13th Annual

WAYNE COLLEGE Student Writing Awards

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

2012

2013

Award Winning
Poetry, Short Stories
&
Personal Essays

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Poetry, Short Stories & Personal Essays
2012 - 2013

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

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Selection Committee

Dr. John P. Kristofco
Emeritus Professor of English

Dr. Susanna K. Horn
Coordinator of Developmental Programs

The University of Akron
Wayne College

2012-13 Wayne College Writing Awards

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT Writing Awards 2012-2013

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Award Winning

HIGH SCHOOL

Poetry, Short Stories & Personal Essays

2012 - 2013

First Place Poetry - High School Division

Human Silhouette

Sit for your portrait, my dear one...my loved one
Sit and enjoy, motion of motionless movement
Just breathing – just sigh
Sit for your portrait and tense
Muscles relaxing
Fade and erase and focus on me as I see you
Perching on a stool, borrowed from a canvas studio
Windows and white
Walls and wood
Floors galore
Perched, yet not caged
Oh my loved one
Waiting for completion so you can fly away
Sip this tea that I offer freely
Let it warm you from inside out
Through blood ways and byways, synapses, and causeways
I brush your lip to the canvas
Sensual...slowly
Rubbed raw
Soft murmured words
Confused, ignored
Stop moving-stay still, stand tall
Brushing your hair with a paint brush
Tangle ochre with vines
Entwine longing with hatred
Enemy's retorted, drunk wine
Faded grey T-shirt
Worn boots, placid smile
Sit for your portrait my dark one, my deep one
Sit. Drink. Dream. Remember.
My dear one, my loved one, my longed for, long ago forgotten one
Sigh movement fog
Breathe settled
My good one, my bad one, myself, and then someone
Scraped canvas
Length die

Sarah McCartney
Senior
Wayne County
Schools Career Center

Second Place Poetry - High School Division

Life

Once when she was little
On a piece of pink heart shaped paper
She wrote a story
She titled it "Lady Bugs"
Because they were her favorite
And that's what it was all about
Her parents read it and hugged her
And said
"That's our girl"
And her teachers smiled
And said she had promise
And that was the year
Uncle George showed her James Bond
And let her be Bond when they played pretend
And that was the year
Her little sister first spoke
And said her name
And her mother and father kissed a lot
And a boy in her class kissed her lips
With tongue
And she had to ask her big sister
About the tongue
And before work
Her father tucked her in bed at night
And he was always there to do it.

Once when she was young
On a piece of paper from the scrap drawer
She wrote a story
She titled it "Swimming"
Because that was her favorite
And that's what it was all about
Her parents read it and nodded
And went to care for her crying little sister
And her teachers smiled and
And said to focus more

Life **continued on pg. 3**

And that was the year
Uncle George died
And she learned bad things
Could happen to her
And that was the year
Her little sister had surgery
With tubes in the ears and lots of tears
And her neighbor's daughter told her
What happens after parents kiss
And the boy in her class laughed
When she cried for her scraped knee
And her father didn't tuck her in bed at night
Because now she was a big girl
And he groaned when she cried for him to do it.

Once when she was adolescent
On a piece of paper torn from her notebook
She wrote a story
She titled it "Him"
Because he was her favorite
And that's what it was all about
And her parents didn't read it
Because she didn't want them to know
But he convinced her to let him see it
And was honored she wrote a poem about him
And her teachers smiled uneasily
Because they knew something was wrong
But she denied it all
And that was the year
Her uncle's wife didn't talk
To the family
And that was the year
Her little sister learned about
What happens after her mother and father kiss
And the boy in her class had too much cologne
And she coughed when they got close
But she got close with him anyway because
That's what he wanted
And late at night after they fought

***Life* continued on pg. 4**

She tucked herself in bed
Her ankle throbbing heavily as she hoped it
Wouldn't bleed.

That's why when she was a little older
In a tea stained journal
She wrote a story
She titled it "Crap"
Because that's what it was
And that's what she was as well
And she was the only one to read it
Because she was all alone
She gave herself a nod of approval
And a cut across her ankle
And threw it under her bed
Because her motivation wouldn't take her across
The room to the trash can.

Alexis T. Kirk
Senior
Highland High School

Third Place Poetry - High School Division

I'll Love You 'Till the Trees Are Soft With Snow
A Villanelle

I'll love you 'till the trees are soft with snow
When we have no more life left here to spend
And then I'll take my weary heart and go

The moments with you pass so sweet and slow
A kind of time on which I can depend
I'll love you 'till the trees are soft with snow

The time will come when I must leave you, though
A coming day I greatly apprehend
When I will take my weary heart and go

No passing words can capture thus my woe
Not even these rhymed syllables I've penned
I'll love you 'till the trees are soft with snow

But winter brings the cold, harsh winds that blow
The fairytale, so happy, has to end
So then I'll take my weary heart and go

Someday I'll forget all I used to know
My clever heart at last will start to mend
I'll love you 'till the trees are soft with snow
And then I'll take my weary heart and go

Abigail Lyall
Junior
Jackson High School

First Place Short Story - High School Division

One Thousand Cranes

2030-Mel

My fingers play with the edges of a worn paper crane. There's never a day that goes by without it reminding me of life and passion. My music students make jokes about why I always have it with me, and laugh about my zeal, but they could never understand.

Not much got through to me, back then. Momma made me tough, with sinew skin and a soul of steel. The strength is what got me through the school bus rides. The boys would touch me as I walked down the aisle, there'd be the occasional brawl and the drug lords sold addiction. I just never cared.

My life was cold, and my only real sparks of emotion came from the boy who sat a seat diagonally in front of me on the bus. He was in the same grade as me, but we never shared the same classes. I was advanced in math and science, and from the way he often wrote poetry, he was probably advanced in language arts- a subject I failed to succeed in due to my dry and uninsightful writing style.

His name was Joseph Wolfe, and he made no sense to me. He never did anything remotely offensive, he seldom even talked, but yet everyone tormented him. They broke his things, mocked him, tripped him in the aisle, and did things to him that unsettled even me.

Joseph was an innocent creature; he was slim and awkward with a long pale neck and soft green eyes. He never fought back with his harassers and he did the most peculiar things. His faithful grey cat followed him half way to the bus in the mornings; he stumbled over his own jeans and listened to classical when the other kids didn't steal his headphones.

To this day I don't understand him, maybe because he was everything I was not. Maybe because he made me feel emotions I didn't think I had.

September 27, 2012-Mel

Today, Joseph has with him a bag full of colorful paper cranes. We are the first two on. He's been bullied a lot lately, and it's not often we get any time alone on the bus.

"Hey Joseph," I smile as honestly as I can, to show him I don't mean to be a jerk.

"Hi Mel," he says, and slides into his usual seat. It takes me aback for a second; I never thought he knew my name.

"I like your cranes," I say, "they're beautiful."

And then, for the first time I can remember, he smiles.

"Thanks," he says sheepishly. "I'm trying to make a thousand, there's a legend that says great fortune will come upon whoever makes a thousand, or whoever they are given to."

"Is there a special reason you're doing it?" I ask. His face turns to a mix of excitement and misery.

"They're for my mom," he says. "But, well, I…if you want…"

He starts to stammer and his cheeks turn pink.

"Yeah?" I say, trying to urge him on.

"I want you to have one," he says, and gives me the most genuine smile I think I've ever

One Thousand **cont'd on pg. 7**

seen. His whole face glows and he offers me a delicate pink crane.

