

Spectrum

No. 39

A publication of the Department of English
at California State University, Fresno

FRESNO**STATE**

Discovery. Diversity. Distinction.

Produced annually since 1980, *Spectrum* is a publication of the Department of English at California State University, Fresno, as part of the Young Writers' Conference. The youth journal celebrates the best creative writing work submitted by central San Joaquin Valley schools, as selected by an editorial board of Creative Writing Program graduate students and alumni. All publication rights revert to the authors after their work appears in *Spectrum*.

The 39th annual Young Writers' Conference took place on campus April 10, 2019 with a keynote address from author, artist, and educator Maceo Montoya.

To support *Spectrum* and the Young Writers' Conference by volunteering your time or making a tax-deductible gift to Fresno State, please visit fresnostate.edu/youngwriters for info, or contact the Department of English at 559.278.1569.

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A Letter From the Dean

Dear Young Writers' Conference Participants,

Writing is the cornerstone of the formation of the individual — it's an expression of the self that is reflective, philosophical, and transcendent. In the act of writing, we affirm a thought produced by the confluence of space and time — a thought, and a moment in time, which will not ever repeat again. The act of writing an idea simultaneously provides us the opportunity to create a thought that evolves with time — every time we read a poem, a novel, or short story, a new element arises, along with a new perspective on life.

As young writers, you have the opportunity to work with the best creative writing faculty. After all the lessons and discussions, though, it is your own personal insight into our world that will appear on the page; it is this insight, this unique experience, that has produced your very own consciousness and that will fuel your literary production. Tap into this vision, be proud of who you are as young writers, and enjoy the art of writing your thoughts.

Your English teachers are instrumental to this process of emotional and academic growth, because their energy, time, and dedication to their noble profession facilitate the genesis of your inspiration.

This conference is one of Fresno State's prized partnerships with our region's secondary schools. It is a model of how university and high school faculty can collaborate to promote writing as an art form that impacts and enhances every single professional field.

I wish every one of you a fun and exciting day full of learning and creativity. I am pleased that the College of Arts and Humanities is a collaborative partner in your educational journey of self-discovery.

Here's to your bright future!

Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval
Dean, College of Arts and Humanities
California State University, Fresno

A Letter From the Chair

Welcome, writers, to this year's 39th annual Young Writers' Conference at Fresno State!

One of the most daring things you can do is to write. Why is writing a daring act?

When you write, you make a concrete record of your ideas about the world. What you put on the page represents your views, experiences, ideas, thoughts, imagination, and feelings. It's brave to be willing to expose what might otherwise be hidden from view.

You are at the Young Writers Conference because you wrote, you shared your writing with others, and you were willing to stand by your work. You are here because you are brave. We celebrate you today—we celebrate the risks you took in committing your thoughts, ideas, and imagination to paper. It's daring to write, but it's also rewarding. You understand that.

Today, you'll attend workshops led by accomplished writers. You'll participate in workshops that reflect the ways we grow as writers at Fresno State. You'll enter into a writing community that cares about and honors your voice. We hope that what you experience here will give you tools you can use as you continue to write and dream and connect and grow and learn. Writing can make everything else in your life more valuable and meaningful.

So, welcome, writers! I hope that by the end of the day, you will have more ideas about what and how to write. I hope that you'll continue with the daring practice of exploring human existence through writing.

Dr. Kathleen Godfrey
Chair, Department of English
California State University, Fresno

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Awards

PRESIDENT'S AWARDS

Timothi Mercuri, King City High School | Head First
Abedallah Hammouda, Edison High School | Desert Fear

HENRY MADDEN LIBRARY AWARDS

Emilee Lane, Fowler High School | a new reality
Alexa Chiu, Los Banos High School | Red Ribbons

DEAN'S AWARD

Juliet Magaña, Los Banos High School | Fireflies,
Not Butterflies

WILD ABOUT BOOKS AWARD

Rebekah Szyszka, Mission Oak High School | Mixed Kid

WILLIAM SAROYAN AWARD

Jessie Steele, King City High School | Twisted Limbs

CHAIR'S AWARD

Micaela Hackett, Porterville High School | Both
Headphones In

FRESNO POETS' ASSOCIATION AWARD

Brianna Beasley, Mission Oak High School | Home

THE NORMAL SCHOOL AWARD

Crystal Regalado, King City High School | Heat

Awards

PHILIP LEVINE PRIZE AWARD

Julia Campiz, Riverdale High School | El Campesino,
a True Warrior

HMONG AMERICAN WRITERS' CIRCLE AWARD

Taylor Yang, Edison High School | Song of Death

FACET AWARDS

Micaela Zuniga, Tulare Western High School | Urban
Paradise

Andrew Castillo, Endeavor/Voyager Secondary School | I am
standing

MFA AWARD

Devon Osborne, Mission Oak High School | The Legend
of the Werewolf and the Wendigo

SAN JOAQUIN LITERARY ASSOCIATION AWARDS

Martin Delgado, King City High School | Ambivalent

Hannah Swiecki, Mariposa County High School | Gradual
Breakage

CHICANX WRITERS AND ARTISTS ASSOCIATION AWARD

Sydney Rivas, Clovis High School | This World

DRAMATIC ARTS AWARD

Aaron Morales, Porterville High School | The Twilight Zone:
A Script

Awards

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Cecilia Herrera, Granite Hills High School | An open wound is the place where the light enters you.

Devin Perry, Endeavor/Voyager Secondary School | Life of the Poor

Julia Nuno, King City High School | Tea with Grandma

Sherlyn Hernandez, Corcoran High School | The butterflies in my stomach

Manjot Dhanda, Fowler High School | Becoming a Woman

Nicole Nunez, Mission Oak High School | La guitarra

Mia Marin, Corcoran High School | Dear Grandma

Carter Whatley, Mariposa County High School | Spirits in Yosemite

Sage Hackett, Los Banos High School | Then. Now.

Gabriel Valencia, King City High School | Enclosed by the Sun

Cadence Dooms, University High School | My Wish

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY WRITING PROJECT TEACHER AWARDS

Betty Klein, Endeavor/Voyager Secondary School (Madera)

Crystal Salinas, Corcoran High School

Head First

TIMOTHY MERCURI

King City High School

President's Award

The emerald water's edge blurred into a deeper blue, like that of a sapphire smoothie's tang towards the middle. Past that, it was just blue, blue as far as I could see. The sun tap-danced upon my back, and I laid my hand upon the nape of my neck in a momentary, futile attempt to safeguard myself from tomorrow's sunburn.

"It's calm. Beautiful, even," a gruff voice came from behind me, shattering the solace of the dock.

"Can we rent a boat, Gramps?" I said, not taking my eyes off of the lake.

"Why would you wanna rent a boat? It'd scare the fish away."

The fishing rod rested on its stand about a meter to my right. I sighed, relenting, "You're right. It's just so hot, and those boats over there have these shades on the top and they look so comfortable and nice and..." I trailed off, just gazing at the water's reflection. Staring back at me was a Green Tim, his pudgy cheeks round and reddened from the sun's glares. A little kick into the water with nothing but my toes, and he was gone. Good. He was ugly anyways. I looked back up to see a sailboat, maybe 40 feet long, making a lackadaisical traipse across the waters towards one of the million other docks around the lake. Finally, my grandfather looked at me and sighed.

"You know, the water's much cooler than it is out here." He smirked.

"Yeah, but I can't swim. Grandma wants me to do swimming lessons soon, though."

"That's not how my father taught me how to swim."

"How'd your dad teach you?"

"Why, I'll show you. Stand on up, close your eyes, and spread out your arms," he said, moving to stand up.

"Okay," I said, blissfully unaware of what was about to happen, "but you owe me ice cream for all this hard work," He chuckled, and

only then was I confused. I had no idea what was coming, but it was my grandfather, so of course, I trusted him. I closed my eyes and let the sun shine upon my arms as they spread out from my side, like the wings of some chubby baby bird. “Gramps?”

“Remember, relax, and you’ll float to the surface.”

“What?”

“Take a deep breath.”

I breathed in, my suspicion reaching a peak. He wouldn’t- My thoughts were cut short, no longer did the dock scorch my bare feet. It had been replaced by the cool rush of air around my body, like that of a tiny hurricane blowing past me. I opened my eyes and saw the lake below me. For a moment, the feeling was enough to make me forget the real world. I flew. I was above it all, above myself, above everyone else. Reality hit me in a duel-offensive with the water’s surface. In the time it would take most to blink, I had entered for the first time, two totally separate yet very similar worlds. The water held me for a moment, like a mother holds her child. It was cool, yet not cold. The beatings of the sun had made its colder depths far more inviting, yet even I was not brave nor foolish enough to attempt a deeper plunge. I shut my eyes tight, simply feeling this new world, this universe of momentariness.

“Do I have to?” My prepubescent voice only added to the intended whine of the query.

“Tim, you can’t swim unless you take the swim shirt off. Those are the rules,” Coach was right, as always.

“But—”

“No buts,” she had clearly had enough of my whining, “Your race is in about ten minutes. Get the shirt off and get warmed up.”

Before I could utter a rebuttal, she had disappeared into the crowd of people, off somewhere towards the starting block. So many people, the concrete choked with the footsteps of what must have been dozens, if not hundreds of swimmers, parents, coaches, and spectators. All those eyes, they’d all be on me. A bottom level swimmer, in the very last heat of the fifty free. They’d all be watching me. I choked on my air, running to the bathroom for some very needed solitude. Squeezing through the crowds, bobbing, weaving, dodging, ducking my way through the cold, slightly decrepit restrooms until I eventually slid the stall door shut behind me. I breathed a ragged sigh, the gravity of the situation crushing me on all sides, like the garbage compactor scene in *A New Hope*. I pulled my swim shirt off, my flesh being too plenty; the scars on my upper back were like red rivers running in a pinkish peach landscape. I traced them with a delicate

finger, still trepidatious of what was to come. I kept imagining that day at the lake, longing for that first second, that moment of isolation when I first encountered the world of water, that world which now held my worst nightmare.

Thoughts pounded the image in my mind, ripping me from any semblance of a happy place that was left.

“They’ll laugh at you. They’ll call you fat. They’ll nod and say ‘he shouldn’t be here’, and laugh even harder when you come in last. The little fatty who lost,” they said.

I trembled, now with anger more than fear. “I’m not fat. I’m not. I’m Tim, I’m smart, I’m strong. I’m not fat.” I repeated, over and over and over until the words felt slick and raw on my tongue, without meaning, yet feeling almost like a prayer, safeguarding me from the horrors of my own imagining. Minutes passed. The intercom called the swimmers in the first heat to the block. I forced myself out of my mind, and ran from the bathroom to the blocks, forgetting the shirt behind.

Upon reaching the blocks, the second heat was in the water, and the third heat was preparing to step forward. I still had maybe three or four more heats to sit through whilst the time dripped away. Sitting down on the bleachers nearest the blocks, I finally stopped to breathe. My eyes shut, and I drifted back to the lake, a haze of summer-evaporated freshwater taking over my willing mind.

“Tim! There you are, I’ve been looking for you!”

I jolted back into the real world. “Sorry, coach, I drifted for a bit.”

“I can tell. Glad you got rid of that shirt, your heat is up next. I can tell you didn’t warm up, that’ll be a 500 at practice on Monday,” She turned and walked back to the timer’s desk.

“My shirt? What...” My hands probed upwards from my jammers, finding my chest bare. My breath became ragged, my vision blurred, my entire existence was spinning. I wanted to pass out, to fall, to fade away from people’s eyes. Someone grasped my arm, I couldn’t even tell who. I felt myself walking, bumping through the crowd, drifting within my mind, until we eventually stopped. I heard the whistle, and as if it was the call of a siren, I made my way to timer’s area, right behind the block. Suddenly it all stopped. The world righted. My breath slowed. My vision became crystal clear. In a moment, I was gone. I was back at the lake.

Suddenly, my throat tingled, reminding me that I’d eventually have to return to the surface, I couldn’t stay here, hide here, forever. My perfectly strange little world was brashly torn asunder when my head pierced the surface tension once more. My little lungs sucked in

as much of this now delicious air as they could, and the wind's cool caresses pushed the water back, tugging on my bright blonde mess of hair. For now, I was elated. "Gramps, I'm in the water! I'm doing it!" He smiled and laughed, giving me a thumbs up. He motioned for me to scoop the water with my arms, and I did. It pushed me forwards, slowly. I trekked this vast expanse of about five feet, panting when I finally reached the dock.

"Swimmer in lane three, please step to the blocks," A tinny, reverberating voice summoned me from the past. Normally, I'd stutter and apologize. Today it was different. I strode, as if in a trance, to the block. I heard nothing but the gentle sloshing of a freestyler practicing their stroke over in the warm-up lane. I looked around, and all eyes were upon us. Titans in our own right. It's a strange feeling, when more eyes than can be counted are leveled solely at you and a few others, and you feel nothing. It's like a numbness, through which a strange buzzing arises. In a moment, the world is gone. Nothing matters but you and the water. The whistles summoned us once more, this time to stand on the blocks and to prepare to dive. I crouched, my body coiled like a violent spring, ready to fire out at a moment's notice. For a moment I gazed down at my reflection in the pool's little tsunami waves. The Tim who stared back was no longer that little Green Tim. This was someone who was proud. Someone who was worth it, regardless of what they looked like. Most of all, I saw someone who wanted to swim. We smirked at each other, and I readied for the start.

BRAAAAAAP.

Air time. My legs became pistons, firing out and sending my body up, then straight, then down at just the slightest angle. The crash was always my favorite part. The water splits around you, and for a moment, you're a Viking warship, slicing through the waves around you. Snap back to the race. First twenty-five, no breath. Just swim. The dive takes up half the pool, so it's not as bad as it sounds. Wall. Head down, throw the shoulder, kick off. Fire out, a blue-water bullet. Wait for it... now! Breathe! God, that's so fresh. The first breath always tastes like orange Kool-Aid. Sweet, and I could drink it in forever. Head thrust low. Underwater again, back into my world. Arms thrash the water, and I check my sides. I'm ahead. Not by a lot, but by enough. Wall again. Flip like an underwater ballerina, kick like your life depends on it. Last fifty. Faster. Pick it up. Feel your lungs burn.

Feel them scratch for air. Feel it all, take it all in. Hold it, let it singe your nerves, and slam it all into the last twenty-five. Burn out. Let it all go. Arms and legs operate as one, abusing the water around me. Whitewater consumes me, and I am lost in a mist of my own creation. I love every second of it. My shoulders feel the stretch and pull as I reach for the wall, aiming to cut off every thousandth of a second that I can. My fingers slam against the concrete, and I yank myself forwards. My head bursts into the air, and I suck in one glorious burst of air. This one has no flavor, none until I look around to see every other swimmer still catching up. Then it tastes like every single thing at once. Lake water from years ago, the Nutri-Grain bar from fifteen minutes ago, and even that enchilada I know I'll order after the meet. I pull myself from the water after I shake hands and wish the best to the other swimmers. I rise a champion. The once-cold concrete of the pool now feels warm and lustrous. I smile, asking my timer for my time. "1:02? That's my starting time for the year? Perfect." I glance over to the bleachers, to see my grandfather, camera in hand. He snaps a quick photo of me standing by the blocks. We lock eyes, and for a moment, I understand. No words are needed. He nods at me, and I nod back.

The sun warmed my cheeks, the gentle winds embraced my sopping wet visage, and I felt at peace. Of course, I couldn't exactly pull myself from the waters without a little help. Chuckling as he pulled me out, my grandfather smiled, placing his hand on my shoulder. "So, you know how to swim now."

Desert Fear

ABEDALLAH HAMMOUDA

Edison High School

President's Award

“Can you get the zaatar?” my father asked his mother as he was getting breakfast ready. He had forgotten he was no longer at home. The zaatar wasn't as good in Jordan as it was in his hometown of Deir-Debwan just outside of Jerusalem. It was “too spicy” for his unrefined 13-year-old pallet at the time. He preferred his salty blend of thyme, sesame, and salt. They usually would have brought some with them as they visit family in Jordan but they were in a rush this time and forgot to pack it.

My father's uncle had been worried the day before about the trip they had planned to Jordan so he had come along with them. When they had arrived all together, it was August 2nd, and they were planning on just staying for a few days. And that very morning as they were eating breakfast, the TV was on. My father was in the bathroom washing his face right after waking up but he still heard the news bellowing through the house. It was a Jordanian news reporter saying, “The Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, has invaded Kuwait. I repeat, the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein has invaded Kuwait.”

