

2015
SLWP Writes!

7th Annual
Young Writers
Competition



SLWP Writes!

2015

Writing Contest Sponsored by
Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project
Dr. Richard Louth, Director
Michelle Russo, Co-Director
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SLWP Writes! Contest

Overview

The purpose of this contest was to promote and recognize young authors (grades 6-12) who demonstrated creative ingenuity through fiction, nonfiction, and poetry in the Southeast Louisiana region. In the spring of 2015, the SLWP received over 100 submissions to our Seventh Annual SLWP Writes! Contest. Writing Project teachers and writers read meticulously through submissions and selected fifteen winners and five honorable mentions based on originality, clarity, language, style, and detail. Please note that SLWP Writes! does not revise the winning entries in order to keep the integrity of the works.

SLWP would like to give a special thanks to all the students who poured their hearts into their words, to the teachers who encouraged their students to submit to this contest, to the judges who spent many long hours reading, deliberating, and determining the winning submissions, and to Dr. Richard Louth for organizing and supporting this project.

For more information about Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project writing contests or summer workshops for teachers and students, please visit our website:

http://www.selu.edu/acad_research/programs/slwp/

SLWP Writes! 2015 Award Recipients

DIVISION I FICTION (GRADES 6-9)

1ST PLACE

“A Colorful Vocabulary”

Jonas Fos
Fontainebleau Junior High
Grade: 7
Teacher: Janice Krantz

2ND PLACE

“Acceptance”

Hayley Melerine
Fontainebleau Junior High
Grade: 7
Teacher: Janice Krantz

3RD PLACE

“My Enchanted Forest”

Darian Herndon
Fontainebleau Junior Krantz
Grade: 7
Teacher: Janice Krantz

HONORABLE MENTION

“Hope”

Austin Coakley
Covington High School
Grade: 9
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

DIVISION I NONFICTION (GRADES 6-9)

*No winners selected

DIVISION I POETRY (GRADES 6-9)

1ST PLACE

“Who am I? And Who I am.”

Amanda Phillips
Fontainebleau Junior High
Grade: 7
Teacher: Janice Krantz

2ND PLACE

“A Fallen Angel”

Hillary Bohm
Fontainebleau Junior High
Grade: 8
Teacher: Janice Krantz

3RD PLACE

“Blank Words”

Grace Brauner
Fontainebleau Junior High
Grade: 8
Teacher: Janice Krantz

HONORABLE MENTIONS

“Pitch Black in Sight”

Mason Barron
Boyet Junior High
Grade: 7
Teacher: Jennifer Crain

“Feelings”

Charlotte Chehardy
Fontainebleau Junior High
Grade: 7
Janice Krantz

DIVISION II FICTION (GRADES 10-12)

1ST PLACE

“Forget You Not”
Maggie McMichael
Covington High School
Grade: 10
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

2ND PLACE

“The Tree by the River”
Katie Monette
Covington High School
Grade: 11
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

3RD PLACE

“Rotten Apple”
Harris Baumann
Covington High School
Grade: 10
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

HONORABLE MENTION

“Static”
Owen Langston
Covington High School
Grade: 12
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

DIVISION II NONFICTION (GRADES
10-12)

1ST PLACE

“The Good-Willed Stereotype”
Gracie Babineaux
Covington High School
Grade: 11
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

2ND PLACE

“Pursuit of Happiness”
Kevin Dang
Covington High School
Grade: 12
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

3RD PLACE

“The Good, the Bad, and the Worst”
Anna Grace Koepp
Covington High School
Grade: 11
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

HONORABLE MENTION

“Is Fast Really Better?”
Rebecca Smith
Covington High School
Grade: 11
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

DIVISION II POETRY (GRADES 10-12)

1ST PLACE

“Body”
Isabella Biondini
Covington High School
Grade: 10
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

2ND PLACE

“Defeating Nature”
Ashleigh Nave
Pearl River High School
Grade: 11
Teacher: Karen Maceira

3RD PLACE

“Plucked”
Sammy Burke
Covington High School
Grade: 10
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

HONORABLE MENTION

“Loss of Gravity”
Dylan Agoff
Covington High School
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

Division I: Fiction—First Place

A Colorful Vocabulary

By Jonas Fos

“And this is the living room,” the man said, gesturing around.

It was a comfortable place, to say the least. The fireplace crackled welcomingly, and the walls were painted a muted brown. The ceiling was high, and paintings hung in some places.

The one above the hearth interested Timmy the most, as he noticed more than one child in it.

“Who’s this?”

“Oh! Him,” the father said, taking a cloth and running it over his glasses. “That’s my other son, Tyler.”

“Mark doesn’t talk about him much.”

“Yes, he doesn’t. It may be that he has-well-quite the ‘colorful’ vocabulary.”

“I see.” Timmy said.

“Like a sailor,” Tyler’s father reaffirmed.

The next hour was spent in silence, until Timmy heard a car pull up. Someone got out, let out a muffled cry, and slammed the door. Glass shattered, and metal scraped against metal.