I think I might blush. It's a strange feeling, and very foreign. My heart actually flutters a bit. It stops me, sends me spinning.

"I mean, you don't have to," he says, "I just thought… never mind, I know it's silly…"

"No!" I spurt out, remembering why I started blushing in the first place. "It's awesome, I love it."

I take the little bird from him and tuck it safely into my violin case. In my fluster, I forget to thank him, and the kids start to pile in. I shoot him a sort of awkward good-bye smile and turn toward the window.

I forget about the confusing feelings by taking out my homework. I lose myself in numbers. The noise of the bus disappears. It's algebra and me. There's something relaxing about the way numbers fit together like gears.

"Cranes? Loser, I feel bad for your mom. You're a damn disgrace."

I don't why, but that one voice snaps me out of my focus.

Joseph sits in his corner, and pulls on the sleeves of his sweatshirt. He stares intently out the misty window with the bag of cranes sitting neatly in his lap. The kid who sits in front of him leans over the back of his seat and rips the bag from him.

With a smirk, he spills the bag's contents into the aisle. About 30 intricate little cranes decorate the floor. The kids kick them around- smashing their folded bodies and turning their beautiful colors brown and gray with mud. Every last bird is stepped on or torn. Their paper wings are bent to fit the grooves of the aisle.

I watch the spectacle with an open mouth. I cannot move and I cannot speak. I turn my eyes to Joseph who looks as crushed as his cranes. His eyes are shiny and he tugs at the edges of his sweatshirt relentlessly.

Juan, our large Mexican bus driver notorious for hangover Mondays, yells at us. He scares a lot of kids, but he's never bothered me much. I'm more concerned by the way the kids abuse an innocent boy. It makes me angry that Joseph doesn't stand up for himself. He should be stronger.

September 27, 2012- Joseph

The back of my throat hurts with held back tears. As soon as I step off the bus, I feel lost. I can't go in to my house. I can't face my ailing mother; I can't face myself. I know where my mom keeps all of her pills, she has so many. It would be painless…

No. I can't do that to her. I have cranes to make. My cranes are my pride. They are the reason to keep going. Now a good 35 are broken and muddied, like trash.

I decide to go to a Penelope's house. She's my elderly best friend and she lives near the bus stop. Sometimes, I walk to her house instead of going straight inside my home. She always has a cup of hot chocolate for me, and a new painting for me to marvel at.

The journey to her place is meditative. We live in an old, shabby part of town. Being white, I feel almost out of place here. Most of our neighbors are black, Mexican or some sort of mix, but I like the diversity.

As I walk I note every bird that crosses my path. A flock flies lazily over head. Flocks interest me particularly. I imagine their relationships, their stories and their view of the world. I wish I could fly away with them.

One Thousand **cont'd on pg. 8**

I allow myself a smile as I pass a humming bird fluttering about a feeder. It reminds me of Mel, and my smile grows. She called my cranes beautiful. She has one and she protects it. I feel something warm inside of me, a little bit of happiness and something else unknown. It is small but powerful.

I've always envied Mel. She is strong and demands respect, but she is still delicate and innocent. She never stands up for me, but she rarely taunts me. Though, it's always been her big owl eyes and rich dark skin that awe me the most.

Penelope's house is a cozy little place, nestled between towering oaks.

She greets me with a hug and a lovely smile. Her old fingers flutter in the air as she scurries to boil water for my hot chocolate, which I never even asked for.

I tell her about today, and she listens loyally. When I'm done venting and I chug down the last of my beverage she shows me a small portrait of wild horses. It is absolutely breathtaking- as are all the artworks displayed around her house.

She's a retired art teacher, and a splendid artist. She could be rich, but she doesn't believe that art should have a price. She paints me pictures of exotic birds for holidays and makes art to hang in hospitals- but she never sells it.

Later that night I get a call, her heart had stopped. Through my tears, I make a special crane in her honor.

September 28, 2012- Joseph

Mel had dropped her CD. I will return it to her, but I have to listen to it first. I've always wanted to hear her play.

It's Bach's famous cello suite, played by Mel on the violin. Technically, it's almost perfect, she doesn't miss a beat and the notes are all in tune, but it lacks something. It lacks the fire that is supposed to drive music.

The crescendos are missing a sense of pride; the pianos miss their playful whisper. I can almost see her playing, with her posture perfect and her bow keeping perfect time. Her movements are emotionless, her eyes focus on the music with a cold stare and her face is set in stone. It is a beautiful and frightening image.

I know it shouldn't bother me because she plays wonderfully, but what is music without passion? Why does she play if she does not feel? Is it just numbers to her?

It makes me want to show her all life can be. Sure mine is pretty grim- but it is warm. I wish she could see through my eyes the way every bird is as unique as a person, and how every emotion is precious, even if it is painful.

December 3, 2012- Mel

It's a bitter Monday. I still think about when Joseph had returned the CD. He said he listened to it, and told me it was great. But his eyes told me otherwise.

It didn't matter, but a silly, newborn part of me will not stop with nonsense about Joseph and my non-existent feelings for him.

I hate it. I don't want to like any one like that, it scares me. In the cold of last night I had done something that would end the little smiles we shared in quiet moments and kill the butterflies that had nested inside me and burst out like diseased parasites.

I feel for the note in my pocket, and sigh. It doesn't have my name, but it has his. After it are six words written in icy haste. I don't know why I wrote them, I didn't mean the words, but I wanted to go back to my world of mathematical precision and solitude.

One Thousand **cont'd on pg. 9**

I throw it toward his seat and shrivel up in my sweatshirt, regret starts to creep into the hollows of my bones. Until the moment he walks on, I can't stop thinking, "what if?"

December 3, 2012- Joseph

A small piece of folded paper lies in the aisle. Out of curiosity, I pick it up to read.

Joseph-

You are worthless. Go kill yourself.

That's all it says. Those few words leave me breathless. I collapse in to my seat. Mel notices me, but her face is unreadable.

I have been told things like the note before, but no one had ever written it down. No one has ever felt so strongly about it that they put it on paper.

I let it drop from my hands and feel a monster growing inside of me. It rages and devours- but it is suffering. It simply seeks an end.

"Joseph?"

I turn to face Mel, who does not look herself.

"Don't worry about it," she says. "Whoever wrote it, didn't mean it."

I can't even respond. There is no comfort in her words, so I turn my back to her and the rest of the world. Everything comes crashing down. I decide that sleep is best when you don't have to wake and face the storm.

I reached 1,000 cranes last night. They will be so much more beautiful when I am gone.

Autumn Koenig
Sophomore
Medina High School

Second Place Short Story - High School Division

Solace

The service lasted merely an hour. Each second that slipped away was another memory, another word spoken. I felt broken and numb all the way down to my toes. The deadness of the situation reached inside my heart cutting off all circulation. I could not cry, wrinkle my brow, or muster the strength to even frown. Everything was gone.

"Matthew. If you need anything else please let us know. She was a wonderful lady, " said the pastor.

I did not even look at him; I simply sauntered out the door like the ghost I was. Trying to escape, I found myself driving nowhere and everywhere for the next three empty hours. Subconsciously, I had driven to our special place. I was taking off my matte-finished dress shoes and feeling the sparkling crystals of sand beneath my feet; each grain of sand shining like diamonds in the beaming sunlight. The beach was busy with volleyball games, bocce ball, vendors, and families, but I knew of a spot where solitude diffused the commotion.

Far past the chaos beyond the souvenir shops, and where there was not an ice cream or a bistro stand within miles, I finally sat down, removing my suit jacket and tie. "*Fifty-six*." I thought, "and still as beautiful as the day I met her."