This marked the beginning of the Gulf War. The expression on my grandfather's face was pure distress. My father heard his mother from the kitchen saying, “Oh no...” and he immediately came out of the bathroom to see the TV.

Everyone stopped what they were doing and they all had one connecting thought: going back to Kuwait where they had their second home was no longer an option for the family. Fifteen hundred kilometers away was their three bedroom townhouse and it was within seven kilometers of a front line against the Iraqi forces.

They apparently came in the middle of the night but the news report was delayed due to how sudden the attack was. This fact led to a brief moment of panic; everyone was listening to the news and packing their things. The stay in Jordan to visit their family was no

longer going to be possible. No one knew how long the attack was going to last so my grandparents decided to make the trip to their townhouse and take their belongings and valuables. They were going to leave the next morning but there was one problem, they had to go through Iraq to get to Kuwait.

All my father wanted to do was come along. He was 13 and itching for adventure even if it was risky entering a warzone. But of course he wasn't allowed to; his father was going to take his brother with him who was a much older man but who had a much better Iraqi arabic dialect accent than my grandfather, so he could be of use if they ran into trouble. It was better off to be prepared in my grandfather's eyes in moments where the money does the talking for those who are corrupted by the dinar.

The day went by as the whole family was just sitting near the TV dreading the sound of the Jordanian news reporter coming up again with his urgent tone. And not to forget the abrupt interruption in the middle of the translated version of Knight Rider with David Hasselhoff.

"Not now!" yelled my father.

His show was interrupted right when he was getting excited for the end of the finale. The voice everyone was dreading came on; my grandfather was the only one still awake other than my father. When he heard the voice come up, he woke up my grandmother and his brother. It was only 9:00pm at the time but they were all just resting because they had a long day ahead of them driving through the desert.

"Kuwaiti front lines have been broken through and the Baathist army is under way to Kuwait city," declared the news reporter.

Kuwait City is on the far side from where Iraq's forces came in, meaning they had intention on waging war all the way through.

This news was to be expected due to the strength of the Baathist party in the past couple of years under Hussein. But with his new found power over the people of Iraq, came new found wealth which in turn led to this invasion in the first place. There was an oil reservoir on the border between the two countries, greed was a given and took over who "owned" the oil. So Hussein called it his own and invaded Kuwait to make it the 19th province of Iraq by force so he could have it under his power and do what he wished with the oil throughout the country. This information spread through the Middle East and was considered insubordination.

After the reporter was finished talking, Knight Rider came back on. The ending credits were playing, which upset my father due to the fact that he didn't get to see the ending. It didn't matter anyways. He was going to stay up and watch movies since he didn't have to be up early for the trip his parents were making. He was going to stay with his family in Jordan.

“Goodnight,” said my grandfather in a worried tone as if he was scared just to wake up the next day.

The next morning came around. At 5:30am, my grandfather woke up my grandmother and his brother.

“Get ready, we’re leaving in 30 minutes.”

“What about breakfast?” asked my grandmother. But she got no response from him, he was oddly on edge about the whole situation but it was obvious he was scared of the drive through Iraq.

It was already 5:50am and they were all getting ready to load up the things they need in the car. The most important things were water and the money just to use here and there in case of an emergency.

“Hey Abedallah, do you need the trailer to be hooked up to the truck?” my grandfather’s brother asked him in case he wanted to bring back their furniture.

“Oh yes that’s right, we should probably bring back our beds and Persian rugs. But do you think the truck could handle the weight load?” he asked in return.

The look on his brother’s face was uncertainty as to whether the truck would give out on their journey. But the risk had to be taken; there was no way they could leave all their expensive belongings and potentially be robbed. After hooking up the trailer and packing their things, they were on their way.

It was a 17 hour ride and by the time they were near, it was already 11:00pm so they stopped near the border of a hotel for the night and they would enter the country in the morning. My grandparents and my grandpa’s brother slept in one bedroom in case something were to happen so they would all be together. They had their pre-packed dinner and slept through the night.

They left the motel at 7:00am. This time my grandfather’s brother was driving past the border in case they were questioned by Iraqi forces for identification they would be okay. But in these times, Saddam Hussein had relations with Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Iraqis did not have anything against Palestinians, and all my grandparents wanted was their belongings.

The border to enter Kuwait was only 15 kilometers away. The car was too quiet due to the worry in all three of their heads approaching the border. My grandpa tried to put the radio on but nothing came up but static. And every kilometer they got closer to the border, the louder the booms and bangs got. Once they reached a checkpoint, my grandmother in the back was praying that everything would go smoothly.

“Bismillaahir rahmaanir raheem,” she said. She was seeking the protection of Allah in the most worrisome of times.

“Identification,” said the border guard. Without saying a word,

they gave him their haweeyat which were their passports with the Palestinian insignia on it. Before the guard even took it, he saw the front cover and let them pass with a swift wave of the hand to go forward.

“Allhamdulillah,” my grandfather said to express his relief.

They continued driving forward. So much smoke was in the sky it was impossible to see the sun. The streets were empty and deserted, a stray dog could be seen every other block or so. After about an hour of driving they finally reached their townhouse building. It seemed abandoned due to the lack of light in the top three stories.

“Everyone seems to have fled the country,” my grandmother said.

They exited their car and started walking toward the building. As they entered they didn’t even hear a single sound. Their home number was A7 on the first story of the building. He took his keys out getting ready to unlock the door but he noticed the lock was previously broken. His brother had given him a puzzled look but also a warning of caution. He tried to open the door but it wouldn’t budge as if there was a chair in the way angled to prevent the door from opening any more than three inches.

“Kick it in,” said his brother.

And that was what he did. When he entered, he couldn’t believe what he saw. The house was practically emptied out and in the living room were about 15 people and about 10 kids hiding in the bathroom. They were other families that lived in the building as well, but on the top stories. They were sheltered in my grandparents’ home due to their windows being shot at if they were seen in their top story home by Iraqi forces. A man from one of the families my grandparents knew was named Saeed, and his wife was Miriam.

Saeed approached my grandfather, gave him a firm handshake and said, “We thought you guys were never going to come back.”

“We only came back for our belongings and valuables. I’m glad to see you guys are okay but where are our rugs and couches?”

“Everyone just took them and left the country to sell them, people are desperate for money you understand? If we knew you were coming back we wouldn’t have sold it,” he said in return.

My grandfather just sighed, and my grandmother was about to cry with her head hanging low. Her brother-in-law hugged her and told her it was okay and to pack up what’s left. She obliged and wiped her tears off. Within 20 minutes everything was packed up and put in the trailer. There were two kalabayas and a farsha in the trailer as the biggest things loaded up.

It was as if the whole trip and the fear that came along with it was for nothing. They reached the border and crossed it with no problems whatsoever. The drive was a tricky one though. It was already past

noon by that time so they just kept driving through Iraq. In this moment in time, they were going through the dry desert, nothing but sand everywhere. It was about 4:00pm and already getting dark when their truck started to slow down and eventually came to a stop. My grandfather was the one driving whilst his wife and brother were sleeping. When he came to a stop, they both woke up together wondering the same thing.

“Are we there yet?” his brother was referring to Baghdad.

“No, we are just stopped because the car broke down.”

“I told you, that trailer would be too heavy for this piece of junk to carry,” said my grandmother.

They all exited the truck and looked in all directions on the dirt road. The engine was smoking and nothing could be done about it. No car was in any visible radius to their location as well as no radio signal either.

After 40 minutes of waiting and my grandmother praying for Allah to help them, a car came down the road about half a mile away. My grandfather got up from his seat in the car and shouted, “Stop!” to get their attention. They kept driving though for about 30 meters and then they turned the car around with the headlights beaming in the front of my grandfather’s truck getting everyone’s attention. When the driver parked the car, my grandfather could see that there were three large men, two in the front and one in the back all with black masks on their faces. At this time, my grandfather was terrified but tried to hide it. He knew who these people were and what they do: they were gangsters.

“Car trouble?” the driver asked.

My grandfather didn’t understand their dialect so he told his brother to answer them.

He said, “We’re just on our way back home and it broke down on us.”

“There’s a body shop 5 kilometers that way,” he pointed north in the direction they were going. “We could give just one of you guys a ride to it to get a tow truck back here because we don’t have enough room in the car.”

My grandfather thought to himself, this is it, this was how he was going to die. And he wouldn’t let his wife or his 60 year old brother go alone, so he had to go. He got in the car and drove away leaving the others behind reluctantly.

No one said a word in the car, and my grandfather was the oldest one out of all of them by the physical looks. It was already fully dark outside and they arrive at the body shop, the driver told him the mechanic’s name and that Saffi sent him.

“Thank you so much for you help,” my grandfather said as he tried to hand the man 100 dollars but he didn’t take it and just said,

“May God be with you,” and drove off.

My grandfather got the man he spoke of and they drove back together to his broken down truck. They brought it back to the shop and within the hour it was all fixed up, he paid the man and by 8:00pm they had reached Baghdad, the capital of Iraq.

“Pull over!” said his brother. He pointed at a hotel across from the beloved Sheraton Ishtar. The sign on it read, “International Palestinian Hotel” so it of course was welcoming to them. It was a sense of safety after all they have been through. My grandmother especially had gone through so much stress, at that point she couldn’t even talk.

So they decided to spend the night there. They were immediately welcomed and greeted amazingly as if being Palestinian made you most special. After getting up to their rooms, they listened to the news if anything new was happening across the border. But nothing was reported until the next morning while they were eating breakfast in their rooms.

The reporter on the TV had said, “Kuwaiti defenses have been decimated, the Baathist Party now has control over the new 19th province of Iraq.”

My grandparents had been through so much those past few days, first hand experience with the Gulf War and the worry for their lives was unlike anything they had been through together. And so that morning, after that moment of hearing the news and in the moment of relief for their lives. My grandfather said, “Let’s go home, I’m starting to miss that zaatar too.”

a new reality

EMILEE LANE

Fowler High School

Henry Madden Library Award

sticks and stones may break my bones,
but the sound of bullets will always haunt me.

the bodies collide with the surface beneath,
the psalm of their breathing is now complete.

the rain isn't over,
the thunder is just beginning,
the sound is like bombs, the flesh of the earth splitting.

the terror, the screams.
the tremendous weight on top of me.
"quiet" they say,
"don't say a thing."
"play dead," "muffle your screams."
"pretend the blood isn't real,"
"all of it is just a dream."

sticks and stones may break my bones,
but the sound of bullets will always haunt me.

the more i run, the more they scream.
the next bullet is coming for me.
my name is called, i watch them fall.
death is calling and i can do nothing at all.

sticks and stones may break my bones,
but the sound of bullets will always haunt me.

i can feel my phone, my phone is ringing.
my back, my side, both are stinging,
the blood is pooling, my knees are giving.
i think it's time, i feel i'm quitting.
i've been hit, i'm falling,
i'm face up towards the ceiling.
the earth is fading, i have collapsed
the shooter is coming,
all has gone black.

Red Ribbons

ALEXA CHIU

Los Banos High School

Henry Madden Library Award

You're thirteen years old. You see your brother walk to the overflowed medicine cabinet where the drowsy pills and first aid kit are. You watch him scramble for band-aids. No. The gauze that is always left to mourn the loss of the disappearing band-aids and to meet new tubes of "Neosporin." You watch him run up to his room with nothing in his hands. You hear his creaky door slam shut and wonder if he got a paper cut.

Easter. The day a bunny comes out to play or the day your family celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. That same family that squeezes into your mom's Toyota Sequoia. You are sitting next to your brother, the brother with long brown hair, the brother with his hand on his arm. His hand laid tightly on his arm as if a secret was about to be spilled out. You know in your mind why he is containing a secret. You know why he wanted to wear a sweater on this scorching hot day, the day where the metal lawn chairs might have melted. You know why your mom's favorite color isn't red anymore, why she decided she wanted to paint the walls a different color. You look to your left and see red ribbons lace his arm. Your mom is screaming, "Why would you do this to yourself?" The car reached half a mile down the road before it turned around.

You. You wonder where it all went wrong. Was it your grandfather's death? His dad being a coward and leaving him? The times where you didn't want to play "Pokemon" with him? He was the only one who would play anything with you, so why wouldn't you just play that last game? You remember the times when you would make tents out of blankets and you're not talking about small, amateur tents; you are talking about mansion sized ones. He is the greatest tent builder you know and always will be even if you go to a tent building competition. He will always be number one.

After you reach home you notice the water bottle in your hand is

crushed and there's almost no water inside it. The water has leaked into the crevasses of your hands and onto the floor mats. When you see those kinds of red ribbons you never want real ones in your hair anymore.

Those damn red ribbons.

Fireflies, Not Butterflies

JULIET MAGAÑA

Los Banos High School

Dean's Award

Since a very young age, I've pondered on the idea of being gay. I've always thought about what it would be like to have feelings for a girl that were more than friendly. I'm not going to lie, up until recently, the idea made me a bit uncomfortable, but it didn't scare me and it definitely didn't disgust me. It's a question that, over the years, I've asked myself multiple times. Could I be gay? Each time I thought it over, I always came up with the same answer: I couldn't possibly be gay because I like boys and even though the thought of liking girls wasn't completely unappealing, there had never been one that I actually liked. Until approximately five weeks ago.

I've always been quite the tomboy, from the way I dress to the way I talk and act. So, as much as I hate people making assumptions, it was fair enough for someone to think that I might like girls. It's sort of crazy how someone who really doesn't know you could make an assumption about you and be right when you didn't even know that thing about yourself. Thank god she did though because if she hadn't, she never would have asked me if I wanted to hang out and who knows how long it would have taken me to make realizations that would change life as I knew it.

I didn't have to be gay to see that she was very pretty. If someone is good looking then they're good looking and that's that. I knew I was screwed after the very first time I hung out with her. It was only forty minutes we spent together, but in that forty minutes I decided that she wasn't just pretty, she was absolutely gorgeous. The way she smiled at me sent a swarm of fireflies loose inside my stomach that traveled up into my chest and out my throat, their fluttering and burning making it impossible for me to speak. It was definitely the dimples.

The next time we got together, it was for a few hours instead of just a few minutes, and I found myself liking everything about her.

How she took charge of the conversation because she knows I'm quiet and awkward and the way she made me feel comfortable talking to her even though we didn't know each other that well. The way she made an effort to get to know me made me want to get to know her too. I liked listening to her sing along to her non-mainstream music while she drove, resting her hand on the gear selector. I knew then that she wasn't just a girl I thought was beautiful, she was a girl I found attractive. There are plenty of beautiful people in the world, that doesn't mean they're attractive. An attractive person is someone you're drawn to, someone you gravitate to for reasons unknown. An attractive person heightens your senses.

Nothing blew my mind more than how easy it was for me to go from not wanting to believe something to being completely comfortable admitting it not only to myself, but other people as well. I liked her and not the way I like new socks and Sunday morning and black ink gel pens. I liked her liked her, as sixth grade as that sounds, and she made it pretty clear from the beginning that she liked me too. It was a mutual liking which was new for me. There had been boys in the past that had expressed feelings for me that I had to awkwardly turn away and, of course, there had been boys that I liked a whole lot who had to turn me away. It's an invigorating feeling, knowing that the person you're into is into you too. It was well known by pretty much everyone that she was into girls and, as we started spending more and more time together, people began to assume that I was too. When they asked me if it was true, I had no problem saying that it was. After telling them to mind their own business, of course.

It definitely sounds cheesy, but there was this unexplainable and immediate connection. I'd never wanted to make someone smile as much as I wanted to make her smile. I'd never felt the need to impress someone before and honestly, I had no idea how to do that. There was one Friday morning where I jokingly suggested we ditch school, not expecting her to take me serious, and she didn't even hesitate to enthusiastically agree. I'd never actually ditched school before, I'm sort of lame like that, but I wasn't going to risk disappointing her by telling her I was kidding, even if it meant my parents were going to have my ass later. So we blew off the rest of our classes and spent the day together eating and napping and driving around aimlessly. I didn't end up going home until eleven o'clock that night and even though we were together for twelve hours straight, I still missed her.

Things got even better after that. I've never been a fan of labels so I was beyond relieved when she told me that she wasn't either. Labels are used so that the people around you know what you are to each other. Quite frankly, what we are to each other is really nobody's business but our own. I knew how she felt and she knew how I felt and that's all that really mattered. I didn't need a label to know

that she liked me, I knew it when she stopped resting her hand on the gear selector and instead slipped it into mine while she drove. I knew it when we'd sit next to each other and she'd lay her head on my shoulder. I knew it when she'd ask me about my day and actually listen while I told her. I did my best to make sure she knew it too.