Catherine hardly aged, with only a stray grey hair every now and again. Her sapphire eyes, porcelain skin, and ebony hair, only grew in beauty to me. It was here where I met her. As both of us aged, we managed to outrun time, never letting it fade our growing appreciation and love for each other.

Clutching my chest, I could feel the tightening. I cursed the memories for causing me so much pain. As the stabbing inside my chest worsened, I found myself wishing that I had never met my true love Catherine. I tried to imagine my life without her. Somehow, it helped to relieve the pain.

For a moment, I closed my eyes only to become twenty years old again, walking the long stretch of beach, never looking back to the beautiful girl with ebony hair and porcelain skin; the one who originally caught my eye. As the sun bounced off the crystals of sand, a highlighted path presented itself before me. Anticipation built, as my speed increased trying to grasp ahold of the unattainable. I chased the path intently trying to keep up, always managing to stay a couple of steps behind the light source. Freedom was my calling.

Each step I took was another one closer to living a different life. Through my strides I could somehow forget what happened in the past. I was free to live days filled with work, business gatherings, and the occasional friend, and family holidays. It would be safe and predictable. There would no longer be a debate between sun kissed buttercup or golden dandelion but a choice of predictable beige. Take out would become breakfast, lunch and dinner, and would add only to the aroma of each room. As these thoughts grew in number I could feel myself getting closer to the crystals of sand which were all aglow. I was now just one shy step away from my imaginary pain-free life. The queen sized bed would belong all to me, with no uneven ratio of one third to two.

***Solace* cont'd on pg. 11**

Money wouldn't be as much of a burden and the responsibility of providing would lessen. A simple life without anguish was what eased my troubled heart. I was so close, but just before my foot could touch the tip of the light covered sand, my daydream was shattered by a wave crashing upon my pant leg.

The breakers had caught me long before I had ever reached the light and before I could shuffle backwards towards dry sand, I glanced up and from a comfortable distance I saw the couple. He was a young man tall, slender, accompanied by his girlfriend who was shining almost as brightly as my Catherine. He was down on one knee, looking deeply into her eyes with a shaky hand clutching a black velvet box. Unconsciously, I felt my entire body lunge forward trying to save him from the fleeting joy that had abruptly ended in bitterness for me, but before I could save him it was too late. As defeat festered within me, reading his lips, I watched as he asked "Cassandra, Will you marry me?" Watching her expression, I saw her face change from worry to surprise. Finally, joy overcame the anxious couple, and that was when I saw myself and my love again.

I reached into my pocket pulling out her diamond. The simplicity of the silver band complimented her radiant beauty and the two sapphires alongside the diamond represented the deep blues of the ocean which reflected always in her eyes. I could feel the pain in my chest again, tightening, squeezing, and stabbing. My vision blurred and a mixture of nostalgia and sickness overcame me. My pant legs were soaked up to my thigh and as the waves unfolded into cascading stairs, step by step I greeted the blues, greens, and teals until I was waste deep into the sea. Thrashing the water in complete anger I cursed and sputtered.

"She was too young to die!"

"She was too young to die." I repeated more softly.

The water from my eyes flowed from gentle tears to uneasy rapids. The sobs and teardrops that rippled the water around me added nothing to the vastness of the ocean. Life would move on whether I was disheartened or euphoric. It was selfish for me to want to live without Catherine, sure it was easier. *But what is life without a debate between yellows that look exactly the same? What is life when all you do is eat out and never have a home cooked meal? What is life with obligations and business endeavors if there is no one to share these accomplishments with?* The pain lessened from within my chest. Looking out across the water's surface, I saw each sparkling reflection of sunlight as someone else's diamond. Lovingly, I brought Catherine's ring to my lips, kissed it, releasing it like a skipping stone across the water. Knowing *our* diamond would be safe here; as I walked away I felt the salty ocean breeze kiss me back.

Mary Anne Snyder
Senior
Orrville High School
Wayne College PSEOP

Third Place Short Story - High School Division

What We've Done

I still remember her. I still remember.

High school is a time of pain and glory, of smart elites and expelled burnouts, of brown nosers and lazy group members. It can be easy, or it can be terribly hard, but mostly it's just there. Like a constant buzzing in the back of your mind, never fully recognized or dismissed. It is impossible for adults to fully remember what they experienced in high school. It's hard enough for teenagers to remember what happened the year before last. This fact, and this fact alone, makes my story so sad, So desperate and miserable. Because it will not be remembered. The stories before it were not remembered and neither will the ones in the future. They will all melt into history, crushed in between the pages of a dusty yearbook, thrown in with the trash. It's all the same. *We're* all the same. I remember this new girl. She was a bit smarter than most of us, which put her on the lower end of the social spectrum, and she wore glasses that were a few sizes too big for her head. Her clothes were always several decades behind fashion standards and she continually hurried through the hallways, her books glued to her chest, eyes on the ground. Even with her low status, she wasn't socially ignorant. She knew that if you made eye contact with the wrong sort, you were liable to end up on the ground, books spread wide across the school, kicked farther by cruel seniors. She might even cry if pushed too hard. That would doom her for life. I had the chance to meet her once, in the hallway. Our lockers were just a few spaces apart. I knew not to talk to her openly, not until she was accepted into one of the Groups. She seemed like a chess kid, or maybe Academic Challenge. Something *smart* sounding. Personally speaking, I was in the Animal Care Club, but I thought she might be allergic to pets and such.

She was always sniffling when she went into the Biology lab where they kept all the live animals. "Hi," I said, one day after class. The hallways were almost empty, the final bell already rung. She looked at me strangely, like I was a foreign species to her. Who knows, maybe I was. I hadn't seen her talk to anyone yet, except some teachers, and they really didn't count. "Hello," she replied. Her voice was mousy, much like her look. I had been expecting it. "How's school going?" I asked, trying to wheedle out information. I wanted to tell my friends what I had learned. She wasn't sought after, I knew, but news was always fun in a town as small as mine. "Fine," she replied, closing her locker. She spun the lock a few times, even though it wasn't necessary. "You don't have to do that," I said. She shrugged. "Force of habit." Did she go to a school in the middle of the ghetto? I laughed politely, not sure how to respond. She smiled awkwardly and walked past me, towards the doors. I spun around, surprised by her abruptness. "See ya later, then!" I shouted. She threw a little wave over her shoulder but didn't respond. We really never talked again after that.

By the end of the semester, she was still

What We've Done **cont'd on pg. 13**

alone and doing badly. The elite had taken an interest in her lost-lamb-looking-for-a-flock routine. They recruited her. But us on the outside knew the real story. She was fresh meat. A fresh slave, unsure of herself and ready to be commanded. But there was a price. I silently prayed that she wouldn't have to pay it. I saw her in the hallways often. She changed how she dressed. No more out-of-style business suits or grandma sweaters with little animals sewed in the corners. Now, she was "normal." One of us, by command of the top ten. If you even looked at their puppy wrong, it was a one way street down the Road of No Return. They didn't like rebellion. They could squash you in an instant with all of their teacher recommendations and witty charm. It was a dangerous game. One that could cost you your social career. You could be ruined in less than a day and wouldn't be forgiven. Ever. It's possible you could get a clean slate in college. Unless, of course, your town is so small it only has one local college that everyone goes to and no one is new. No one transfers in. It's only you. And them. The new girl did everything they told her to do. Sneak into the boys' restroom. Check. Take specifically assigned pictures in the girls' locker room. Check.

Spray paint the principal's desk. Check. Break into the cafeteria and replace all the milks with glue. Check. She did everything and didn't speak a word against them. I knew not to approach her again. Someone could see us talking and report it back to the top. I would be a target, then. I didn't want that. So instead, I watched her suffer in silence, the strain becoming harder and harder to bear.

One day, she was caught sneaking into the gym teacher's office with a hamper full of girls' underwear. Everyone knew he was a pervert. The joke was on him. But not this time. The girl was suspended. She didn't even complain. I saw her mother crying in the front office. She was shaking, head in her hands. "What happened to my sweet little girl?" I heard her shriek as I turned into the restroom. High school happened. It happens to everyone. I wanted to tell her the real story. How it wasn't her daughter's fault, it was mine. It was the elite's. It was all of ours. But I couldn't, you see. Because then I would be saying it out loud. And acknowledging the existence of such an evil is so hard to swallow, to process. I couldn't force that on myself. I couldn't force that on them.

The girl came back next week. Her suspension only lasted four days. Before first period ended, I saw an elitist corner her in the back of the room. I looked towards the teacher but he was talking to another student. Looking back and forth between them, I didn't know what to do. So I did nothing. At lunch, I saw the new girl pushed from The Table. She skidded backward on her butt until she came to a stop in front of the trash can. A football player the size of a tree came up from behind and dumped his tray on her.

"Oh no! I missed the can. Oh well, close enough," he said. His friends at The Table guffawed and he walked over the girl to them, leaving his mess behind. I watched her stand up and wipe the food off. Watched her fight back tears as she scooped potatoes out of her hair. She didn't run from the cafeteria. She walked, cruel laughter following her every step. The next morning, she found "bitch" inscribed into her locker. Her dog-eared copy of *The Great Gatsby* was torn to shreds. I watched her scoop

What We've Done **cont'd on pg. 14**

up the tattered scraps and throw them away. No one talked to her during class. Harsh whispers followed her down the hallway.

Boys laughed at her openly, harassing her with comments too vulgar to repeat. Girls were worse. They shoved her in the hallways, crowded around her and tugged her hair sharply, giving no reprieve. It went on for weeks and weeks. Brutal punishment for a failed job that wasn't even her idea. I watched in horror as she grew thinner and haggard. Dark circles enveloped her eyes and her clothes hung off her in odd angles. The harassment was still as bad as ever. They weren't tired of it. They fed off it. They wanted her pain and misery. They wanted her to suffer. Finally, I couldn't watch it anymore. My friends thought it was bound to end soon. I thought differently. It shouldn't have gone on for this long. Then, one afternoon, when the new girl was absent, I went to the guidance office and explained what had been going on. I said that I was worried and really wanted it to stop. "Why didn't you tell me before it got this bad?" she asked me. I shrugged. I didn't really know why I hadn't told anyone, why *anyone* hadn't told them. We were just kids. Telling us what to do *if* such an event were to happen doesn't prepare us for when it actually does.

The next day, we found out the new girl was dead. She had committed suicide the night before but her parents hadn't known until they got home from work. The school turned to chaos. Tears, apologies, even a circle of grief around her locker. The guidance counselors interrogated the people who had been picking on her but they had such legitimate grief, she couldn't really blame them for anything. No one stood up to point the finger. They said she was a "*poor, tortured soul."*

"Never understood."

"A beautiful person."

Everyone went to her funeral, even the ones who had caused the event in the first place. No one told her parents what really happened. Her mother stood at the edge of the hole in the ground, and stared at it, crying silently, painful tears as her only daughter was lowered into the dark abyss. I couldn't stand to watch her pain. The grief ran for days into weeks and then into months. Two months, to be exact. Then, everything kind of started again. Social calendars were calculated and scheduled. Classes resumed normality. Students laughed and teachers gathered in little social circles and chattered about the smart-mouths in their classes. It was "normal" again. However, I do not have a rubber heart. I feel the guilt of what we did. I will not watch it happen again.

I still remember her. I still remember.

Morgan Elswick
Senior
Buckeye High School

First Place Personal Essay - High School Division

The Christmas Without Santa Claus

As a child, I was fearless. From the time I could walk, I clambered to the top of the playground jungle gym, while other girls my age cowered below the monkey bars. On Halloween night, my four-year-old self bravely donned a ragged black dress and witch's hat, slung a pillowcase over her shoulder and marched out the door to wrestle candy from the neighborhood's formidable ghosts and goblins. I always knew there were no monsters hiding under my bed or dragons lurking in dark corners of my backyard. But for reasons that my parents could never discover, there was one terror that this valiant toddler just couldn't shake. Perhaps it was the paranoid summer weeks spent at the local Safety Village, or maybe the hideous news stories of kidnapping and rape that provided the background noise to our family dinners, but somehow I had developed an insurmountable fear of Santa Claus.

The first Christmas Eve that I was old enough to realize what was going on, my father hoisted me up on his shoulders so that I could hang my stocking over the fireplace and set the star crookedly on the top of the tree. He tucked me in bed and whipped out a thin book with blood-red binding: that horror of horrors, *The Night Before Christmas*. As his low voice spoke the words and his big hands turned the pages, I sunk further and further under the covers, until the quilt was covering first my shoulders, then my neck, and finally my head. Contrary to the words of the poem, the illustrations in the book did not depict St. Nick as a jolly fellow; he looked uncouth and uncivilized, with his unshaven face and unwieldy boots. The ominous sight of the black bag slung over his left shoulder struck fear through my heart-- the book had implied that the lumpy shapes within were toys for good little girls and boys, but one could never be sure. The twinkle in his eye, inserted cheaply with an early computer drawing program, made him look neither thoughtful nor happy to me-- it appeared more as though he were plotting something sinister. I didn't know what a sugarplum was, but I didn't want it taking over my head, dancing or otherwise. I didn't want the ominous clicking of reindeer hooves to wake me from my peaceful slumber, and I most certainly didn't want a strange old man that I had never met flying anywhere near my place of residence.

Snapping the book shut with a chipper "and to all a good night," my father turned to me with a joyful expression of Christmas wonder upon his face. But instead of having it returned with a smile of toddler glee, he found me cowering beneath the bed sheets, tears welling up in my big, blue eyes. "Daddy?" I whispered. "Is that man going to come in my room?" It was a sad night for my parents as they spent most of it trying to convince me that the most magical belief of childhood was actually a fantasy, trading the greatest Christmas tradition for the end to a toddler tantrum and a good night's sleep. There would be no baking of cookies for the terrifying giant or singing menacing refrains of "Here Comes Santa Claus" in our humble abode.

As I grew older, the horrors didn't stop.

Christmas **cont'd on pg. 16**

While I was aware that the predator in the red suit was only make-believe, I was still forced to make an annual trip to the overcrowded city mall to be photographed with some hirsute wannabe. My mother explained ad nauseam as I whined in the car on the way there; she needed pictures she said, to send to her half-uncles and third cousins twice removed and a long list of former coworkers that she hadn't spoken to in decades. Christmas-card-production was a painstaking affair and my assembly-line-style job of envelope licking was simply not contributing enough to the effort. To try to make me more optimistic, she pointed out the obvious fact that I would receive a candy cane upon completing my task. When I retaliated with the number one rule of stranger danger- don't accept candy from unfamiliar persons- she gave me the "mom" look, sending me stomping down the roped-off-aisle toward the vagabond in red.