She often likes to smirk superiorly, with those damn dimples, and tell me that she "turned me gay." I'm not exactly sure it works that way, but I can't help but laugh along with her and tell her that she's probably right. I like to let her have her moments. Realistically, I know that the gayness has always lingered within me, dormant. She just woke it up, and, even though only time will tell what happens to us, I'll always be extremely thankful to her for doing that. I've never learned so much about myself in such a short amount of time and its possible that I never would have, had it not been for her.. No matter what the future has in store for us, I know that I'll never deny her being an absolutely beautiful person, inside and out.

It's important that we come to terms with what and who we really are as people. Sometimes you can change these things and sometimes you simply can't. Sometimes there are things that should and can be changed, and sometimes trying to change is so pointless, it shouldn't even be attempted. You have to be comfortable with who you are in order to live a good life. We don't always just automatically know who we are, sometimes we have to take the time to learn it. That may come easy for you, or it may make you want to rip the hair out of your skull. Acceptance of self isn't always simple, but it's vital in being happy. If you can't accept yourself, you can't be confident in yourself and you'll get nowhere. So, get somewhere.

Mixed Kid

REBEKAH SZYSZKA

Mission Oak High School

Wild About Books Award

They call me *mestiza*—translated literally from Tagalog, my mother’s foreign tongue, to mean HALF BLOOD, HALF BREED, NOT COMPLETE ENOUGH. As if I am not a full person on my own. Broken mosaic of a girl, forged from so many cultures soldered together, none of them want to claim me.

My first language was not English, but an alphabet my father did not care enough to learn. At three years old, I could form whole conversations with my *Lola*, who still calls me *basang*, though I have stopped responding.

When I asked my mother why she stopped speaking to me in Tagalog, she answers me in English. Did I not know I was American? How lucky I was to be born to a white father in a white man’s land. I never had to deal with the growing pains she and her eight siblings did. This translates to I AM ASHAMED.

When I was little, my aunties would tell me to stay out of the sun. I did not know that they meant to keep me from deepening my coffee creamer skin, that they were ashamed of the sunripe bodies they were born in. My mother’s sister used to bleach her skin with sunshine and lemon juice to fake what I was naturally. In the Philippines where half my blood comes from, to be WHITE, I mean, *LIGHT*, is synonymous with BEAUTIFUL. My parents used to joke that I could make millions just by existing there—because I was mixed. I know now these comments aren’t so much jokes as microaggressions. I know now to not laugh along.

I am a first generation American, and I do not belong anywhere. Too foreign for my paternal family, not foreign enough for my maternal family. I grew up in San Francisco, but even there some things just do not mix/ Even in a melting pot city, things still burn.

Twisted Limbs

JESSIE STEELE

King City High School

William Saroyan Award

Sam stood outside, gazing up at the daunting task in front of her. It didn't matter that it dwarfed her by comparison, for nature had made both her and the tree. There was a path of footprints, compressed into the tall grass that were lighter than the rest. It wasn't the sun's path that Sam followed, but rather, Cassie and Madison's footsteps.

The pine itself appeared to have a skyscraper build with a double helix design. Its branches grew from the sides of the base, which to Sam went up forever. But when a breeze swept across the valley, the branches, and the girls in them, swayed back and forth. Sam could hear the others' laughter echo through the dense needles of the tree, yet she was petrified that those twisted limbs would snatch her up, only to drop her.

"Sam, hurry up. You know the last one to the top is a rotten egg!" the disembodied voice called out from within the tree.

I have to, if I don't they'll only think of me as a baby, Sam thought.

Her legs quivered as she took a step forward and rested her palm against the ancient wood. Her fingers dragged across the natural design of the wood, tracing the patterns of the bark, and comparing them to canyons with rivers of sap underneath. The chips of bark were ashen and dried on top, yet layers of wooden clay underneath, all contrasting the rich dark green of the bushels of needles.

"I'm already halfway there..." Madison's voice said, quoting the SpongeBob episode they were previously watching inside the house.

Sam clutched the lowest branch, pulled herself so she hung like a sloth, and slowly shimmied her body up into a sitting position like she was fighting off a tranquilizer dart. Looking up through the spiraling staircase of limbs, she spotted her sister and their mutual friend. Instead of tasting their dust, she briskly looked away as pieces of bark rained down upon her.

Before she continued her trek, Sam glanced at the ground, to see

how high she was. She leaned forward and began to shake. Her feet seemed miles away from the Earth, and it felt like the breeze was going to throw her off her perch. Sam's eyes began to sting, not from the bark which continued its weather pattern, but from falling tears as she was consumed in panic.

"Help!" Sam wailed.

The other two instantly shot their gaze down to make sure Sam hadn't fallen only to see her hugging the tree as she had her mother's leg the first day of school.

Sam tried to ground herself to the massive extension of the Earth, without realizing that it was being in the tree that kept her from the ground. From safety.

Realizing that Sam hadn't been injured, the older pair yelled down to her one word, "Jump!"

"I can't, it's too far and I'll hurt myself."

"Well then stop complaining. If you aren't going to help yourself, there's nothing we can do," her older sister told her as she began her ascent again

Madison shot Sam a sympathetic glance before following Cassie higher.

That day, both Cassie and Madison made it to about a quarter of the way up the tree, leaving Sam to panic at the very bottom branch. They climbed down after getting stuck and had to get Sam and Cassie's father to help get her down from her tower. After the panic of her mind and the twisted limbs that ensnared her, Sam became determined to show them that she wasn't a rotten egg, determined to reach the top. Even though heights made Sam's vision tunnel, she didn't want to seem like the little kid holding them back.

Sunlight was trickling through the green needles of the pine, yet the tree itself appeared smaller to Sam. She had grown through last summer, much like the long grasses of the hills that had dyed their tips yellow, but the roots remained green. All summer, Sam's hands had become stronger and calloused as she practiced with the older girls. By the time she could get higher than the first branch, Cassie and Madison didn't think it necessary to always go out with her. It took her awhile, but eventually, she could sit on the branch and look down without her vision swimming.

That didn't stop the teasing coming mainly from Cassie. All summer long, the older two had improved as well, being able to get past the halfway mark. It seemed to Sam that no matter what she did, they would always be better than her; always able to mock her for not being at 'their level'.

She scurried up the tree, like a chipmunk, reaching the quarter way mark that the other two had before Mother Nature had played with the thermostat. Sam looked up to the exact branch that always stopped her sister and Madison, and made a path down to where she was, working backward on the maze. She tried to reach the next branch, but even on her toes, it strayed out of her grasp.

Maybe if I jump to it, I'll be able to grab it and pull myself up? But what if I miss? The others are painting their nails and won't hear me if I get hurt.

Sam's conscious had won out, and she sat on her new perch disappointedly.

Every day for the next year, Sam climbed the pine tree. Cassie and Madison had already reached the top branch and had gone on to other challenges leaving Sam to remain looking up at the needled peak, her eyes reflecting the sky. By now, she had grown from a seedling into a sapling and was ready to have her limbs reach the top. The others may have reached their goal, but Sam was still behind them, desperate to finish before moving on to the next challenge with them. The constant teasing wouldn't stop until she proved to them that she could climb the entire tree.

Sam's hands worked on autopilot as she climbed up the familiar path. Her hands scraped against the harsh bark of the tree, but her hands were used to the pain. She reached the branch that had stopped her before, and easily wrapped her hands around it, accomplishment blooming in her chest. Sam continued her climb, winding her way up the branches, and losing herself in the experience. Her hands easily grappled branches without any thought involved, allowing her mind to take in everything: the slight breeze that had scared her in the beginning, how the light seemed to fall through the branches and dance on the needles, the creaking of the wood as she neared the top, how it became thinner and thinner, yet more densely populated with the green spikes.

Sam's head poked out of the top of the tree and she let her eyes drink in the sight as a reward. Even though heights still made her queasy, she couldn't look away from the rolling hills covered in a sea of green grass with clusters of wildflowers acting as kelp beds. Perched at the top, a slight breeze made Sam sway with the tree, but she still could not look away; she would not. It had taken her so long to swallow her fear, that the wind didn't frighten her anymore.

After drinking in the sight for a little longer, she spotted Cassie and Madison near her house at the foot of the hill and began to call to them excited to prove that she could do anything they could.

“Guys come here! I finally did it.”

Sam’s voice carried in the wind, and the two older girls looked up at the pine tree, seeing a tuft of blonde mixed with the rich green and began walking over. Hurriedly, Sam started climbing down, hands scraping against the bark as she slid down with ease. By the time Cassie and Madison were reaching the tree, Sam was reaching the ground.

“Can you guys believe it? I finally reached the top!”

“Took you long enough,” Cassie said.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, it’s just that we reached the top forever ago and moved on,” said Madison. “I mean, it’s cool you reached the top, it’s just that...well, you know.”

“No, I don’t,” Sam said.

“She means that we don’t care,” Cassie said.

“I would have said it nicer than that, Jesus Cassie,” muttered Madison.

“Oh. Um, I guess you guys can go back to doing whatever you were before I bothered you.”

“Wanna join us?” Madison said as Cassie shot her a glare.

“No, I’m gonna hang back for a little bit.”

“See you at home then!” said Cassie as she dragged Madison down the hill whispering angrily, leaving Sam alone with the tree.

Sam watched them leave as her eyes began to sting. She turned back toward the hardwood and began to climb it again, although at a much slower pace than before. Reaching the top again, she wasn’t filled with pleasure but was rather disappointed. From the new height, Sam watched as Cassie and Madison went inside the house without a backward glance.

Why don’t they care? When they finally reached the top, they were so happy. I just wanted to impress them; to show them that I can do anything they can.

The sun was setting as Sam continued to reason. The sky was changing to shades of gold, purple, and red; a true masterpiece, yet all Sam felt was blue. When definite figures transformed into silhouettes, Sam decided it was time to climb back down. As she neared the ground, Sam looked downward to see the emergence of a new pine tree. It was struggling to grow due to its proximity to such a larger one, but in all due time it would grow. Sam finally reached the conclusion that she may be able to do everything that Cassie and Madison could, just not always at the same time, much like the baby pine.

Sam compared the two trees once more and felt melancholy before she began her descent of the hill towards her house.

Both Headphones In

MICAELA HACKETT

Porterville High School

Chair's Award

Every day at 3:31 the bell echoes through the school halls like honey to the students' ears. With children rushing out of classrooms eager to go on their way with friends or even just by themselves, I walk alone through the halls. Both headphones in, not tuned out from reality but my mind spiraling. As I'm making my way down through the loud and congested quad I can't help but notice all of the different people. The ones with big groups, the ones with maybe just a couple of friends and even the people who think they go unnoticed, the ones sitting alone, I notice them. Their features, such as the ones with curly hair, the ones with straight hair and the ones who are bold and daring that choose to dye their hair to make a statement or maybe because they simply just liked the color. However, the first thing I always notice is the expression upon their faces it's always the most revealing thing even when people think they're being mysterious. A smile can mean a thousand different things when you look at it right. It can be warm and loving but have undertones of hurt and pain. It can be seen as pain but really just someone struggling to express their emotions. Often times on my embarks into the city or even just on my small walks in school I see so many people trying to conceal what they feel. Beneath the mask that we put on for the world is a story, one that desires to be told. Too often I see people I pass with blank expressions, heads down trying not to make contact with anyone around them. It's almost as if making human connections has completely rotted away like the core of an apple left on the counter for a few days.

Even in a loud room, it's easy to see through people; we don't have shields protecting us from observant eyes. In the loudest of classrooms but also the most creative and engaging classroom, I have a friend. This friend often comes to my mind when I began to spiral walking through the loud quad. I turn my music up to tune

out the loudness of the world around me and I think. “Why does she always wear black? Why does she always smile and laugh? Why does she continue to cut her once long black hair?” These details are so minute they go unnoticed even by the people who are closest to her. So unimportant, so small, yet they seem to reveal everything about her: her insecurities, her fears, and her joys. She wears black because she’s afraid to be seen however lately she’s added a few pieces of color to her closet. I call that progress. She smiles constantly because she doesn’t want people to ask questions about what’s behind the mask and she laughs only because she has a poor sense of humor. Her hair is her anxiety and maybe, just maybe if she cuts just enough each time she’ll feel better in the end. These details are so major that they are in fact what make a person.

With my mind continuing to spiral I begin to ask myself, “Why does no one seem to care about these details let alone take time to notice the small beauties in the people and the life that surrounds us?” The universe is such a vast place filled with billions of stars, planets, galaxies, and forms of matter and energy yet to even be discovered. We seem to notice the monumental things around us, the things that make history, the stories that make headlines, but what about those small details that went unnoticed that brought these stories to light? How important are those?

I continue my walk with both headphones in, through the bustling parking lot filled with angsty teenagers walking around, getting in cars of all different types. Some rustic looking and some brand new; some with dents and some with scratches; some filled with groups of friends and some filled with high school lovers. However, one car in particular that I pass everyday catches my eye without fail. A 1970’s white ford who probably could use a new paint job, but nonetheless still a beautiful rustic car. Where a junior, but probably a senior with a short buzz cut sits every day waiting for the after-school traffic to die down before attempting to leave the busy school. I see him around the school, but not very often. I did hand him and the teacher whose classroom he was sitting in a Valentine’s Day goodie bag that Z-club made to hand out. He gave me a surprised look as he was sitting in the corner, hoping to go unnoticed. I noticed. I handed him the goodie bag and said, “Happy Valentine’s day from Z-Club!” with a smile and walked out with my friend. Since then when I do see him we exchange blank glances, but I’ve come to notice that seems to be his forte; never an expression on his face really. A bland circle character if you will. Troubled but tries to hide it with that blank face. I wonder if anyone asks. Maybe that’s why we exchange glances every now and then, or maybe it’s nothing.

As I exit the parking lot I make my way past the gym. Never the same recurring faces; almost always different. This makes it hard

to notice much as it's just kids coming and going. Nonetheless, I continue my way down the sidewalk making my final stop around 3:45 at the corner of West Vine St. and South Villa St. where here I wait for my ride. I look to my left and there she is again. The girl with the short red hair, purple glasses and a flower Jansport backpack sitting under the awning of the Interscholastic Federations building. She sits here and waits for her ride every day. Sometimes she does homework and sometimes I see her reading. She puts her jacket over her light wash jeans and just sits and waits. Most of the time, we wait here on this corner together about 50 feet apart I leave before her around 4:10 p.m. However, the few times her ride comes early she grins, jumps and hops into the front seat of a silver lifted 2003 GMC Yukon and the backseat is sometimes occupied with another, much younger child. This rarely happens. For the long 20 minutes we sit outside waiting for our rides to show up we exchange many glances with each other. All of them blank, short and quick. When my ride shows up I give her one more glance, her nose deep in whatever book she's reading or homework she's working on this time and I hop in the front seat of my mom's brown 2009 Buick.

I go home and think about this girl. I'm not in love with her by any means this isn't one of those kinds of stories. Instead, I try and piece together what I learn about her each day when I see her waiting. I know it seems silly, why not just talk to her? Learn about her life that way right? I like to appreciate life from a distance, I like to analyze and write the story about the people I pass by every day. The ones that try to go unnoticed have the best stories if you just simply notice them. There's something about the presence in strangers that is oddly comforting and warm. Although I've never spoken to her I already know so much. Red, isn't her natural color. In fact, her natural color is more of a dark brown, like the color of milk chocolate. She only needs her glasses to see up close such as when she's reading her books or doing her homework. Sometimes I even see her with a camera, so she must be into photography. I'd say she's apart of yearbook but that's more of a social group and she seems to be a bit more reserved so I'd say she's in journalism. Her face is expressionless. She tries not to show much but it's easy to tell she's genuinely hurting inside, maybe lost. Perhaps that child in the backseat of that silver lifted 2003 GMC Yukon is her younger sibling. Younger siblings are great, but being the oldest is always hard. Maybe that's where her pain comes from. It's hard to tell exactly why people you've never even spoken to are hurting and you can only make assumptions. I just wonder if anyone asks.