I approached him with my jaw set and my gaze focused-- I had a job to do. I perched on his padded knee and winced as his clammy hand slowly closed around my waist. I felt his warm, faintly tobacco-scented breath on the back of my neck, and heard his hoarse, raspy voice ask me what I wanted for Christmas. I sensed that he was rather taken aback when my reply was "to get this over with," but although I was usually a polite girl, I was past the point where I was worrying about the feelings of others. I leaned forward as much as I could, faked a smile for my mother's camera, and then snatched the candy cane from Santa's sweaty hand and ran as quickly as I could. Legs and arms pumping as if the building were on fire, I raced for the nearest exit, burst through the door and leaned against the cold brick wall, panting and vowing to never let myself be roped into such an ordeal again-- until next year.

The time for the fear of Santa Claus to be an ever present element of my holiday experience has passed. My friends have long since stopped believing, and likewise I have stopped being afraid of the jolly old man with the bag. Every year I hang my stocking by the chimney with care and complete absence of dread, in hopes that St. Nicholas soon will be there to bring me designer boots and a new iPad. But there is a part of me that still wishes I could go back to those simple childhood Christmases, despite the fright and panic that I experienced at the hands of the Santa Claus myth. In a world of harsh adult realities and real, grown-up disappointments, it would be nice to experience a taste of Christmas magic, to believe that someone is really there shouting "Merry Christmas to all!" – even if it is an eccentric, ruby-cheeked, potentially dangerous stranger.

Abigail Lyall
Junior
Jackson High School

Second Place Personal Essay - High School Division

In the Shadows

I stood in our kitchen, struggling to think of what to say as my throat choked up with tears and I tried to blink back the ones that threatened to spill over. There were so many things that I had planned on saying, profound and well thought out words of encouragement that only a sister would know to say. But when the time had finally come, words seemed to have escaped me. My mouth dried up in an instant and my lack of preparation scared me. She was leaving; I had known this for awhile. I had watched her and my dad stay up countless nights, hunched over the table, as they frantically filled out the applications and argued about the future. I knew it was inevitable and just another stepping stone in life that everyone had to go through. But this was my sister, and it felt like I was losing her forever to the unavoidable world of college.

As I watched my dad, hair graying and eyes tired, lifting each of her over-packed bags into the car, my heart was in my stomach. Uneasiness set over me, the usual feeling I get when I know that change is coming, as I tried to take in the drastic difference in dynamics that I knew would come with the departure of the oldest child. I imagined the empty chair that would be at the dinner table in meals to come. I thought of going to restaurants and how when the hostess asked "How many?" we would have to retrain our response. I realized that my room would now become my own, something that I had never experienced in my life. A family of seven would shrink to six overnight and the thought threw my brain into panic mode. Marlowe was on her way to bigger and better things, but where did that leave me? I would soon learn that her absence would force me to realize the parts of me that had never had a chance to surface.

As long as I could remember, it had been Marlowe and me. She was there to squeeze my hand when it was flu season and Mom insisted that we all get our shots. I remember trying so hard not to cry because she hadn't cried when it was her turn. Even though I wanted so badly to jump off that high table where the tissue paper stuck to my legs, I remained. As much as the doctor and the nurses with the needles scared me, I told myself that I could do whatever she did. When she decided to get her ears pierced, I decided I wanted to get mine pierced too. As I sat on the tall, metal stool, I watched the middle-aged woman with hair that badly needed brushed as she readied her instrument and I immediately regretted my decision. As soon as the gun even touched my ear, I let out a blood-curdling scream that the Belden Village Shopping Mall would not soon forget. The trauma I once felt was soon overshadowed by the pride I felt in the fact that we had done it together.

It was like that our whole lives. Marlowe was the image of everything I wanted to be and at the same time, everything I couldn't be. She was short, always on her tiptoes, trying to see what was going on. On the other hand, I was tall and skinny, often making me look uncoordinated and breakable, like if you bumped me, I might shatter. Her hair, springy with curls, was the color of a dark chocolate Hershey bar. Contrastingly, I received the recessive gene that gave me a head of bright red curls that sometimes got a little too out of control. Her skin was dark; mine gave off the

In the Shadows **cont'd on pg. 18**

impression that I'd never seen the sunlight. We would go to the beach every year and every year she would return a golden brown. Marlowe could stand out in the sun for only a few minutes and effortlessly come back with tan lines. Of course, my fair skin didn't exactly produce the same result. My freckles would darken and explode in small blotches all over my light skin. After a few hours in the sun, I would turn a shade of pink, making my light blonde eyebrows stand out on my burnt face. Needless to say, I envied almost everything about her.

At parties, Marlowe would find a group of people to talk to and join in on games of Red Rover and tag. I preferred to follow closely behind, never getting too close to the action, but still knowing what was going on. Occasionally, after much persuading from my sister, I would participate in some of the activities, but only if I was on Marlowe's team. I considered us a packaged deal and secretly, I think she enjoyed the constant admiration. As we got older, the same trend continued. Boys would flock to her traditional beauty and almost everyone knew who she was. I got used to hearing, "Are you Marlowe's little sister?" A question that I would learn to dread the more I heard it.

I grew to resent the fact that I wasn't my sister. Constantly hearing "Doesn't Marlowe look pretty today?" and "You should be more like your sister" really triggered the short fuse that redheads are known for. I was no longer content in letting Marlowe have all the fun and receive all of the attention. I would put on her clothes and try to do my hair just like her. Much to my dismay, my efforts were almost always fruitless, and I was left to look at the same bony little girl with the strawberry blonde hair in the mirror. I began to take the comparison to heart, wondering what I had done to receive all of the wrong traits.

But as I sat in my now half-empty room, I realized that I was not, and could never be, Marlowe. In that instant, I also realized that I did not want to be. For most of my life, I hid happily in her shadow, allowing her to influence most of my decisions and feelings. Now that she was leaving, it was time for me to become my own leader. When asked for an opinion, I would no longer wait for hers first, eyeing her like a lost little puppy, but instead give my point of view immediately. I was forced to see things through a whole new perspective – my own. Although my initial response was to sprint after the van and tell her she needed to stay, I remained, sitting on my bed, trying to absorb the silence that echoed in my room. This was my chance to happily be the person that I was meant to be.

This new role was not something I was used to, but I felt optimistic about the idea of being my own person. I completely rearranged my room and changed the pictures on the wall. The floor, once cluttered with already worn outfits and tags that had been hastily ripped off of new clothes, was now spotless. The drawers that had been stuffed to their capacity were now organized and clean. Everything had a place, just the way I liked it.

This new sense of control had filled me with excitement. No longer allowing myself to be held back by unrealistic comparisons and jealousy, I was able to find qualities about myself that had not been evident before. Although I love every moment that I spend with my sister, being away from her has made me embrace the things about myself that make me different. Hopefully, as I begin to let my light shine, it will encourage others to do the same.

Carolyn Beatty
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Dalton High School

Third Place Personal Essay - High School Division

First Impressions

To Mom, he seemed like just another creature in distress that we children felt a human duty to love and protect, and for whom we promised to take full responsibility. One of many, among the homeless kittens, the lost turtles, the baby birds fallen from their nests, the orphaned opossum babies; we had established a definite pattern. Even though we *promised* to take care of him, she knew what we all knew. In a month, he would be entirely *her* responsibility, and she did not want another dog! My mother's reaction to our new puppy taught me not to form opinions based on a first impression.

I grew up in a family with five kids. My brother Jon, the oldest, often thought himself too mature to join in on our games, though when he did, we were always awed by his talent at everything he could do. My sister Hannah, the intelligent, imaginative, mothering one, never pretended to be too old to play with us, though she would rather hide away and read a book than join us on our adventures. My other brother, Jesse, was funny and quiet. He loved creatures, reptiles in particular. I was the spirited little animal lover who was willing to adore anything soft and cuddly, though I wasn't too much of a "girl" to join my brothers on their expeditions down to the creek and beyond. Little Seth was the clowny comedian, and he was mischievous beyond belief. He and Jesse were my most constant playmates. We would trek all over the farm together trying to find interesting entertainment, and catching every animal or insect that we could get our hands on.

My mom had all five of us high-energy, ornery kids in seven years. That in itself demands respect. She's an expert at running our home, and an excellent mother to all of us. Growing up, she was patient with us, but was also a strict disciplinarian when needed. She loves my dad and every one of us kids more than anything and we know it. As kids we also knew that Mom was someone to honor and respect, and we usually did so. But when we didn't, we sure didn't forget it.

When I was young, my dad was a home delivery man. His job was to drive from home to home out in Amish country delivering groceries to people's doorsteps. For a kid, this was the best job a dad could have. Dad was a little ornery and adventurous sometimes, which made him a lot of fun. Since he was on the road all day, he often would come home with the neatest things, always in one of his characteristic red milk crates. Sometimes it was a treat for us like sweet icy popsicles from his delivery truck or mouthwatering homemade cookies from a generous Amish woman. But other times, he would bring home something far more interesting. One time he came home with the most enormous bullfrog any of us had ever seen. We put it in the aquarium with Seth's "fire bellied toads" and stared mesmerized as the fat moist glob sat there with his throat inflating and deflating like a balloon. Another time, he came home with a box full of baby opossums. He told us they were orphans, their mother having been hit on the road. We felt obligated to care for these homely little rodents with crooked grins and

First Impressions **cont'd on pg. 20**

little needle-like teeth. Even opossums, some of the ugliest beings on the planet, could look so adorable while they hung sleeping upside-down with their pink wiry tails wrapped around our fingers. So one day when Dad came home, we were understandably thrilled when he said he had a surprise for us. We looked with eager anticipation as Dad carried one of his red plastic milk crates from the truck.

This surprise was arguably the most exciting. He lifted something from the crate and carried over to us a bundle of light brown wrinkly skin, and we saw sad tearful eyes peering out from behind Dad's arms. Dad had outdone himself this time. It was a puppy! The puppy had fur the color of milk chocolate with an orangey-brown colored chest and paws, resembling a bitten Reese's peanut butter cup. He had the classic sad puppy dog eyes that would melt a little girl's heart. And his story was heart wrenching. Dad said he found the puppy out in a field he was driving past, completely alone, far away from any houses. He was crying with loneliness, sitting out in the snow by a deer carcass. This was a dream puppy for a girl like myself; adorable in every way, with a wonderfully touching life story. Mom *had* to let us keep him. He needed us!

But Mom was not amused. She was convinced that we had enough pets around the house- chickens, lizards, chinchillas, rabbits, kittens, fire-bellied toads, and our old chocolate lab Hunter, who was also not amused by this new addition. He saw the new puppy as a rival and competition for our love, and moped pitifully around the house for days, even though Hannah was sure to give him special attention so that he didn't feel replaced. Mom asked Dad take the dog with him on his route the next day to ask all the area houses whether they recognized him. To our animated delight, no one did.

Mom seemed determined not to get attached to the new puppy. She could see by the disproportioned size of his paws that he was going to be a very large dog. He had little round eyebrows resembling those of a Rottweiler, which made her assume he was going to be a mean dog, which was out of the question for a family with five small children. And there was also the fact that she just plain did not want another dog; another puppy to chew to shreds everything in sight, to relieve himself all over the house, and to sit in his cage and wail and howl like a siren all night long.

She tried everything she could to find a new home for him. She asked and asked people to take him off her hands, but no one wanted him. So Mom made a new plan; she would take him to the Humane Society. She had all of us kids say our good-byes to the puppy, because she was taking him to a new home. It was hard to see our new friend leave, but it was Mom's decision, not ours. She took him all the way to the shelter, and began to tell the lady about the dog as she filled out some paper work. Mom told her the story, about how my dad found him along the road in Holmes County. The lady stopped her right there and told her that she was sorry, but this was the Wayne County Humane Society. They can't accept dogs from outside the county line, and that she'd have to take him to the Holmes County shelter. So she reluctantly took the little inconvenience back home to a bunch of happy kids.

Mom never took him to the Holmes County Humane Society. She never had the opportunity, and once she found the time, the puppy had already filled a place in our hearts. There was something different about this dog. He had a

First Impressions **cont'd on pg. 21**

lovable nature with an easy-going personality. He would never run away from home and would follow us around dutifully wherever we went. We would receive compliments on the behavior of our dog from others very frequently.

But the reason we loved him was not because he was easy to live with. He had a habit of destroying things. He'd chew shoes, kittens, furniture and just about anything he could get his teeth on. One time, Mom and Dad saved up some money to buy several new trees for our yard. They finally came in, were planted, and my parents were pleased with the results. The puppy promptly chewed them all in half, infuriating my parents. Another time, my dad picked up some old porch posts from a house that was being demolished. We kids spent many weeks in the garage with a heat gun and scraper peeling off the old purple paint that was on them in order to give them a fresh, smooth coat. We got them put up on our newly built porch, and they looked great. It wasn't long before we saw the edge of two of them gnarled by little puppy teeth, infuriating all of us - kids and parents both. We came to dread mornings when we had to go down stairs to a large smelly mess all over the floor that we'd have to clean up before school. And our beloved lab Hunter couldn't stand the little intruder, who had a tendency to jump clumsily up on his back, chew playfully at his heels, and sit awkwardly on his head when he was trying to sleep; not to mention the puppy stealing our precious attention away from him. Many times, we doubted our decision to keep the little rascal, and I'm sure Mom couldn't help but feel some bitterness towards the Wayne County Humane Society for not taking him.

After several months of being known as "Puppy", we changed his name to "Monty", short for Montana, which is the state my parents used to live in as a young couple. We grew to love that dog, despite his many faults. He was the gentlest, most devoted, most affectionate dog we'd ever had. We could just tell he loved us as much as we loved him. Mom's first impressions were inaccurate. Contrary to Mom's first assumption, he didn't have a mean bone in his body. But, some respects, she was very correct. He was a huge dog; eventually weighing over 120 pounds. And she was also correct in the fact that she did become chief caretaker of him. But the effect of this is that he grew to respect Mom and would listen and obey her when he wouldn't any of us kids.

Even Mom eventually warmed up to the little nuisance. After months of her rejecting him, she finally began to realize that he really was a good dog. One day I came downstairs to see her leaning over petting and scratching Monty's loose wrinkly hide. It was then that I realized how important it is not to form opinions based on a first impression. I realized that Mom had judged Monty by how he looked and by the fact that she didn't want to take care of another dog. She didn't give him a chance, because there were many things about him that were not favorable in her eyes. But after Mom took the time see the positives about his character, and once she got to know him, she realized that he was possibly the best dog we'd ever owned. Through observing this, it taught me to wait to form judgments based on experience not on first impressions.

Rachel Detweiler
Senior
Dalton High School

Award Winning

COLLEGE

Poetry, Short Stories & Personal Essays

2012 - 2013

First Place Poetry - College Division

First Lust

Crush
to smother and bury
leaving no trace behind
completely enveloping
and making totally blind.
I wish I could say
that it's me doing this, thing
torturing you
making your heart sing.