I remember growing up me and my mom bonded over watching our favorite crime shows. Our favorite was always Monk. He was intuitive, picky and had his own issues but was the best detective in

San Francisco. He noticed everything. The smallest of details is what helped him catch the killers and robbers. He would go over every piece of the crime scene even the parts the actual detective's thoughts weren't important. Monk had his own way of observing things, he never touched anything, not even with gloves. Rarely he would move something with his tweezers he kept on the inside pocket of his suit. Nonetheless, Monk kept his distance but still did the best work any police department had ever seen.

Maybe it's the small details like watching this show that makes me who I am. The far observer with both headphones in who doesn't talk to the people she observes but somehow intuitively knows. The universe is so complex it's never something we can understand entirely but when I walk around with my headphones in it all makes sense. Her signs, the small details she sends out to all of us, those "coincidences," those are what makes the story, the headlines, history. When lightning strikes look up; when raindrops are falling look around; when the rainbow comes after the storm thank the universe for sending you that sign.

Home

BRIANNA BEASLEY

Mission Oak High School

Fresno Poets' Association Award

I am from coffee cups
From Clorox and Ajax.
I am from the house with the orange door
Eye catching and bright
It looked like a pumpkin covering the doorway.
I am from the small palm trees in the backyard,
The flowers that only came out when the sun did,
Encouraging me to shine too.
I'm from the tamales and crooked teeth
From Nadia and Steve
And Karen.
I'm from sarcasm and intelligence
And procrastination too
From practice how you play and thank your coaches after every game.
I'm from Philippians 4:13
Church every Sunday and bible study every week
I'm from the little agriculture town
Soup and sandwiches
From the cane my abuela leans on to stay steady,
The oxygen tank my grandpa carries to keep breathing.
In the garage are tubs,

Overflowing with memories and love,
Making me smile and remember who came before me.
I am from these people,
Loud and loving,
Lighting up the world just as they did before me.
They are my home.
In their arms, I am safe,
Cared for and never alone.
Home is not a place.
It's wherever they are.

Heat

CRYSTAL REGALADO

King City High School

The Normal School Award

Some five-year-olds get the urge to feel the heat from the beaming sun. However, this one five-year-old learned heat's bite through the belt.

As she grew older, she decided to inhale a special type of heat that made her travel to a breath-taking place where there are no worries just a place to escape reality for a bit.

Her husband kept advising her to quite inhaling the magical heat because it would just suffocate her lungs.

Within a few weeks, she felt something was wrong in her stomach. She thought she was going insane when she felt something inside that was pushing to get out of her.

She went to the doctor to see what wouldn't let her breathe at night. She couldn't deal with the pressure.

The results are about to be revealed. Sweat dripped from her forehead. Good and bad news. She's pregnant.

However, she had advanced lung cancer. The sweet bundle of joy would never be able to see the wonders of earth.

Now she's six feet in the moist ground, where the heat will never again warm her skin once she's under the blanket of moist dirt.

El Campesino, a True Warrior

JULIA CAMPIZ

Riverdale High School

Levine Prize Award

The hands of a worker,
Battered and Beat.
Touched by the sun and marked from the heat.

The face of a worker,
A map of rivers upon rivers on the earth that is their skin,
Molded into a face of a true warrior.

The eyes of the worker.
A beauty in themselves.
Filled with a deep tiredness
And a small spark of hope, happiness.
Hope for the future,
The future of their children
The future that holds a better life.

The dreams of a worker,
A soft whisper among the hot breeze.
A silent prayer for anyone who dares to listen.

The life of a worker, tough and soul eating.
Draining youth from the workers.
And replacing youth with great wisdom.

The worker.
Persistent, wise, caring, resilient.
A role model.
Clad in worn, weather-beaten armor.
Wielding their weapons crusted with dry mud.
Sludging through the battlefield, littered with crops.

Wars raging all around, workers fighting their own.
A war in which they dare not speak.
For fear of losing everything.

A war in which they know...
Holding your ground is all that can be done
For fighting back will cause more harm.

The cries of the warrior are only heard at night.
They're hard to hear but easy to see.
We are not blind . . .

We strive to be great,
To repay all of which we are given.

Let these warriors be proud.
Let their pride shine,
Because the pride they instill
Upon us was their whole life.

Song of Death

TAYLOR YANG

Edison High School

Hmong American Writers' Circle Award

My heart beats in my chest,
my feet beat the ground,
they carry me away,
away from the song of death.

The melody of mourning mothers,
the pleas of help and cries of pain.
the explosions of bombs,
the ringing of guns,
this song fills my ears as I leave not only my country,
but my home.

The bodies of loved ones now cover the ground,
As we run and run,
many come tumbling down,
dropping faster than the rain on a gray stormy day.

The once beautiful land has now become an ocean of red,
stained with the blood of my people.
The smell of fresh grass is here no more,
for the smell of iron takes over my senses.

As I run for my life,
I can't help but let a drop of fear enter my body,
and like the ripples in water it spreads and expands.
Boiling inside me,
urging me to run faster,
to escape the song of death.

Urban Paradise

MICAELA ZUNIGA

Tulare Western High School

FACET Award

It was located in downtown, yet it had the potential to take you to the rural fields of Europe. It stood strong with the wood and brick as a consequence it held the vintage look that could make you forget your stresses and the city noises. Oh tell me your life story, tell me that which you have endured and tolerated. There the busy noises of the city such as the car horns, chatter that the business associates consider detrimental to their sales, and the office gossip means nothing. It was filled with an essence that one can only imagine of; that one only thought was achievable in their sleep. One could have lived there and not know where they truly lived. It took one away to where one had yearned to travel to. It did not matter which era one grew up in. One could not deny the power of vines which crawled up and surrounded the exterior walls. One could have only wished the furniture could talk and share its stories in the motherland. Its history, its ambiance is detected, what it has endured. The arch in the garden entrance must have stood through the weddings of the century. May it wed I and my beloved one, on the most important day of my life. Even if it may have rained and the wooden benches may be damp and the vines may let go of the droplets one by one as if their farewell was caused to be painfully unbearable by a deeply rooted relationship, the milieu would remain still. The visitors would finely dine enjoying the faint aroma the morning glories provided as they sipped their açai smoothies. They would enjoy the glittery bright sunshine peering through the incomplete ceiling that completes the surroundings that offer the relaxing pleasure, that before would inadequately be attempted to be given by a foot bath. It took one away to their deepest dreams and into the sparkly paradise, which no one would have guessed that it was in the center of the miserable nightmare of hell. It made anyone's taste buds have a party that one wished could last forever, well after the crepes were off their plate.

It was the kind of place that made its guests forget that they were breathing the polluted air containing the vehicle's smog instead of the pure air that vineyards provide. It was the place that made you hear the canaries singing even when they resided miles away. It took its recipients' minds far away from their worries that oceans might as well have been between them. It was where relatives and friends were taken to socialize. It was the place that gave relief and asked for nothing in returned, it was the place that deserved to be called home.

I am standing

ANDREW CASTILLO

Endeavor/Voyager Secondary School

FACET Award

I am standing in the middle of the street, underneath the street light. Blood running down my nose. My hands are shaking. My stomach hurting. The street is crowded full of old and young. My mother is crying and kneeling on the sidewalk. How could I have done this? I could not bear to look at my sister. I know that things will never be the same again.

I wish I could go back to the old days when my sister was having fun and laughing. My mom can't stand me. She won't even look at me. She is disappointed to have a son that is on the news- Carlos Hernandez, the most dangerous kid from the neighborhood.

The last time I talked to my mom, she just looked at me. Not a word. Her eyes just beaming on me. "Son," she asked, "are you hanging around gang members?" "No," I said. Even though I lied, she crossed her arms and sighed. "Ok pues," she said. My mom looked disappointed. I could not blame her. I am not an easy person and on the streets, no one will look at me. I wasn't scared of any one.

I have been hit by people whom you would not like to meet. I don't run from anyone. One day, it all changed. But on this night, I ran. I ran like a dog chases a cat. Back in the days, my sister and I would separate our dog, Cisco, who would chase anything, although Alissa would never yell at our dog like I would. She was always a good kid. I miss her so much. What I ran from wasn't no kid. It wasn't no gang; it wasn't the police. It was much bigger than that. I was running from the truth.

As I was running, the words of my English teacher ran through my head. "Carlos, you have so much potential. Why are you throwing your life away? Don't be another number. You can talk to me. The Lord loves you." The words bothered me when she said them.

Now I have to make a choice. I saw the black Honda on the move. Mikey and Nico said that they know who did it. This is what it all

came down do. What would I do?

My life changed on June 10, 2016. I remember exactly what happened because I still dream about it. I wake up sweating and yelling in the night. I can never forgive myself. My friends and I were hanging out in front of the house. We were laughing about who would get the cute girl in school.

The Central Valley weather was perfect. No need for sweaters in the summer. We had loud music coming from the speakers and Nico was singing lyrics from the song.

We were just hanging out—talking about sports and the latest songs. Mikey looked at me and Nico, “Guys, I’ve got to get myself a girl. I spend too much time with you guys.”

“Man,” I teased, “have you looked in the mirror?” We laughed because we were so close. Nico cracked up and sounded like a hyena. He was always laughing. We were in trouble all of the time, but we never talked about it.

Last summer was the worst summer of my life. I regret the things that I did, but it was family. “Carlos,” said Alissa, while standing in front of the house. “Mom said to come inside.” I turned around to see a small figure in front of the door. It was Alissa, my 10-year-old sister. “What does she want?” Nico asked, shaking his head. Nico did not like little kids. “I never saw someone love like that little sister of yours.”

“That’s true. Alyssa tries to be like me. She always makes sure that I am ok.” No matter where I was or what I was doing, she was looking for me. It frustrated me, sometimes. I tried to push her away. I’m her big brother and her father figure. I tried to be the best while I was in front of her, so you will not see the bad things that I do. I thought that I could change before it was too late. I was wrong.

“Tell your brother to come inside,” my mom said. Most of the time, I would tell my sister to go back inside the house. I lied and told her that I would come in a bit. Anything that would give me more time with my friends.

“Alyssa, “ I said, popping my head in front of the black Tahoe that was sitting in front of my house. “Go back inside.” Alyssa came towards me. “What did I tell you?” I growled.

“Sorry. Sorry, Carlos,” she stammered. “I just wanted...”

“You just what?” I prodded. “Just go inside.” I could see the hurt in her eyes. She looked at me.

“I just wanted to say ‘good night.’ I love you.”

Mikey and Nico shook their heads. I glanced away, embarrassed. “Go inside, Alissa. Now!” I ordered. My sister stared at me for a second, but I could see the pain and disappointment in her eyes. All she wanted was my love and there I was, pushing her away.

“Ok, Carlos,” she said, “I’ll leave the door open.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said with a nod. I felt guilty.

I couldn't stay mad at Alyssa for long. No matter how I treated her, she always forgave me. I was her super hero. Oh, if only I could have been her super hero. I watched her walk away and then I turned around. I heard Alyssa shouting, “Carlos!” I turned to see her running towards me.

A black Honda coming down the street, holding something black out of the window. “Go back inside!” I yelled.

My little sister was trying to protect me. The car came closer and I shouted for her to get out of the way. She did not run for cover. She could have hid behind the car or ran back inside the house. Instead, Alyssa ran right towards me. Her beautiful brown eyes were wide open and I could see the fear.

Mikey and Nico ran behind the black Tahoe. I heard them whispering and talking. “Get down, Carlos.” Shots rang out. Pop! Pop! Pop! They sounded like fireworks. Like fire, it burned my eyes. Alyssa finally reached me and leapt into my arms. As the black Honda came, I could not think. I just grabbed her and turned so that I was her shield.

More shots rang out. Bullets raced past my head. Bullets everywhere. Glass breaking. Then the bullets stopped. Looking up, I saw the black Honda turn down another street.

“They're gone, Carlos,” Nico said as he came from behind the black Tahoe. My heart was jumping. I am not scared of gunshots. I have been shot before, but I have never been shot at in front of my house. I was shaking and breathing hard. “Alyssa, get up. It's ok,” I said. My sister did not get up.

She looked more beautiful than ever before. She looked as if she were in a peaceful sleep. “Alyssa?” Mikey and Nico came close to us and noticed the body on the floor. “C'mon, wake up, Alyssa.” I picked her up and held her in my arms. I saw blood running down the back of her head.

“Carlos, she's been shot,” Mikey cried. Mikey sounded scared. My eyes started tearing up. Everything started to fade away. My sister's life was gone. This can't be true. This is just a dream. Wake up! Wake up!

“Ali, wake up! I cried, running my fingers through her hair. I remembered when I used to brush her hair when she was a baby. “Please wake up!”

Neighbors came outside of their houses and gathered around us. I did not pay attention. This can't be true. I gathered her close and kissed her cheek. One tear fell down my face and onto hers. Blood and tears mingled together.

There was blood on my hands and fingers. “Wake up, Alyssa! Please!” I heard my mother scream. “No, not my baby! Call an

ambulance! I could not move. I just sat there, holding my sister.

Nico came to me and said, "I know who did it. I know where they are at." I did not move. I heard the ambulance siren scream down the street. I could not let go of Alyssa. This was my little sister. In my heart, I knew that the paramedics could not save her. I knew she was gone.

Things will never be the same. Whoever killed my sister killed a part of me too. It's time for revenge. I did not go to the hospital. I could not escape the memory of my mother crying, "It's your fault! Get out!"

I washed my hands and watched the blood of my sister running down the drain. I could not stand it anymore. I ran out of the door. I ran and ran. I ran until I could not run anymore. Standing in the middle of the street, blood ran down my nose. My hands shook and my stomach ached. I thought that I was going to throw up.

My mom's words continued to echo through my head. It's my fault! It's my fault! It's my fault! No revenge, but I want to. What good is another death if I cannot bring my sister back?

Mikey and Nico pulled up in the black Tahoe. Mikey said, "Get in. Let's go get them back," As I saw the black Honda from a distance, I saw a couple of kids and a young boy. Flashback of my sister lying in my arms. I could not do it. "Stop the car and let me out." As I walked down the streets, I saw the black Tahoe leave.

I started running again. I am not running from anyone. I am running from the old me. I am not going to throw my life away. The Lord forgives. Nothing can bring my sister back. I will keep my promise, Alyssa. No more trouble.

Heading home, with blood all over my clothes, I opened up the door. My mother was waiting for me. She came and held me. I clung to her, sobbing. There was no need for words.

The Legend of the Werewolf and the Wendigo

DEVIN OSBORNE

Mission Oak High School

MFA Award

A full moon shined brightly over the top of the dark mountains as a howl echoed through the trees. My chest rose and fell rapidly, the cool night air entering and exiting my lungs with each breath. Tall trees, and green shrubs surrounded me from all sides, the mist of my breath coming and going rhythmically. I'd never been in this forest before, it was strange, unrecognizable. I had been on many hunting trips with my grandfather and the other men of my village countless times, but not once do I remember this forest. A howl broke me away from my thoughts. I felt my hand run down to my belt where my oak handle knife, my grandfather had crafted for me normally rested, but it wasn't there, neither was the belt. I looked down at my legs, my pants were torn and tattered, my moccasins were ripped from the sides, as if they busted open. Fear began to creep into my chest, as another howl echoed through the still air, this time it was far closer than the others. My eyes skimmed the tree line, the shrubs, the thorned needled bushes of roses, yet to bloom, but I seen nothing. A muffled grunt danced through the trees to my ears. My breathing quickened, my chest rising faster and faster and faster, waiting for any moment, whatever was watching me would leap from the bushes and I'd never be seen again. As my eyes darted uncontrollably from bush to bush, I remembered stories grandfather had told me. Stories of great hunters, cherokee warriors, who had encountered a great grizzly in the forest one day. He told how the men had fought bravely, and how many narrowly escaped, and how some had not. I remembered his lessons as if he were standing next to me in this moment. I sniffed the air, searching for the pungent smell of wet fur, but rather than that scent, another met my nostrils, a familiar one; the sweet metallic smell of blood. Whatever was watching me,

whatever was breathing behind the bushes, whatever it was, it had just killed something.

The smell of rotten flesh and the metallic sting of blood became stronger. I felt nausea begin to creep into my stomach. Despite the frigid winter around me, I shivered not in the slightest. My eyes darted once more, back and forth, from tree to tree until...I froze, not able to move a muscle, not a bone, I didn't even breathe, the bushes had eyes, and they were staring directly into mine, I was sure I was looking into the face of death himself.

Whatever it was, it was no bear. The eyes were milky white, bulging from its grey skinned face. Its eyes were not of an animal, but of a man, a monster with the eyes of a man. I remained still, not moving my eyes from the bush, suddenly it leapt from its hiding place.

I didn't realize that I screamed but grandfather and the other elders of our village came running, breathless into my hut.

"What ails you Altair?" Grandfather asked placing his hand upon my shoulder.

I was covered in sweat from my head to feet, yet my forehead was cold as Ice, I had no fever.

"I had a dream grandfather, a terrible dream," I began.

"What was it grandson?" he asked as the other elders sat next to him.

"I had a dream of monster, a demon grandfather, I was in the forest and..."

"Slow down grandson," he said as he placed his hand upon my shoulder.

"I was in a forest, I'd never seen it before, I was alone, my clothes were ripped, I looked for anything but I couldn't find anything, I kept hearing the howls of brother of wolf but never did he appear, instead it was that monster, I thought it was a bear at first." I paused clearing the lump from my throat. "Then I looked into its eyes, they weren't the eyes of a bear grandfather, they were the eyes of something dark."

My grandfather looked very worried, "What did this evil spirit look like?"

I closed my eyes remembering exactly what it had looked like.

"It had gray skin and it's eyes were that of a man, but at the same time not."

"How so?" Grandfather asked looking deeply into my eyes.

I stuttered, my mouth had suddenly went dry, it felt like cactus needles stung the roof of my mouth and throat, a lump the size of an apple formed in my throat, I tried to swallow but it wouldn't go down. I opened my mouth but no words left my mouth.

"What is it?" he persisted.

"It's eyes were...were... white, it was like looking in the eyes of

death," I said finally squeezing the words out.

Silence fell over the entire room, my grandfather's face had turned to stone, expressionless.

I reached out to touch my grandfather's hand, but he, whether it be unintentionally or on purpose, drew back.

"There is a dark magic at work here, inside you, it's dangerous" he said.

I looked at him, a mix of fear, and surprise.

"That creature that you seen is a demon, it is a Wendigo," he said as he stood from my bedside.

I stood with him, reaching out for him, but again he retreated from my grasp.

I stood thinking about what grandfather had said, I'm dangerous.

I dressed quickly and walked out of the hut, my belongings rolled in the buffalo hyde of my previous hunt, a rope tied the bag to my back as I looked back at the village that I once called home, and the people I once called family. It was September of 1702.

Two days had passed since I left my village, the frigid winter was covering the entire area. I covered myself with the buffalo pelts for warmth, as I walked through the snow. Everything in the forest I was passing through had a light coat of the white powder, the sun was completely gone, the sky was a pale gray.

After walking for about a mile, I stopped and started to set up my Teepee, gathering wood from bushes and fallen trees, creating a fire within the Teepee. I sat for a moment letting my bones and muscles thaw in the soothing warmth of the fire, then I began thinking about the dream again, the creatures eyes, everytime I close mine, they were there, piercing deep into my soul, ripping at my insides, hissing out my name. As my eyes drifted closed I was back in that forest, back in front of that bush, back looking into those eyes, and just when the creature pounced from the bushes, I awoke, leaping back, kicking snow up, extinguishing my fire with a sizzle. My breathing was rapid and just as before I was sweating, cold perspiration dripped from my forehead down the bridge of my nose until it dripped from the end.

Light seeped in from the hydres covering the teepee, it was day time. I stood, and walked in a crouch to the flap of the teepee, and opened it. The sun was beating down through gray clouds, snow still covered the ground but was beginning to melt, a white hare upon seeing me leapt to cover behind a group of bushes. I darted into my teepee, and reached into my coat, searching for my Oak handle knife that my grandfather had gifted me with, but I found nothing.

Later that night, I sat close to the fire once more, eating pieces of

salted and dried meats, pieces of stale bread. A pain began pounding at my temples. I reached into my coat once again, grabbing a thick bundle of sage and sweetgrass, but it fell from my grasp, my hands were numb, as if not in my control, the world began fading away, and I felt my legs crumble beneath me. Pain ripped at my chest, as if something was inside me, trying to fight its way to the surface, I screamed, my head felt as if it was ripping open, I grasped it with my hands, trying to hold it together, my heart was beating so fast I was immeasurable, the world faded in and out of focus, in and out of reality, until finally my eyes closed, outside the top of the teepee, a full moon rose above the trees.

I gasped air filling my lungs at a rapid rate, fresh air, outside air. I looked around me in a fray, a woman stood over me, cocoa skinned and green eyes, looked down at me, opposite of her on the other side of me was a man, he was light skinned, hazel eyes, with a scuffle. I began panicking, retreating back, my feet sliding in the soupy snow, my back was bare and caked with blood and mud.

"It's okay, It's okay, we're here to help you, my name is Aveline, and this is Ezra" the woman said placing her hands on my shoulders.

Her words entered one ear and out the other, "How did I get here, where is my shirt?" I said through deep breaths, pausing to look down at my pants, which were ripped practically to shreds, my feet were bare as well. "What, what happened?" I asked confused.

They looked at each other, a look of confusion and knowingness. A knowingness of something I didn't.

"You transformed," she said looking at me.

"Into what?" I asked confused and afraid.

"A wolf," they both said as if rehearsed.

We walked together, a blanket covered my shoulders as I shivered from the chilly temperature. I couldn't comprehend what they had told me, that's impossible I thought. But then again, what could really explain what had happened to me?

We walked for hours. As we walked, the unmistakable smell of blood and rotting flesh filled the air, the smell of smoke. We all lifted our heads looking from tree to tree, until we seen a village spread on a flat plain of Earth, past a break in the forest.

It was horrible. Bodies were strewn across the snow; Men, Women, Children. Their blood stained the snow around them, turning it a eerie red. Some had their internads exposed, their stomachs ripped open,

sometimes their eyes were still open as we passed by. My thoughts flashed back to the eyes in the bushes, the gray, lifeless eyes. I felt a horrifying fear spread over me, like someone had poured cold water inside me. I looked over at Aveline, tears streamed down her cheeks, but she wasn't weeping, she had the most solemn look on her face. Ezra, who was walking a few steps behind us, had his hands folded behind his head, and his elbows pointed to the sky.

"What did this?" I asked horrified.

Aveline glanced back at me, "A monster," she replied. "The reason we were created."

"A Wendigo," Ezra added from behind me, "A creature with the horns of an elk, but the eyes of death."

My stomach sank as I looked at them, they must have noticed.

"What?" Ezra asked.

"I've seen one, well in a dream, it was horrible," I said as the eyes once again flashed in my mind.

"That wasn't a dream," Aveline said after a moment.

"What?"

"It was a transformation memory," she said looking back at me. "When we transform, we rarely remember what happens while we are in that state but sometimes we remember certain things," she added looking away from me once more.

I looked down at my bare feet, "Not a dream, a memory," I thought.

"What do we do now?" I asked.

"We bury the bodies and then we find the Wendigo," Aveline replied.

We walked for days following the tracks of the Wendigo, unknowing that we weren't the only ones doing so. The sun was sinking in the sky as we set up camp in a small clearing within the forest.

"So where are you from?" Aveline asked, as she sat on a rotting tree trunk, around the fire.

"A village about 3 days south of here," I replied.

"Did they know?" She asked looking at me curiously.

"I don't know," I replied with uncertainty.

"I left the village after I had that dream, my grandfather told me that I was dangerous, that there was dark magic within me," I said looking down at the dirt.

"Yeah, my family threw me away like trash when they found out, never could stay in one place, was alone until I found Ezra" she said over the crackling of the fire.

I remained silent.

“It doesn’t have to be a curse, that’s not what it was meant to be,” she said as I looked up at her.

I began to open my mouth to say something but I said nothing as my eyes drifted back to the floor in thought.

“Only we determine whether we are good, or evil,” she said standing from the log.

The fire crackled as we all bedded down, my buffalo hydes had been lost during my last transformation so we slept out in the open.

Just as I began to drift off to sleep, I heard steps in the distance, leaves crunching underfoot. I lifted my head, looking, fearing seeing those gray eyes once more.

The steps were in the distance, and just when I heard them, I caught the pain in my head and chest once more, my eyes drifted towards the sky as my head jerked back slamming against the hard dirt below, a full moon shined just over the tree line, I forced my head to the side, Aveline was turning as well, so was Ezra.

Just as we finished transforming, a group of men burst from the treeline, hooting and yelling, carrying muskets.

They popped off shots that echoed through the air as we ran, on all fours through the treeline. Just as we were they were out of sight, the shots began more rapid, and screams joined them.

We turned just as the four Wendigo burst through the trees, one latched on to Ezra’s throat the other charged at me and Aveline.

I dodged to the side, as it whooshed by, its horns nearly cutting me. I looked over to see, a tall Wendigo standing over a bleeding Ezra. I quickly ran over and leaped through the air, smacking the Wendigo in the side, knocking it to the floor. I grabbed Ezra by the shoulder and pulled him to his feet. We began to run through the forest, past trees and bushes, the Wendigos right behind. We stopped running and turned around, this move caught the Wendigos by surprise as they ran right into us. They swung their long claws, looking to penetrate our flesh, to rip off the bone, but we dodged, and clawed and scratched back. Aveline fought one, causing blood to ooze from its side. Just as I looked back, the Wendigo swung its claws, stabbing into my chest, I grunted loudly. Just as it came in with the other hand, I swung my hand, claws barred, the strike caught the creature just below its chin, slitting its throat wide open, black bile sprayed through the air, covering my fur. The creature gurgled, trying to breathe but its throat was filling with blood, and after a few moments, it collapsed to the floor dead. I looked over to Aveline who had also dispatched of her enemy, Ezra and the Wendigo he was fighting both lay motionless

on the floor. We ran over to him, blood was filling his mouth, and he reached out toward us. Aveline began weeping and held him close to her.

He reached his arm out towards me and with his dying breath said;

“Your grandfather was wrong.”

After we buried his body, we ran deep into the woods, looking to leave this place behind.

Two years later.

The sun shined brightly against the boat, reflecting off the water. I stood on the deck, looking out over the beautiful blue water, Aveline approached my side, and I turned looking into her eyes and kissed her. I realized something after Ezra’s death, we weren’t created to be evil, we were created to stop it, people misunderstood us as to be being evil, often hunting us, believing that we are the evil in the world but we aren’t. Since we left America to Europe, stories drifted with us. Stories of men who turned into monsters when a full moon graced the sky. Stories of men who turned into wolves. Men and women alike feared these creatures, they called them many things; monsters, demons, the devil, but the most common is Werewolves.

Ambivalent

MARTIN DELGADO

King City High School

San Joaquin Literary Association Award

Blake was among the crowd of proud children talking and boasting to the others of how one's heritage was better than another's and how their heritage project would be the best. Some were swooning about the romanticized history as other's discussed the cultures of other children. Many were even saying how accomplished or heroic their siblings were. Yet he had felt isolated from these conversations, he had nothing to contribute. He had never asked his parents where he had come from or had any siblings to talk about. This question was burned into the back of his mind, the constant reminder that he was nothing special, yet wasn't different. Not like the other children, gleefully aware of who and what they were. He couldn't take the excessive banter of his classmates trying to one up each other around him. It was suffocating. So much so that he had asked his history teacher, Mr. Aleberry, that he needed to exit the classroom. Mr. Aleberry looked sympathetic as he allowed the clearly distressed Blake to leave.

Blake took quick strides to get out of the class room, taking his backpack with him. Once outside, he began to gulp the cool air. Pleased with the silence, he took a heavy breath. He then began to take out a small, newly prescribed, orange pill bottle from his backpack and took shook it desperately. Only two small white pills fell out, but he took them eagerly, wanting to escape. Blake with his back against the ground appears like a minute detail, almost bending into the lockers.

The bell rang, and everyone started to pour out of their classrooms, filling the hallway, eager to leave the school and get back to their families. Even when surrounded by people, Blake still felt alone and empty.

When Blake got home for dinner, he had this urge to ask the question that was eating at him, but he had never wanted to upset his parents. He remembered the day that his parents had adopted him.

He was eight at the time and it was the most pivotal and life altering thing anyone can do for a child. He knew that they would give him their undying affection since the newly married couple, Mary and Abraham, had already set eyes on him. It was love at first sight. It was the last piece that would complete their fairytale; a scrawny, sad eyed boy with green eyes that lit up the first time they met. Even when Blake began to have this feeling of undying remorse and sadness overtake him, they were there to support him.

“Mom,” Blake said looking down at his food that he hadn’t touched yet, “I want to look at my adoption papers,” he said hesitantly.

“Why Blake? Is there something wrong, honey?” Mary asked.

His father, Abraham, asked across the table, “Are you okay there, Bud?” with a worried expression sprawled across his face.

“No- well yes, it’s just that I have this heritage project at school, and I know that there is some information about my family history there” he said moving his fork around his plate, wanting to divert his attention away from the shocked and sadden faces of his parents, “I just wanted to... read it,” he clutched one of his hands into a fist underneath the table, until his hand turned white, and his fingernail dug into his skin, causing slim lunar shaped ribbons of blood to emerge.

When Blake looked up expecting to see hurt and heartbroken expressions, he saw his parents usual loving and kind faces.

Abraham said shakily, “Of course, Bud, I mean we knew that you’d ask sooner or later, fifteen-year old’s always have this vendetta to own their identity to the fullest and, we were expecting this.”

“I’ll go get them,” she said as she stood up from her seat next to his father.

Mary and Abraham shared a look of concern before she quickly went to their bedroom closet.

Blake took note of this and listened closely to his mother. He heard the rustling of clothes, as well as the shuffling of papers in the next room.

His mother came back with a flustered look and gingerly handed him the aged, mustard yellow envelope containing his past, his identity. He grasped it cautiously, as if he might rip it. His hands trembled, the rest of the room began to disappear as he focused solely on its contents that he had slid across the wooden table, and panned his eyes eagerly across its text, searching for important information. His eyes stopped dead in their tracks. His body froze and his jaw tightened. He saw one word that made his whole mind go blank:

Sibling

He had a sibling, someone that shared Blake’s green eyes, his messy raven colored hair. Someone who shared the same parents as him.

He could hear his mother and father concerningly asking questions, but he couldn't pinpoint what the familiar but disembodied voices were saying, the only thing he could hear was the repeating words in his head,

I have a sibling.

He looked up at his parents, his eyes had begun to profusely tear up, blurring his vision in rage. He could feel the emptiness in him fill up with an intense heat rapidly. They knew he had a sibling, someone like him, but kept them a secret. Did they not want him to contact his sister or brother? Did they just not care that they deliberately separated a family?

Blake asked with a shaky voice, "Why! Why didn't you tell me?" he tightened his grip on the paper.

Mary said quietly, "You and your brother were separated early on, you were two when you went to an orphanage in Boston. Your brother was sent to another one, two towns away and you grew up without him. We had considered adopting him, but when we questioned the orphanage about, we found out that..." Blake had never seen his mother so distraught, she just stood there. Staring at the ground.

His father continued, "He had already been adopted by another family and we just couldn't. It wasn't ethical of us to barge into his life after he had found happiness with another family. We couldn't come out of the blue and destroy everything that they had worked for."

"What... what's his name..." He asked, he was trying to restrain himself from screaming.

His dad answered hesitantly, "His name is Leto Jarvis. He is six years older than you" there was a long pause "and he has two other, also adopted, siblings. They live three towns over."

Three towns away, that was an hour drive away from his only sibling. He was so close this entire time. Blake just sat there, staring. He didn't know whether to feel joyed, or angry. All he knew was that he was somewhere out there, and that his parents had lied.

Blake bolted up from his seat, with labored breathing, and ran upstairs to his room. He went to his backpack and unzipped it eagerly as he pulled out his little bottle of pills. He opened it, hot tears running down his cheeks, only to find its contents empty. He threw it across the room in frustration as he sunk onto the floor and buried his face into his knees sobbing as if someone had just taken away his only chance of happiness. He felt nothing but loneliness, he had never felt anything this strongly. It felt as though his heart was about to give in, and his brain was about to explode. He sat in the dark corner of his room, alone.

His parents knocked on his door. Blake just heard the frantic thuds of the door across the dark room. "Blake! We are so sorry, we

should have told you, it was wrong of us! Please just... open the door!" his father pleaded.

He finally gave in and let his parents into his room and was immediately smothered by hugs from the both of them, but he pushed himself away from their affectionate embrace.

"Your mother went back to get you this." His father had handed him a folded and weathered slip of paper, with the phone number and address of Leto. "We called his parents a few years back, and he had moved out. They gave us his information in case you were ever interested in contacting him."