Cody Steigerwald
Wayne College

Second Place Poetry - College Division

Raging

Oceans are loveliest when raging,
White caps rising like specters of souls lost at sea,
Trying to escape their watery graves, then crashing to shore
Only to be returned to their eternal resting place.

White caps rising like specters of souls lost at sea,
Their ethereal forms reaching for the heavens,
Only to be returned to their eternal resting place.
It's vast, black void, a tormented Hell.

Their ethereal forms reaching for the heavens,
With a cacophony of groans from the oceans bowels,
It's vast, black void a tormented Hell,
For man and beast primordial.

With a cacophony of groans from the oceans bowels,
Like the lamented dirge of the sirens song
For man and beast primordial,
Melancholic, yet beautiful to hear.

Like the lamented dirge of the sirens song,
Trying to escape their watery graves, then crashing to shore,
Melancholic, yet beautiful to hear.
The oceans are loveliest when raging.

Treva Eihinger
Wayne College

First Place Short Story - College Division

The Spider, the Fly, and the Cartels

Outside the cold front had rolled in and across the sky the clouds drew their battle lines; finally clashing in blinding flashes and tremendous roars. Sheets of rain pummeled the small helicopters parked on decks across from a fortress of a building in an office park. Oily rain and inky black night beat back the light from the spots mounted at the edges of the decks obscuring everything but the outline of the aircraft. From the third floor Dante Farr could see nothing outside save the two circular decks.

"I think it's clearing up, I'm going to prep for preflight and get suited up," he said to his supervisor Leslie Stratford.

"Stand down Farr, I told you we are not risking this storm. The Intel is good for tomorrow, and I want a seamless operation with no surprises. We wait." Stratford commanded. Dante's jaw muscles flexed and his jugular pulsated visibly.

"You make sure to tell every single one of them tomorrow that we waited another day to get them out. Make sure to repeat that *Intel is still good* line."

"One more word and you're off this operation. Get downstairs with your crew and run it again." Stratford said with a metered tone.

The basement of the building could have been the sound stage of a Hollywood studio, and was home to a drama of sorts. It was used as a practice area for the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team. Here, before each mission they would rehearse the plan exactly. Dante loaded a magazine with wax bullets and focused on the role he would play. He tried to clear the image of the girl from his mind. He loaded another magazine subconsciously, then another one, and another. When Virgil Sexton had come up beside Dante, there was a pile of twenty loaded magazines on the table.

"World war three starts today, eh?" Virgil said.

"We are running it again Sexton, stow it and get your game face on."

Virgil had been a SWAT operator for seven years before joining HRT, which was seven more years of experience than Dante had at high risk missions. They had worked together the past three years as equals, but this was Dante's first mission as crew chief under Stratford. He thought he knew what Dante was going through, and left his next joke alone.

"I'll get the other guys down here. And hey, we all want this as bad as you do, but we have to play it smart."

"If it were someone you knew, a wife, a daughter, would you wait until tomorrow?" Dante asked.

***The Spider* cont'd on pg. 25**

"Without a moment's thought I would take off tonight, but then I'd be dead and they would still be slaves. Yeah we're pro's but sometimes that means knowing when not to go too." Virgil said.

"Slaves," Dante thought to himself, "slavery needs to be the only way to describe 'human trafficking.' I'm not even packing cuffs on this mission, due process be damned; I got all the justice those scum need and it measures exactly 5.56 by 45 millimeters. I don't care if we catch them in the shower, I'll say I thought the soap was a grenade or a knife or something."

From the dark part of Dante's soul, he could feel the white heat of its condemnation towards himself.

"Don't forget that time you took part in a rape, you've earned the same justice," came a voice he knew as his own, but altogether darker.

"I did not rape her. I never have raped anyone. I never will rape anyone. I am not even considering this debate." Dante recited as a mantra.

"You did rape her. Your inaction directly led to her abuse. You were drunk and you thought about it and you chickened out; but someone else did it. That is directly your fault for not stopping it. Guilty." came the voice a second time, louder than before.

"I could not have known if anyone was going to do that." Dante replied sheepishly

"I bet given the chance to do everything over, you would have gone through with it. You would have locked the door and done the deed and maybe, maybe kill her too." The dark voice insisted.

Dante stopped prepping his gear and closed his eyes while he took a deep breath. He held it for several seconds and let it out slowly to the sound of silence in his mind.

"Gang's all here Chief, ready in three." Virgil called out from the entrance where he led in a group of twenty men.

Stratford ended the call on his prepaid phone. He removed the SIM card and battery. He destroyed the card and put the phone in a brown envelope labeled 'incinerate.' He cleared the timer on his desk which read just eight seconds. He felt dirty because he was dirty. He had to be to move the pawns around the board to take the real prize.

The game, he thought, is to let the cartels think they have him in their back pocket so they get sloppy; when they get sloppy the FBI wins big with minimal effort. A failed bust by Farr now could lead to bagging more dangerous prey later. It was a very special game he played and he played it well, he thought. Farr's tactics would take a back seat to global strategy.

"As painful as it is to play both sides like this," Stratford said, "one doesn't catch the big fish in the shallows."

That night Dante dreamt again of that night in college that haunted his waking life. He wasn't a part of the fraternity, but was invited to celebrate the football team's win. No one had

The Spider **cont'd on pg. 26**

any idea who the girl was, nor did they know that she was a minor who had snuck in.

It didn't take many shots before she was blackout drunk, and Dante and his friend carried her up to one of the bathrooms upstairs at the frat house. They propped her up between the tub and the toilet with her face on the toilet seat in case she threw up. When they went to check on her an hour later she had moved herself to the nearby bedroom, or so they thought. They left her to sleep it off.

The rapist was never caught.

The dream ended as it always did. A surreal chase to tackle the shadowy figure he knew to be the culprit. Each time they would pass through a dark ally and the shadowy figure would melt away into the inky blackness, and Dante would wake grinding his teeth and sweaty.

He later dreamt several black widows dropped down on his face and bit his nose and mouth. He killed the spiders but his face was disfigured and he felt he was about to suffocate just before he was shook awake.

"Storm's clearing; we're lifting off in twenty." Stratford said.

The plan was to capture to a resort in the mountains of the Catskills in New York. There the leaders of the Mexican drug gangs in charge of human trafficking and money laundering were to meet face to face with several of their main African and East Asia clients to discuss business. There they were also to have several dozen girls and boys as young as six years old as a personal gift to the Mexicans, along with the normal assortment of drugs.

This once in a life time meeting on U.S. soil was only possible because the African and East Asian clients also happened to be foreign diplomats with diplomatic immunity. The catch would be tying them to the international crimes against humanity (human trafficking specifically) to try them in international courts. With the cartels and the children slaves and drugs present, it was a cookie jar with all the players' hands in it at the same time.

The mission was set for just after 0305 Zulu time. Flying was vital to the success of the mission as they needed to enter the building from the top and bottom simultaneously. It also gave them the ability to hunt down any fleeing vehicles, and in a worst case scenario provide close air support with their mini guns and rockets.

Once over the roof of the resort the HRT members fast roped off the helicopters and assaulted through the roof access and down off the sides of the building entering at mid-levels through windows. Those that arrived via ground transport entered through the front and rear of the building. The mission was anticipated to take place in no more than fifty five seconds from the moment their boots touched the ground.

Less than a minute after they started they had total control of the building and its

The Spider **cont'd on pg. 27**

surrounding air space. They were in possession of an empty resort.