Blake had begun to calm down but would occasionally whimper and hiccup. The darkness seemed to disappear, all he could feel was a sudden warmth emanating through his body. He threw his arms around his parents, burying his face into them.

They left him alone in his room to have some time to think. Blake rushed to his desk and started writing furiously into his notebook possible ways of greeting his brother and what to ask. The obvious questions first ran through his head and then were solidified onto the paper in ink. But there was a question that had come across his thoughts, if Leto was eight when they were separated, why didn't he look for Blake?

Suddenly he repeated in his head, he knew he had a brother, did he leave me... on purpose? He couldn't shake this question out of his head. He left me on purpose and never looked for me? It stung and lingered in the back of his mind like a poison, slowly corroding the rest of his mind. Blake looked at his phone sprawled across his desk, shining with the light of his lamp, with a shaky hand he dialed in his brother's phone number. It rang for what seemed like an eternity, his own limbo. He heard on the other line deep a voiced man.

"Hello?" a man said.

Blake froze, he didn't know what to ask first.

"Um, hello?"

Blake said quickly, "Um yes, I'm so s-sorry to bother you," he started but then hung up quickly, tearing up, his heart beating rapidly. He couldn't do it, he couldn't confront him. But he knew he had to.

He dialed up the phone number once again, after what seemed like days, a confused voice answered, a younger boys voice, "Who is this?"

It all came to Blake at once, almost giving him whiplash, of course Leto would forget about him, he had a new family. He forgot all about him. He was nothing more than a stranger to his own brother. His brother had pursued a new life and forgot about everything else, even his own flesh and blood.

He hung up and set his phone on his desk when he took note of a picture frame on his desk. His first birthday after getting adopted

by his parents. They had invited all of his extended family members, his cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents. Everyone's first impression of Blake was that of welcoming a newborn into the world. Full of joy and pride of calling him a cousin, a nephew, or a grandson, but most importantly, a son. This was his family. They didn't play a random game of chance and got anyone they chose him. They chose to love and keep Blake forever. They don't just consider Blake family, he was family, by blood or not, they loved him the same as everyone else.

Blake slowly rose from his chair, leaving a slip of paper with a phone number on the desolate desk, and took a treasure more valuable than anything else he had in this world in his left hand, holding it gingerly. He cracked open his door, letting a sliver of the warm light of the living room his parents were waiting in enter his room. He then opened the door all the way and let the living room light flood the inside of his bedroom to see his parents on the living room couch, waiting grimly together. Blake had never wanted to upset his parents, but he was doing more harm to them than they could have ever done to him, he had become the monster, he hurt the two most important people to him—over a stranger that had given him up. Blake then walked into the bright light. Maybe one day he'd try again, but for now, he knew he had everything he needed for his project; his heritage was right outside his door.

Gradual Breakage

HANNAH SWIECKI

Mariposa County High School

San Joaquin Literary Association Award

November.

You ask me for your shirts back. I peel them out of my drawer like petals off the face of a rose.

October.

On the night it ends, I am wholly and totally alone. My roommate is out with their partner, and so I lie across our beds and cry until I give myself a headache. You broke up with me over text, and I want to call you a coward for it.

There is no fanfare. No wedding song like we talked about. I decide right then that I'm going to college.

You don't love me anymore. I don't want to be friends, and I tell you that. You agree, which hurts more than if we'd fought.

I wonder how long I can carry on this lie that I am telling, and I think I'm doing well until a friend asks me how we're doing. The answer is, we aren't anymore.

I wonder if I walked to your house and begged, if you'd lock me out. But more, I wonder who you could've made me, and I find myself thinking back and back and back until I reach the beginning.

September.

My doctor takes me off my meds and puts me on new ones. I'm depressed, I tell her. She's in a relationship, my mother translates.

My mother doesn't know that I snuck across town to see you on Friday night, ditched the football game and the screaming stands for the whizz of trucks as I walked in a dress and heels from the fairgrounds to Rite Aid. My mother doesn't know that your back door, never locked, always cracked open so the dogs can get out, was closed. My mother doesn't know that your own mother was outside smoking, or that she looked me in the eyes and told me you weren't home, even as I heard your voice inside. You were singing along to some love song you once dedicated to me.

My mother asked me how we were doing. I smiled and said, fine.

Relationships can be stressful, my doctor agrees. I text you when it starts raining. I make that joke about the umbrella you once made to me. We'll meet in the middle, I say. You read my message, and do not reply.

August.

On the first day of my junior year, you enter my French classroom in a flurry of mesh and lipstick. You've brought me cupcakes and flowers. You kiss me in front of the class, and I can feel everyone staring. I don't care. Girls don't kiss girls where we come from, but we're going to change the world, you and I. Tucked into the flowers is a little note with a line from a song. You sang it to me once in art class.

I walk across town to your house and go through the door without knocking. You're waiting for me with open arms. I go home and text you. You joke about walking to me. It's raining, I say. You'll bring an umbrella for the both of us, you say, and we'll meet in the middle.

You reply in minutes because we're doing fine and because you love me. You probably always have. You probably always will.

July.

I'm at work. You're in North Carolina.

Your door is unlocked when I go up. I brought your mother some chocolate. I leave a balloon in your room for every week you are gone. When they deflate, I leave them limp across your floor.

You don't text except to send me pictures of yourself draped over other girls. You smile with your teeth.

I go to work every day. Children ask me if I'm in high school. I say yes. There's this light in your eyes there. I don't know what it is or where it came from, but it's so beautiful that it makes my chest ache. I'd do anything for you to keep it.

Children ask me if I have a boyfriend. I don't. I have a girlfriend in North Carolina who loves someone else more than she loves me.

I think about what would happen if we broke up. We'd stay friends, I think.

Children ask me how I'm doing. I smile and say, fine.

Maybe that light is fireflies. We don't have those in California.

June.

You're going on a trip next month. You say, I'll text you. You say, I'll miss you. I believe you on both counts.

I don't want to go to college, I've decided. I'm crying about it, because I'd been doing fine for so long and you just smile and you wrap me up in your arms and you say, I promise. "I promise I'll be the good-for-nothing your parents blame for you not going to college."

The night before you leave, I'm sneaking up to your house. I know the way by now. Your dogs don't bark at me when I get to the door because they know me. Your door is unlocked. Your kitchen smells like the lilacs on your windowsill.

The night before you leave, you tell me you love me for the first time. We say it back and forth until our throats are hoarse and we're both crying.

I'm not going to college and you're not going to Carolina. We're gonna stay right here forever, curled up in your bed.

May.

I'm not sure who asks who out. We've been flirting since January but only now has it started feeling serious. It's the Friday before the Butterfly Festival in town, and we go to lunch with all our shared friends. I make some joke about how I want to be your girlfriend. That can be arranged, you say. You take my hand in yours. We text each other into the early hours of the morning.

The next day we're all over each other. My first kiss, my second and third and I can't keep count, the same way I can't keep my hands to myself. I've never had a girlfriend, you know. Too many boyfriends, none of which I ever really wanted, but never a girlfriend. It feels so right when we hold hands. It feels like coming home at last.

You take me to your sister's wedding. We share a bed. The back door isn't locked—it never is, you tell me—but I feel so safe sleeping here. We fall asleep nose to nose, breathing the same air.

I go home with a couple of your shirts, and I put them in my pillowcase.

This World

SYDNEY RIVAS

Clovis High School

Chicanx Writers and Artists Association Award

This World

I've grown up, in this world.

Where rolling my r's make me an alien

Where my skin is too light to truly experience lo que es batallar

I've learned to accept its hate

That not all parents se aman each other

Not every six year old hides from the Cucuí

In this world, I've grown up

Looking at the stars, pleading for them to give me apollo

¿O ya me han dado los suyos?

The Twilight Zone: A Script

AARON MORALES

Porterville High School

Dramatic Arts Award

Narrator: There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the Twilight Zone.

Narrator: Driving at 60 miles per hour down this barren, desolate Nevada landscape; void of life and all that resembles it, is Henry Cent. Tall, charismatic, and with an endearing smile, Cent is often perceived as an honest man with integrity, however, he is far from it. Cent is liar-- the worst of his kind, whose deceptions have destroyed lives, and caused suffering. For these actions, Cent feels no remorse or guilt, for his only interest is his well-being. Yet as he travel down this highway, oblivious of the danger that lies ahead, he is to finally face punishment. On his travels, he will tell thee lies, all of which will end the life Cent is living....

[Police siren wail as Cent passes a police cruiser. Cent curses quietly under his breath, and glances at the rear view to witness a police cruiser trailing him. He pulls over to the side, as does the police cruiser. Down engines sputter to a stop as the men pull over on the side of the road. Outside, all that can be viewed is darkness, and the glimmering in the night sky. The police officer steps out of the automotive, and strolls to Cent's car, where he lightly knocks on his window. Cent slowly lowers the window, before addressing the officer.]

Cent: Good evening, Officer. Lovely night, isn't it. Perfect for a midnight drive.

Officer: Do you know how fast you were going.

Cent: I assume within the appropriate limits

Officer: 60. The limit 'round these parts is 40, you know, due to the cattle problem 'round here.

[Cent begins grinning]

[Chiming]

Cent: Why of course I know, Officer. You know? I too live around here.

Officer: You do?

Cent: Name's Carl Blaine. I was out for a night drive. My wife drives me crazy with her complaining and the such

Officer: I know that all too well. You know, for a second I thought you were some outsider, or something like that.

[Both Cent and the Officer chuckle]

[The Officer gets a serious look on his face]

Officer: Still, the law needs to be upheld or people turn into animals. License and registration?

Cent: Well.... I....

Cent puts his hand into his pockets, where he feels the leather of his wallet, but he doesn't take it out.

Cent: Officer, I seem to have forgotten it. I must have gotten out in such a rush.

[The Officer sighs]

Officer: Well, I fear have no choice, but to--

Cent: Officer....Officer. Look, I'm local, you can let me go right now, and I assure you can give the proper punishment afterwards. You have my name. Just search me up in the phone book.

[The Officer hesitates, thinking about what decision he should make.]

Officer: Okay, but only this time. Don't go on driving past without your license.

Cent: Why of course, Officer. My house is right up this road.

Officer: Okay. I'll check on you tomorrow.

Cent: Very well, Officer, very well. I'll be waiting.

[The Officer steps back from the car, and Cent starts the ignition. The engine roars, as Cent goes back onto the road, and continues on journey, looking occasionally at the rear view mirror to see if the Officer is following him.]

[It is daytime. Cent pulls into a roadside diner, where he hopes to eat food, and drink a refreshment. Cent combs his hair, and looks at the rear view mirror. He smiles at himself]

Cent: You're one handsome devil, aren't you?

[The doorbell jingles as Cent walks into the diner. Inside the diner is a total of 5 people-- all sitting at the tables. The stools and the counter are left unoccupied. All of them look tired or uninterested in their surrounding, yet one person catches Cent's eye. A beautiful waitress passing out food looks back at Cent. Cent walks over to the stool nearest to her, and sits in it.]

Cent: Hello, there

Waitress: Hello

Cent: If you don't mind me asking.... What is a beautiful lady like you doing in the middle of nowhere?

Waitress: There's a town down the road. I was born there.

Cent: That town must be heaven, 'cause, my dear, you're an angel.

(The Waitress blushes)

Waitress: Well, what do you want, hon?

Cent: Eggs and ham, dear.

[The Waitress chuckles]

[Cent catches a glance at a pile of newspaper lying at the end of the counter, organized in a neat pile with a headline that says, "Supreme Court decides case concerning human rights".]

Cent: That's neat-- the Supreme Court decided another case. You know I'm real interested in that stuff-- the law and such. Well, in my business you just about have to be.

[The Waitress puts down a plate of food before glancing at Cent]

Waitress: Don't mean to interrupt, but that costs money.

Cent: How much?

Waitress: 13 cents

[Cent pulls out a slick \$10 bill, and hands it to the Waitress]

Cent: For the food too.

Waitress: This is way too much

Cent: My mistake. The rest for is you.

Waitress: This is too much!

Cent: Trust me. For you it's too little.

[The Waitress chuckles]

Cent: What's your name?

Waitress: Jance. What do you go by?

Cent: Henry.... Henry Cent

Jance: You mind if I check your license.

Cent: No problem.

[Cent pulls out his wallet once more, and gives the Waitress his license. Jance glances at the card before looking up, clearly upset.]

Cent: What's wrong, gal?

Jance: You know it's not real nice to tell someone fake name. It's a real sicko thing to do, Carl.

Cent: Excuse me? My name is Henry.

Jance: Not according to your license.

[She hands Cent the license, and Cent looks in shock as he reads the name on the license-- Carl Blaine. And for the picture, it is Cent's very own face.]

[Ominous music plays]

Cent: That's not funny, girl. What you do to my real license?

Jance: What are you talking about? That's your license; you just handed it to me.

Cent: No....No! I am Henry Cent. What game are you playing at? This isn't me.

Jance: What are you talking about? That's your face, Carl.

[Cent suddenly stands up, violently grabbing Jance by the wrist]

Cent: My name is Henry Cent! What are you trying to get at here?! You think this is funny?! You think I'm stupid?!

Jance: You're insane!

[Three of the people inside the diner stand up, all looking at Cent. Cent takes a look at all of them, and lets go of Jance. He heads toward the door.]

Cent: All of you are crazy! Sick and crazy!

[Cent storms out of the diner, sweating profusely. The door bell jingles as he runs out, and the engine roars as he speeds away from the diner]

[It is night. Cent continues driving through the darkness even though his fuel is nearly gone. He mutters to himself under his breath in desperation.]

Cent: Those people are crazy. I know who I am. Henry Cent! At least I think I know who I am. I'm sure of it! I was born in New York City, I'm 30 years old, and I am a rich man.

[Cent looks in the back seat quickly, where he sees a duffel bag full of money, all acquired illegally.]

Cent: Yes..... Yes..... I am successful businessman. Anyways, who cares if I have someone else's name. I'm still rich.

[Cent chuckles as he pulls into a roadside gas station, where he is greeted by the man who owns the business. The man promptly puts gas into the car, and heads up to Cent.]

Cent: How much will it be?

Man: \$10

Cent: \$10?! For a lousy few gallon of gasoline?!

Man: A man has to make money someway. Plus, we're not a charity.

[Chiming]

Cent: You know.... I'm not a rich man.... The only reason I'm traveling is to get a job out West.

[Cent pulls out only \$5}

Man: \$5?! How is a man supposed to feed himself with that?

Cent: I don't know, sir. I really am sorry, but this all I have. Please, I don't have the money.

[The man sighs]

Man: Okay. I'm a sympathizer of drifters. You know? Used to be one myself. People should have the choice to make their lives better. I feel the ability to travel and get a job should be one of them. This one's on the house. Go on your way.

Cent: Thank you, sir. Really. Thank you.... Thank you.

[Cent head backs into to his car, smiling and waving to the deceived man as he speeds away. Once he is far enough so that the man doesn't notice. He chuckles to himself, knowing he perfectly tricked that man.]

[Cent continues to drive on, until he comes upon a small town where a series of vendors are selling exotic foods. Suddenly, a crave for such comes over him, and he stops next to a man selling a strange type of fruit.]

Cent: How much for one?

Vendor: A dollar

[Cent reaches back to pull a dollar from his duffel of money . Immediately, he notice that is way too light. Cent pulls the duffel open to reveal that it is empty. He immediately grabs his wallet to also discover it is exactly the same-- all the money was gone, except a \$5 bill. Panicking, he closes both the wallet and the duffel and quickly drive away.]

Vendor: Hey! What happened?!

[Cent trembles as he looks at the duffel bag which at one point was full of money, but is now as empty as an old spider-infested barrel]

Cent: What happened to my money? What happened to my money!?

[Cent continues driving until his engines begins to sputter. He desperately tries to turn it back before he is stranded in the middle of the road. He barely drive the car to the edge of the road before the engine dies out. Abruptly, a police cruiser appears from the darkness. He heads to Cent's location.]

Cent: Oh. Great.

[The patrol officer heads to Cent's car where he motions to him to lower his window, which Cent obediently does.]

Patrol Officer: Do you need any help?

Cent: No.... No.... I'm quite well.... I just need gasoline, and I'll be on my way.

Patrol Officer: Wait a minute. I've seen you before.

Cent: You have?

Patrol Officer: Yeah! Carl Blaine! You're wanted by Sheriff Dudley for speeding and attempting to escape apprehension. I've seen you on the local news. I'm gonna have to take you in.

[The Officer pulls on Cent's door, but Cent quickly stops him]

Cent: Wait a minute! Look....

[Chiming]

Cent: The only reason I escaped is because I'm being chased.

Patrol Officer: By whom?

Cent: A murderer! A terrible murderer! He is driving a red convertible, always wears sunglasses, and.... Is armed. Yes. He is armed. Officer, you can't let him get me.

[Behind him comes the sputter of an engine coming to a stop. Cent looks, and discovers a red convertible, with a man driving it. His eyes concealed by sunglasses.]

Patrol Officer: Like that?

[Ominous music]

Cent: Officer.... Officer, don't go near that car. There's something really fishy about this.

Patrol Officer: Relax. I'm just going to check who it is.

[Cent grabs the Officer's arm]

Cent: Officer, please!

Officer: Relax.

[The Officer walks to the car, apparently greets the man, and then before he could react.... Bang! Cent immediately panics, and tries to start the car, but it doesn't work. The murderer gets out of the car, and walks toward Cent's car]

Cent: Oh, No! Oh, No!

[The murderer stands outside of Cent's car with a gun pointed Cent's head]

Murderer: Blaine. You have to pay your debts.

Cent: I'm not Blaine! You're just a lie! Blaine is a lie! All I did was lie! That's all I did!

[The gun cocks]

Murderer: Goodbye, Blaine.

Cent: NO! NO! I'm Henry Cent! I'm Henry Cent!

[Bang]

[. . .]

Cent: I'm Henry Cent! I'm Henry Cent!

[Cent is inside an interrogation room, tied in a strait jacket, and madly going in circles and screaming. He is being watched on a camera by Sheriff Dudley and a young rookie]

Rookie: What's wrong with him, Sheriff?

Sheriff: What do you think? He's looney! A real shame. He was perfectly fine the first time I met him. All that trauma of being chased by the killer, and barely get shot by him. If it weren't for the Patrol Officer's partner shooting that maniac.... Who knows?

Rookie: What are we going to do with him?

Sheriff: Put him where he belongs. The looney bin. Let them take care of him.

[They glance once more over Henry Cent, who continues yelling his name]

Narrator: Henry Cent-- hustler.... Cheat.... Liar. Henry Cent-- the man whose own lies destroyed the life he once had. Henry Cent-- the man who not only lost his identity, and his wealth, but also

his sanity. Henry Cent is like one of many; he is a puppet master who takes delight in manipulating other people. He did not find serenity in manipulation, he found only pain. Only now has he found proper punishment; only now is he who he truly is-- a man that can never be trusted.... A man who is insane. And though Henry Cent is now gone, he will forever be remembered, along with his lies, within the Twilight Zone.

An open wound is the place where the light enters you.

CECILIA HERRERA

Granite Hills High School

Honorable Mention

I'm 3 years old. It's cold; the clouds are grey. I take in a deep cold breath and engrave the feeling of calm serenity in my heart. I stand at my dad's side wrapped in a blanket. Where my dad goes, I'm never far behind. My dad is drinking a beer leaning against a block of wood that holds the rickety patio above our heads. My Dad is a tall, stocky, strong man. He is tan with thick black hair, a straight happy smile, and big strong hands. I absolutely love my dad, for I was a daddy's girl. I believe this memory is the reason I love cloudy days.

I'm 5 years old. I'm drinking chocolate milk at the table. There is an open door just to the right of the table that allows the warm sunshine to fill the entire living room. My dad is relaxing on the couch drinking a beer, as my mom cooks food in the kitchen. The house is alive with sound as my brothers bounce off the walls. I smile back at my dad as he grins at me. That's when I see that my dad now has one silver tooth that doesn't cover the tooth completely, leaving the center of the tooth in view. I immediately bombard him with questions. He laughs and says, "I made a deal with a leprechaun, but now I have to kick his butt because he promised it would be gold."

I look at the tooth in awe, with a big smile, I say, "He really messed up this time but at least your smile looks just like mine now." Giving him a cheesy smile so he can see my silver capped tooth.

"I guess he saved himself," my dad says with a wink.

I giggle and wrap my arms around his head, before letting go and watching TV with him.

I'm 8 years old. I'm sitting on the dark living room floor that's lit up by the TV. My dad and I are watching our favorite show. It's our bonding ritual. I don't even remember what the show was about, but I remember just being happy knowing that I'd be able to watch it

with him, every night at 8. The next day my parents got into a huge fight that ended with my dad being kicked out of the house. I didn't cry when he left; I also didn't watch "our show" for the rest of the season; it seemed pointless to watch without him.

I'm 13 years old. It's a hot summer afternoon. I'm arguing with my father. He is in a drunken rage feeling nothing but animosity towards the memories of my mother. "DON'T TALK ABOUT MY MOTHER LIKE THAT," I yell at the top of my lungs. He blames her for everything that happened. He blames her happiness as the reason he is sad and broke. "If your mother wouldn't have taken all of you away from me, I would still have all of you by my side," he says half in pain and half in anger.

From plain stupid anger, I say, "If you would get a job, rent out your own house, and stop drinking, you'd have us! The very truth is God knows that it's not my mother that keeps me away. I choose to stay away because when I want to spend time with you, you act like this." This is the last thing I say before my chest is engulfed in what feels like flames, my vision blurs, the dry dusty yard spins, and I have my first panic attack.

I'm 16 years old. It's a late sunny morning in Washington. I'm sitting in a dark corner inside my sister's garage. I flick the end of my lit, finely rolled cylinder packed with herbs. I pull inspiration with every drag, jotting down poetically written lines that fill my mind. I sink into my chair, as I feel my heart, body, and soul connect to the world around me. My eyes trace the lining of the freshly painted walls. I wiggle my toes feeling the cold cement under my feet. I quickly extinguish my inspiration, batting away the residue in the air as I hear footsteps approaching my hiding spot. I sit up quietly, observing as I watch a tall, thin man slowly make his way through the open garage door and across the newly swept floor. He skims over the tools that do not belong to him before his eyes fall on me. "Oh, honey I didn't see you there, although I could smell you," my father says. I let out a forced laugh before looking down and continuing to write, secretly hoping he was just passing through. "No, but it's fine. We all have our bad habits," he says taking a seat allowing his body to focus on me; however, his darting eyes lead me to believe his mind lingers on the toolbox. We sit in silence as the words in my mind become harder to write down. I feel my heart and mind closing down as my guard goes up. I look up into the tired eyes of my father. He actually looks present; he's not in a dazed state of mind. I take a deep breath and settle the angst in my stomach. He smiles with a mouth full of holes, no more silver tooth. I smile back with my lips closed; and for the first time, I ask my father to be more involved in my life. He assures me that he loves me, but I could tell he didn't quite understand my request. "But mija, I give you money." Which isn't

really true, but I don't have the heart to point it out.

"No dad, I don't want you to give me anything. I want you to be my dad. I want you to be in my life." He looks at me confused as if he cannot see our relationship hanging by a thread or maybe his mind is still in the corner of the room thinking of my sister's toolbox.

After leaving that garage, I went upstairs to my bedroom and wiped my tear-stained face. With every urge to cry and throw something, I took a toke of inspiration and turned my frustration into music as I let my fingers dance on the keys of my beloved piano.

I knew that what I asked for wasn't in our future. I also knew in my heart, my dad was really missing out too because I really wanted to be his daughter beyond genetics. I wanted to be his little girl, instead, he stole my sister's toolbox and he broke my heart.

Today I don't know where my father is nor do I know how he's doing. I wish to have him in my daily life, but there's a gap between us big enough to make me feel empty inside. He's the weak spot in my heart, so deep that I cry every time I see a father bond with his child on TV. He pierced my soul leaving an open sore that bleeds and makes it too hard to talk about him. I love my father; I just don't know how to love my father. I freak out on the inside when I realize that the clock is ticking and soon he won't be around at all. I hate myself for not looking for him, but I'm even more scared of getting to know him and realizing he's the terrible person everyone makes him out to be. I realize that I really missed out on the father-daughter experience. We'll never go fishing. I have never ran to Daddy when a boy broke my heart. He's not going to teach me to drive. He'll never catch me sneaking out and promise not to tell. He'll never give me life-changing advice while we toss a football back and forth. So many things that I want so badly that I'll never have in this lifetime. However, the pain he caused has given me several gifts. I taught myself how to turn sorrow into music. When I found it hardest to speak, I discovered the gift of writing. My mind has insight beyond my age because I had to learn to help myself when I refused help from everyone else. So, maybe I don't have him, but the wound he left in my heart has let me help others. The wound in my heart heard my callings that saved me from making the terrible decision of ending my life many years ago. The wound in my heart is the place that allows me to understand the sadness and turn it into beauty.

Thanks, Dad, for helping me find myself in place of your absence.

Life of the Poor

DEVIN PERRY

Endeavor/Voyager Secondary School

Honorable Mention

When we were born
We would have bought a home,
And painted the walls white as snow.
The house would smell of lavender and cherry.

The bedrooms would be blue
The family room white
Hair ribbons for my little sister Sue
Dogs sleeping in the pale moonlight.

Dream the life of the poor
Not able to open the door of
My impoverished family.
Stories and tales with hope;

The lavender would be home to bees
Our eyes open to see
What the world could be
In our innocence.

Even with a few things that didn't matter
Movies with large amounts of violence and chatter
Books tossed aside that don't matter
Dream the life of the poor.

But fear not,
Covered with dirt waiting to be stirred up
By the hands of us poor children
Grabbing the neck of the guitar

Grabbing the neck of the guitar
And playing a loving tune
In the middle of June.
Dream the life of the poor.

Tea with Grandma

JULIA NUNO

King City High School

Honorable Mention

I held onto the freshly made green tea, sneaking a glance to see her yet again staring at me with those intense bright honey eyes that shown just as bright as her spirit. A small cough escaped me, and her face crunched in concern, exposing the fine wrinkles that perfected her face. My cheek still had the print of her soft rosy kiss, leaving her mark and I dared not to smudge it. She came over, soothing my back as I looked down at her small frame. I knew never to doubt her fragile frame. Her spirit roared like a lioness, striking fear to any who dares to make her feel as if she was the hunted, though she took care of all her cubs with the softest touch and the smoothest tone. “Drink, it will help,” Mama coos, as her grand-motherly tone still tugs its way through her raspy voice. The warm, loving and welcoming aurora flowed off her like calm waves on a beach, bringing me to feel at home again. While taking a sip, I leaned into her warmth. I embraced her and kissed her soft, brown hair that was inked with dye. My words could not convey the thanks that my spirit felt.

The weather began to shift, the once beautiful crystal layers that covered the Earth’s body began to fade by the blazing light who wanted to take its precious life away. I watched as her eyes began to dull at the same time, shielding her breathtaking honey orbs from our eyes. Her once small wrinkles became fine, creasing places she tried to hide. Her soft brown hair had vanished like the snow, and she wore the softest, lightest wrap I could have found around where her hair used to lay. She was still breathtaking, and was the one my heart wept for. I held onto a cup of green tea, sitting down next to her fated bed she rested on. My cheek had the small print of her lipstick but was smudged by the small streams that flowed down my

cheeks. Placing the small cup onto her now small wrinkled hands, which still felt like velvet, I whispered before kissing her forehead, “Drink, it will help.”

The butterflies in my stomach

SHERLYN HERNANDEZ

Corcoran High School

Honorable Mention

The butterflies in my stomach at the starting line
All the nerves pass by upon the shooting of the gun
The urge to approach an opponent from behind
And fly right by her never looking back

A sick taste enters my mouth,
I feel as if I'm going to throw up what's left of me
My legs feel heavy
Everything inside of me is on fire

Up ahead are the opponents going towards killer hill
As their chest heaves for more precious air
And their feet leave the ground as soon as they hit
Attack Attack Attack

The finish line is in site
As the "Christmas trees" fall behind me
There is nothing that isn't in pain at that point
Challenging myself to embrace the pain

Sweat rolls down my body
My legs take longer leaps and push harder
My arms pump like never before
Gaining speed
Faster and faster

I'm caught up to the red uniformed girls
And they've noticed me
They try harder to keep me behind
But nothing can stop me now

Adrenaline kicks in
I don't know if crowds are urging me on or my enemies
But it makes me want to go faster
I see myself progressing forward
And others falling behind me

Becoming a Woman

MANJOT DHANDA

Fowler High School

Honorable Mention

Becoming a woman is always looked at as being a wonderful thing. With the arrival of womanhood comes the ability to create life, seeing where you belong in the world, and finding your way to success. We have this extraordinary gift to create human life but our life is set out for us. We bring life into this world and our lives are created for us by the power hungry society. However, there are things that they don't bother tell you about becoming a woman.

They don't tell you about how, with womanhood, comes an additional sense. Woman must learn to have a sixth sense to intuit when danger is coming. To have the ability to sense what danger looks like for woman, is what men fear about having to learn. How is it that we learn in school that there are five senses but somehow, girls end up with more?

They don't tell you that women are considered to be objects before we are considered to be human beings. We are seen as our bodies, crafted for men. Being a stereotypical woman to form to the mold that society has created for the "perfect" woman. How will you expect us to be nice and feminine when we must build out skin thick like the hell smoke you drag us through?

They don't tell you that you can have all the power you desire. Except, when our abilities become too much, they shut us down. They choose to take us as a threat and never forgive us. How the hell are we supposed to say sorry for doing absolutely nothing but existing the best we know how? How the hell do you "forgive us" for just thinking?

They don't tell you about the endurance a woman must go through. Women don't endure the stupidity of society because we feel we aren't given another choice. No, we build up an endurance to keep ourselves sane. They wanted us to be weak but we were forced to stay strong. However, do not mistake this with the idea that women must be stronger. This is not about making women stronger because we are already strong. It is about challenging the way that society feels that women should be perceived. How did your want for us to be weak turn into a need for us to be consistent in our strength than ever before?

Before you decided to refute this concept of womanhood coming with all these different concepts, let me remind you, there is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish. There is no cookie cutter created life that women must be obligated to live. We will not conform to this lifestyle society has laid out for us. And we sure as hell won't let people who drag us down tell us our limits. The sky is not the limit when the entire solar system exists and we will explore our own life. With or without being informed of all the extra little "perks" that come with womanhood, there is nothing that we, as women, cannot achieve. We rise by lifting others. By bringing up the spirits of our fellow woman. We will rise.

Nadie entiende por qué mi guitarra es tan importante para mí
Los dos compartimos la misma pasión por poder ser escuchados
No juzga mi voz imperfecta porque sabe lo que he pasado
Se ahoga todos los comentarios hechos para destruir mi espíritu
Crea una barrera jurada para proteger la rosa en su interior
Mata la soledad con sus melodías de tonos dorados

Toco las cuerdas que tan amablemente lucharon contra el desorden
del mundo
Produce la inocencia que necesito para sobrevivir en este mundo
Inhalo el olor del acero de las cuerdas
Y poco a poco empiezo a darme cuenta de los deseos simples
Ninguna orden puede separarnos
Para la guitarra y yo somos lo mismo

Dear Grandma

MIA MARIN

Corcoran High School

Honorable Mention

Dear Grandma,
I only knew you for a few years.
From the tiny windows of my mind, I still see you.
You and I talking about everything that came to mind.
The smiles and laughter still fill my dreams at times.

The days were brighter
Everyone was happier with nothing holding us back

Loss made the choice for us all and now we bear the pain
My life will never be the same with you missing
But I can't blame you for leaving since it wasn't your choice.
Since you've been gone, the light of the world seems dim.
But I hope to meet with you again.

Spirits In Yosemite

CARTER WHATLEY

Mariposa County High School

Honorable Mention

There are spirits hiding here,
In the big mountains, up the tall trees.
Listen closely, you'll hear them in the waterfalls.
When they brawl, you will hear the rocks fall,
The strong wind is their whistle,
Blowing down leaves, toppling trees
The spirits create thunder with their anger.
When they are sick, the snow comes down
Pay attention they will talk through the animals.
The clouds are the spirits' houses.
Sometimes they will leave, but where do they go?
Will we ever know where these spirits go?
The fog comes from spirits splashing in the creeks
Next time you come here,
Do me a favor, listen closely
Keep your eye out for the animals.
You will hear the spirits, you will see them.
Just believe me, I have heard them,
I have seen these spirits,
There are spirits in Yosemite.

Then. Now.