They would later learn from the owner that there had indeed been several business men from Mexico, Africa, and Asia, as well as a "school tour" with them staying there. However, around 11:15 p.m. the whole group of them checked out, leaving in separate vehicles in different directions. He thought it was odd to leave in such a bad storm but as they had paid through the week he didn't question it.

Dante looked at Virgil and knew where he would be going next, with or without the support of the HRT. He wanted his friend to come with him. Virgil nodded.

"Stratford got his seamless mission, now I get my successful one." Dante said. "I know he's flipped sides, and I'm going prove it."

"Dante, that's a hornet's nest you're about to stir up."

"Black widow nest, and I know the best way to get rid of one is to crush them all at once."

Cody Steigerwald
Wayne College

Second Place Short Story - College Division

Crystal

It was mid October and the kaleidoscope of leaves, in crimson and gold, held on to their mother tree with great tenacity, requiring gusts of wind to drift them away as quick as the season; while the roses, laden with clusters of brilliant red bloom were not yet ready to succumb and fade away.

The waning sun still warmed the days, but at night the full Hunter's Moon glinted off the hoarfrost that blanketed the earth with a thick icy carpet. It was on such a night that I was born. My mother named me Autumn Rose.

My mother was half American Indian, her father a full blooded Hopi, and her mother a country girl of mixed Irish and German descent. My mother's name was Alma, meaning "kind", and she was everything her name implied. She was a kind, understanding woman who treated the earth and mankind with great reverence.

She married Marcus Lee, a tall, reedy built man of Nordic descent. His blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin against her ebony braid, soft doe eyes and warm tea stained skin made an odd mix. Genes have a peculiar way of aligning themselves; I have only my mother's rich brown eyes, all of my father's fair skin and features, and my Irish grandmother's red hair.

My next two sisters followed close like lunar cycles. They too are fair and blonde like our father, and their names are as filled with Native American symbolism as mine.

Sister number one was born in June under the Strawberry Moon, so mother named her Summer June. My second sister was born in May under the Flower Moon, and she was named Spring Mae. Mother called us the "sisters three."

My sisters and I grew up like vines entwined with one another, mother finding it difficult to keep us separate and often confusing us by name. Having names like ours bonded us together in a common front against the insults that blighted our world. I asked,

"Mother, why are we named for the seasons?"

"Because that is when you were born," she replied in her kindest voice.

"Yes, I know that, but the other children tease us and even the adults laugh when they hear our names."

Mother wrapped me in her arms and said,

"They do not understand the importance of a name, and you are as beautiful as yours, Autumn Rose, never forget that."

Mother told us the story of the Three Sisters.

" In Indian tradition the Three Sisters (corn, squash, and beans) are planted together to help each other grow; you "sisters three" will

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help each other grow strong against the cruel jokes and insults that children and adults hurl at you."

Sister number three was born in December, under the Cold Moon sign. It was after Christmas and deep with snow. Ice hung in fingers from our roof, sparkling like diamonds in the sun, an illusion of warmth radiating from their cold exterior. Mother named her Crystal Noel. She was everything the "sisters three" were not, warm skin the color of acorns and eyes that looked like chocolate drops. Her hair a burnt sienna tipped in red. She was exotic and a reminder of my mother's heritage. Our Mother often called her "Yazhi ," which meant little one in her native language.

Mother taught us how to cook and sew and put up the things we grew in the garden, while Crystal watched from afar, Mother always saying,

"Yazhi is too young yet, let her play with her dolls and imaginary friends." We often hid her dolls for spite.

The "sisters three" never took Crystal along on those slow meandering days of summer when we wandered the back fields looking to fill our baskets with plump berries, hanging like jewels, because Mother would say,

"Yazhi might get scratched by the bushes, or lost." We resented Mothers protectiveness.

When we ran and splashed in the delicious clear cool creek that coursed through the back edge of our property, we left her behind with Mother; she never complained or showed the sting of our slight, her icy exterior always blanketing her.

In the evenings the "sisters three" chased fireflies. The tiny creatures put on an explosive fireworks display; that beckoned us into the velvet blackness of night. Mother would sit with Crystal. We would not allow her to join us in our chaotic ballet, as we danced after the magic lights. Then Mother would say, "Girls, come sit and look at the stars with me."

She would point to her ancestors burning bright in the sky, watching us from heaven and tell us of our moon signs. Mother with a great gift for gathering information, was a keeper of wisdom. She had an inherent sense of right and wrong, and gave advice in an honorable way.

"Autumn, you were born in the sign of the Hunter's Moon. I named you because your red hair was like the leaves and the blooms on the rose that would not let go, never forget that you are strong and beautiful."

"Summer, your sign is the Strawberry Moon. I named you for the beautiful summer day that was ripe with opportunity. Make your dreams come true."

"Spring, you were born in the sign of the Flower Moon, and people are attracted to your natural beauty like a bee to a flower. You are lucky in life. I named you for the spring and all its bounty of new gifts."

"Crystal you were born under the Cold Moon, and I knew you would face adversity,

***Crystal* cont'd on pg. 30**

but you have an inner warmth that glows and radiates outward. Crystal you are bright and strong, you will overcome much, but you must learn to trust others."

"I hope you understand the importance of your names. They were chosen wisely and you will grow into them. Wear them proudly and never forget who you are."

As we "sisters three" grew strong and flourished, Crystal's luster seemed to dull. She grew thin and weak. The mildest joggle appeared violet on her tawny skin.

"Crystal, did you fall and bruise yourself?" Mother asked.

"No, I just bumped myself."

"Are you hungry Yazhi?"

"No Mother, my stomach doesn't feel well." She said in a whisper. Many days we found her sleeping, her dolls lying quietly at her side.

Mother's wisdom knew something was wrong, so she and Father took Crystal to a doctor and then a hospital in another town. When Mother returned without Crystal, she told us her story, saying, "Crystal is very sick, she has a blood disorder the doctors call Leukemia." As Mother told us what Crystal faced, the light seemed to leave the room, though it was still mid day. The air became dry and stale, burning my throat; my heart grew heavy as if it were covered in moss and its muffled beat could be heard in my ears. I felt like an autumn leaf being blown by the wind, fighting to hold on.

"When can we see her?" "Is she coming home?" "Is she going to die?" we asked Mother.

"Yes, we can all go see her, but I do not know when she can come home, the rest is up to God." Mother replied as she gathered us in her arms.

In the following months we gravitated to Crystal for strength. Her intellect understood everything the doctors told her, even when our grief numbed minds could not. She radiated an inner warmth that drew us to her and kept our sorrow just below the surface. She accepted her fatal disease with a casualness that astounded everyone.

Like the melting fingers of ice on our roof when she was born, we watched her disappearing before us, helpless to stop the erosion of her body. The "sisters three" sat with her and tried to store memories, like seashells, in the bottom of our hearts.

In the final days when her eyes grew dim and her thoughts receded, we huddled around her, stroking her arms or holding her hands, trying to burn the image of her sweet face into our core, lest we forget it when she left us.

When she was gone our grief weighed us down; it tore at our souls, keeping us from seeing the beauty around us. We carried much remorse and shame for not treating Crystal better. Had we made her the "fourth sister," as in Indian tradition, she would have extended our kingdom and made us "a powerful foursome."

One day our Mother called us outside to look to the heavens, so we could see Crystal

***Crystal* cont'd on pg. 31**

in a burning star as it burst across the black abyss of space. She is still present within our hearts. We see her face in the warm brown acorns that fall to earth in autumn and in winter the ice that hangs from the trees and the snow that sparkles like a million crystals.

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