SAGE HACKETT

Los Banos High School

Honorable Mention

Then. I discovered your loneliness comes from within you. You learned to live with the pit in your stomach that devoured and conquered your heart when it began to beat a bit faster as you looked at me for the first time. I'd like to think that perhaps your heart told you "her" and your lonely told you "Me." and you said "Both." Perhaps your mind settled for the idea that I could not drag you out of your abyss, but instead I could cure your lonely with mine. Perhaps you imagined that my lonely could be the cellmate in the cage your mind created for you. But that is not how the game is played. It never is. Eventually your heart said "Her. Only her." and your lonely told you "Me. Only ever me. Never her. Never her again." and you could not refuse the dark that swallowed your soul whole.

Now. I discovered your loneliness comes from within you. You have not, in fact, learned to live with the pit in your stomach, you expected me to heal you. But I am not a rehabilitation center for the sick and injured. I cannot heal someone, who does not want to be healed. So you fill your days having meaningless relations with girls who look too much like me, to fill the void of what could have been. You look for me on the street, you look for me in your dreams, and you look for me when I don't want to be found.

Your heart still tells you "Her. Only ever her." But my mind and my heart tell me "Us. Only ever us. Never him. Never him again."

Enclosed by the Sun

GABRIELA VALENCIA

King City High School

Honorable Mention

The family entered a small room and sat by the cold concrete wall. Mathew and Isaiah patiently waited, as they played with their toy cars. Their mother stood among them, as she held her six-year-old child, Milly, in her arms. The child fiddled with her short brown hair as her mother's hazel eyes nervously watched the clock. A sudden alarm echoed throughout the room and the prisoners walked down the corridor as an officer appeared.

"Remember. No pictures. No cellphones. Your visits will be monitored. If you are caught breaking these rules, we will end your visit early," the police officer said. He turned his attention back toward the prisoners. "Inmates, you have exactly one hour. Don't get comfortable. Visitation starts now."

A tall, buff man sat across from the children as he picked up the busted telephone.

"Look everyone. Who's that?" their mother said as she pointed to the man.

"Daddy!" her children exclaimed, as they jumped up and down. The security guard, out front, poked his head through the open door and gave their mother a narrow stare through his annoyance. She hushed her children as she grabbed the phone. Her eyes were weary.

The man behind the window peeped up at his wife.

"Hi, Martha; it's good to see you. Thank you for bringing the little ones. They've got so big since the last time I've seen them." the man said.

She sat there nervously. Her eyes wandered as she tried to find the courage to speak. The sound of her breath was all that could be heard.

"Martha, what is it?" The warmth in his eyes began to cool. "Martha. I asked what's bothering y--"

"I can't do this anymore, Angel. I can't keep covering up your

mistakes.” She said quietly. She peeked up for a moment, Angel was silent.

“I know. I said I would wait. For things to get better, but I can’t.”

Angel turned his head away for a second then banged his fist against the glass as his children startled back.

“Don’t do this! Don’t do this to me Martha!” Angel exclaimed.

“Keep it down over there!” The guard shouted.

“I’m sorry. I just can’t.” Her eyes were teary. “You made your decision that night you got arrested and I made mine. I’m taking the kids.” She hung up the phone and headed for the exit.

“Martha. Stop! I’m not going to let you take my kids.” Angel pounded on the glass once more. She hurried over to the door as the children began to cry. Mathew turned his attention towards his father. He desperately banged on the window. It was only a matter of seconds until an officer pinned Angel toward the wall. Mathew had never been more afraid of his father. They locked eyes for about a minute until Mathew’s mother pulled him away. Isaiah watched as the police officer pushed his father up against the wall. His tears dried as he turned back in hate towards the officer and ran for his mother.

Angel watched his children grow from a small cell. The visits stopped once the boys entered high school.

“Mathew, wake your brother up! You guys are going to be late for school!” His mother yelled from down stairs.

“He’s already up ma. Isaiah’s getting ready.” Mathew said. His mother was in the kitchen. The smell of eggs and greasy bacon filled the house. As Mathew and Isaiah walked down the stairs, their mother looked up from her cut board and upsettingly glanced at her sons.

“What’s the matter mom?” Isaiah said, as he pulled his backpack over his shoulder.

“Nothing...it’s just every day you two look more and more like your father.” She sighed.

“Where’s Milly, Mom?” Mathew said as he looked around the living room for his youngest sibling. She lay on the couch, still asleep.

“She isn’t feeling well,” his mother replied, as she turned away from her sons, “Now hurry up. Before you guys are late to school.”

They kissed their mother goodbye before heading out the door. Mathew gazed out onto his neighborhood. The streets were calm. The skies were gray. It seemed almost peaceful, until the police sirens wailed down the street, bring Mathew back into reality.

“Come on, let’s go,” Mathew said. “Before we’re late.”

Isaiah shut the door behind him, and caught a glance at the flashing lights, “Pigs” he said.

“They’re only doing their job. Besides, it’s none of your business. Now let’s go.” Mathew headed for the cross walk. Isaiah turned in disbelief as he ran toward his brother.

“Why do you back them up?” Isaiah said, as he caught his breath.

“I don’t. It’s just none of our business, so why should I care?” Mathew said. The sky grew darker. Isaiah couldn’t believe the words that came out of his brother’s mouth.

“Because they put our dad in jail. Don’t you remember?” The dark clouds slowly enclosed the sun, as it drew back it’s luminescent light into the heavens. “They’re the reason why Mom hates Dad. The reason why she can never look at us in the face.” Isaiah eyes reflected the sky.

“Dad put himself in jail because he wasn’t thinking straight. Not them!” Mathew yelled as he pointed toward the police cars. “Now drop it. We’re going to be late.” Isaiah moved into Mathew direction.

Isaiah stepped closer toward Mathew. “Why do you back them up?”

There was a sound of thunder as Mathew paced backwards from his brother.

“I already told you I don’t! Now move! We’re going to be late!”

Isaiah stood closer.

“Isaiah, I said move.”

“Or what? Are you going to call those pigs to move me for you?” Isaiah said. “Go ahead, call them, maybe then you’ll see why the hate us.” He pushed Mathew onto the gravel street.

“Isaiah stop, I’m not playing,” Mathew said, as he found his balance.

“Or what, huh?” He shoved Mathew once more.

“I said move!” Mathew jolted away from his brother and Isaiah hit the ground. There was another roar of thunder as the rain began to fall from the stormy clouds, onto the black road.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

Isaiah felt the back of his head, blood slowly oozed out onto his hands and on the ground. He caught sight of the red liquid and turn back in anger. As he turned, Mathew could not identify his brother. He had a face of a man that was unfamiliar.

“Isaiah, I’m...” Mathew said. He found himself, seconds later, on the wet ground, as Isaiah pinned him to the ground. He struck his face, multiple times, vigorously.

“Isaiah stop, please!” Mathew pleaded. It wasn’t until that the police sirens grew closer, Isaiah struck Mathew once more before he ran off.

“Isaiah, wait!” Mathew yelled, but Isaiah was gone.

“Hey, come back here!” The police officer said, as he stepped out of his car. The sirens were louder up close. “Are you okay?” He reached out his hand to Mathew

“Yea, I’m fine.” Mathew said as he pulled himself up and brushed off the gravel from his sweater.

“Here. Let me help you.”

“I said, I’m fine!” Mathew shouted. The officer pulled out a napkin.

“Take this,” he said.

Mathew ignored his offer, until he felt the cool drop of blood rush down from his nose.

“Now, don’t worry, I got a good look at his face. We’ll find him.”

“He’s nobody. I’m fine.” Mathew said.

“I’m trying to help you, Son. You don’t have to be afraid.”

“I don’t need your help, I said I’m fine!” Mathew reached for his backpack and headed toward the cross walk. His soaked hair dripped on his face as he walked down the street, with tears in his brown eyes. It wasn’t the pain in his face that made him tear up. It was the fact that his brother attacked him and left him alone on the street. As if he was nobody to him.

The officer watched as Mathew’s figure became smaller.

The rain fell hard, as Isaiah ran into the streets of an unfamiliar neighborhood. He hid in an alley until noon. The rain had stopped, the skies were still gray. The thought of his brother ran through his mind as he felt the back of his head. His head was sore. He looked onto his hands, which were covered in Mathew’s blood, washed it away in a nearby puddle. The water was filthy, yet reflective. Isaiah examined his faced in the water and could not recognize himself. He looked more monstrous. Isaiah startled back and sat against the wall.

The school day was over, and Isaiah never appeared. Mathew wanted to look for Isaiah but headed home instead. Isaiah’s probably home by now, he thought.

An hour passed. Then two. Mathew watched the clock steadily, Five thirty. Their mother would be home soon.

“Milly, have you seen Isaiah?” Mathew said as he rushed down the stairs. Milly, the youngest sibling, was ten now. Her eyes were soft, and her face was little. She still looked as if she was four.

“No, why?” Milly said as she played with her worn out dolls. She had new ones her mother bought her, but she liked these best because

they were a memory from father, he had given them to her. Mathew glanced back at the clock. It was almost six thirty.

“Never mind, just stay here and wait for mom.” Mathew said. He grabbed his black sweater and ran for the door. Milly looked up from her play.

“Is Isaiah okay?” Her concerned eyes convinced Mathew to think of a lie.

“He’s fine,” Mathew said, “He forgot his backpack at school. Don’t worry we’ll both be back soon.” He kissed Milly’s small forehead to reassure her worries before he headed out the door.

Night begun to rise as the sun fell into the mountains of the far way valley, over their small town. Mathew’s neighborhood truly was beautiful, despite its horrid outward appearance. It almost gave Mathew a sign of hope, yet he even knew that hope was a childish belief.

Ten o’clock, it was late. Mathew checked his phone, fourteen missed calls from his mother. By eleven thirty, Mathew decided it was best to head home, Isaiah’s probably home by now, I should go home too.

It was late, Isaiah checked his phone, Eleven o’clock. The clouds returned and so was the rain. Isaiah took one last look at his reflection, it was no longer the monstrous person he saw before, it was him. I need to go home, he thought before he pulled himself together, I need to see Mathew.

The rain came down hard, Isaiah was a few steps from his house, until suddenly he heard a voice, a familiar voice.

“Hey! Stop right there.” The voice bellowed.

Isaiah stood frozen, it was the officer. Isaiah ran. Just a few more houses, he thought. However, the voice grew louder.

“Hey! I said stop!”

The rain poured down as Isaiah stopped and trembled; the voice grew nearer.

“Turn around slowly!” The officer said as he clutched his holster. Isaiah didn’t respond. “I said turn around!”

The street lights were dim and barely visible in the rain. The clouds roared and water tumbled down on the earth.

Slowly, Isaiah turned, as the officer requested.

“Now get on the ground.” The officer said as he stepped out of his car.

As Isaiah approached the concrete floor, his phone began to vibrate. He reached for his pocket.

“Hands where I can see them!” The officer shouted.

Isaiah reached further into his pocket and glimpsed the letter “M”, but a sharp pain burned in his chest and a loud boom echoed through his ears. He fell onto the ground.

The officer stepped back in fear, as smoke arose from his grey pistol and watched his victim fall.

Isaiah shook in the rain as the cold water ran down his face. He felt alone. His blood heavily met the ground as he shut his eyes and held his breathe. He felt nothing but the earth and the rain. The thought of Mathew began to fade as he slowly exhaled, from the earth.

Mathew was a few blocks away from his home, and the weather was horrible. The dark clouds let out nothing but rain. As he waited for the cross walk to signal, Mathew took out his phone and saw that the clock read midnight. His eyes shuddered at the green icon. Hesitantly, Mathew pressed on the icon and scrolled until Isaiah’s name appeared. His phone rang until a loud noise in the far away streets startled Mathew. There was no answer. His heart began to race. The cross walk light appeared. Down the street were the red and blue lights and Mathew ran toward his home. They reflected onto his home. Mathew ran toward the crowd that surrounded the attraction. A figure could be seen through the glimpse of Mathew’s eyes: it was Isaiah.

Mathew pushed through the crowd.

“Please stand back sir.” One of the officers said.

He pushed through once more.

“Sir, I said stand back!”

“That’s my brother!” Mathew shouted.

The police officer fell quiet and let Mathew through. Isaiah body was motionless. Mathew grabbed onto his hand and gentle squeezed it. There were bullet holes found on his chest. Isaiah’s blood was everywhere. Mathew hovered over his brother, until the officer pulled him away.

His blood rushed to his face.

“Let go of me! Let me go you pigs! Where were you? Where were you?” Mathew screamed. His voice croaked through his tears. “Isaiah, Isaiah! Come on wake up, Isaiah wake up!” Mathew wept, but his brother didn’t respond.

“You have to let go of him now, we have to take him in.” The officer tried to pull Mathew away, but he resisted.

“I said get off of me!” Mathew struck the officer in the face. There

was a silence among the crowd as they watched a boy cry for his loss.

The rain had stopped, yet the clouds were still gray. Mathew felt sick, he could hear his mother as she wept down the hall from his room. His sister slept beside him, too little to understand her mother's pain. That only grew anger in Mathew. Nothing would ever amount to what Mathew felt when his brother died, not even his father's last appearance.

"My Dad!" Mathew exclaimed. It had been two days, and no one informed him about his son's death. He had the right to know, even if Mathew's mother hated him. Isaiah was his child too.

"Mom?" Mathew poked his head through her bedroom door. She lay asleep on her bed. It was best if she didn't know where Mathew went. She had already gone through enough pain. Mathew pulled the blanket over his mother and kissed her goodbye on the cheek where her dried tears lay. It was then, when Mathew realized she had given her children everything, and in return she was given pain.

Mathew headed out his door and reached for the car. He looked back onto the sidewalk before he drove off where his brother's body lay two nights before. Isaiah was gone, but Mathew didn't want to believe it.

His father was an hour away from his town. Being so close, he felt so far. Mathew hadn't seen him over the past six years and was afraid he wouldn't want to either.

When Mathew pulled into the prison parking lot his stomach felt sick, but his father deserved to know. The prison hadn't change since the last time Mathew remembered it. The visitation room was still very small, and the telephones were worse. Its black paint has been chipped off with age. The familiar alarm echoed through Mathew's ears as the last memory of his father ran through his mind.

His father appeared through the doorway until he saw Mathew's face. He sat down, and his cold blue eyes began to water as he picked up the phone.

"Mathew," His father said. "It's good to see you son, how are you?"

Mathew nodded his head okay. His tears held him from his speech.

"I'm good, Dad, I'm doing alright." Mathew drew his eyes away from his father. "Look I know it's been a while since we last talked, and I'm sorry."

"Don't be Mathew. It isn't your fault." His father interrupted. "Don't feel sorry for your old man." He grinned.

Mathew looked away. He couldn't find the courage to speak, how

could he possible find the courage to tell him his son had died.

“Dad, I need to tell you something.” Mathew hesitated. He began to cry as he tried to force his words out of his mouth.

“Isaiah’s gone dad. They killed him” Mathew said through his tears.

His father sat motionless, as he turned his eyes away from his son.

“Who...who killed him?” He said.

“A police officer” Mathew murmured. “Isaiah was right dad, they don’t care about us. They only care about themselves.” Mathew said.

The room was silent.

“No Mathew, Isaiah was wrong.” His father said. His began to recall the last memories of his children.

“I led you two to believe that, and I’m sorry. I know you loved Isaiah very much. But don’t let this accident lead you into a path of hate. Look at what it’s done to me.”

Mathew looked over at his father.

“Don’t let this ruin your life Mathew, forgive and forget” his father said.

On Mathew’s way home, he looked up into the sky. The clouds had departed from the sun. Its light shined beautiful among the earth. Mathew brought his attention back to the road and drove off.

My Wish

CADENCE DOOMS

University High School

Honorable Mention

I am the daughter
Of activist America
Whom adults shove away
And mute my voice
And fasten my words on a corkboard
To be neglected

I am the youth
Of diversity
Of which the people of my country ignore
Interrupting my sentences
To tell me to impersonate
The entitled males of white America
And to pale my pigment
And silence my sexuality
Lock my lips
Keep my regards restrained
And to marry the materialistic men
In order to succeed in my homeland

I am the teenage girl
Pushed away
By silver-haired men
That tell me to seal my lips
And to smile more often
Or else no one will want me as a housewife
God forbid

But soon
Everyone will see me
And hear the thoughts that slip through my teeth
Into the heads
Of the white
America

For now
I will whisper my truth of America and aspirations
And let the words seamlessly flow from the ink of my pen

But soon, I will grow to shout it from the highest mountains