“There he is now,” the father said from behind a newspaper.

Timmy gulped, just as the door shot open. He saw Tyler for just a brief moment: A teen, sandy hair, tall, and incredibly scrawny, before he yelled “White!” and tore the opening from its hinges. He threw it into the wall, calling out “Brown!” as it crumpled.

“Maroon!” he roared, digging his miniscule fists into the nearest bookshelf. Books began to fall past his face, and he called out in rapid succession, “Red-indigo-light green-black-black again-purple-white!” before slamming the remains into the covers.

Timmy cowered behind a couch. Tyler’s father just did the crossword.

“Do you just let this happen?!” Timmy cried out between glass shattering and Tyler calling out “Pale!”

“This is better than what he used to do.”

“Used to?”

The couch Timmy was ducking behind began to rise. His heart froze as he saw Tyler above him, teeth gritted.

“Pale. Yellow,” he said, crushing the sofa between his fingers. Stuffing and wood chips fell out, showering over Timmy.

Fully expecting to die, he closed his eyes and waited for it to go dark.

Instead, Tyler stomped off, yelling “Cream!” as a gallon of milk burst against the wall.

“When will he stop?” Timmy asked.

“Oh, soon enough, I think.”

Tyler’s final scream was “Burnt orange!” then something exploded, and he was sprawled out, unconscious.

Timmy surveyed the damage. Almost all of the furniture was broken, the walls had gaping holes in them, and the ceiling was coming down.

“I told you,” the father said, adjusting his pocket watch.

Timmy didn’t talk for a minute, before letting out a long, relieved sigh.

“Sir? Do you have a broom, by any chance?”

Division I: Fiction—Second Place

Acceptance

By Hayley Melerine

I woke up, not wanting to get out of bed. I didn't want to go to school because I would sit in a cold, metal chair all day long, doing nothing. I was used to all the stares and comments like “deaf boy”. These names were only half true. I only have one working ear. The other ear really didn't exist. In place of it was a deformed patch of skin. The names didn't bother me anymore. They defined me. I never said anything back to the name callers. I would have embarrassed myself with stupid, not thought out comments.

I went to school, since I was forced to. I walked through the halls with my head down, scared to run into a bully. As I walked, I ran into someone. I anticipated name calling or a brutal push, but it didn't happen. All I heard was, “Sorry, I didn't see you there.” I replied with, “It was my fault.”

“I should have moved though. By the way, I haven't seen you before. What's your name?” said a girly voice coming from the short-saturated figure in front of me.

“Mark Green.”

“Cool! I'm Samantha Goodwell, but you can call me Sammy.”

“Why are you being so nice to me? Everyone makes fun of me.”

“You seem like a nice guy! Besides, not a lot of people are nice to me. I'm not like the 'ordinary.’”

I hadn't noticed this before, but one of her eyes were gone. It was replaced with a flat surface, pale in color. She was beautiful, even without an eye. I couldn't help but stare at her.

“You can stare at it. Staring doesn't bother me anymore. I'm used to it.”

“I'm not staring at you because of that.”

“Well then why are you staring?”

“No reason.”

“Ummm, okay. Would you like to sit by me at lunch? We can walk together.”

“That'd be great.”

“Okay! We should get going then.”

I walked with her, feeling accepted, which was rare. No one was ever that nice to me, or even tolerated me for that manner. It was a nice feeling. I was so used to name calling or pushing. We talked the whole time at lunch. We had an actual conversation. It wasn't about how stupid I am or how I can only hear well on my right side. None of our sentences included any of our peculiarities or how different we are from anyone else. These lunch meetings continued every day. I liked our “meetings”. I liked her. I liked Samantha Goodwell. I liked everything about her.

When we would talk, I wanted to hear her clearly without making an effort to put my right ear into her direction. I knew I couldn't help that, but I still despise that flaw about myself to this day.

After about two years of talking to Samantha, I fell in love with her. The Senior prom was coming up, and I decided to ask Sammy to go with me. The way I asked her wasn't big or grand. I knew she wouldn't like that, since she doesn't like much attention drawn to herself. We were eating lunch one day, she asked for a napkin, and I gave her one saying the following: “I know this is cheesy, but will you go to prom with me?” She replied with a mere “yes,” but I could tell by her face that she was very excited. We went to the prom and went out to eat afterward. When we were eating, she asked for a napkin, so I gave her one saying the following: “I bet you weren't expecting this, but will you be my girlfriend?” She replied with yes, blushing slightly.

Years passed and we were still together. I knew that she was the one. I decided to bring her out to eat. She asked for a napkin, so I gave her one, saying the following: “Will you marry me?” By the time she looked up, I was on one knee holding a ring. She said “Yes!” as tears rolled down her face. We got married, and like they say, the rest is history. We're expecting a child. I came up with the name Joy, and Sammy loved it. I don't know what I would have done without my Sammy. She made me feel like I was worth something and she taught me how to accept myself. Everyone should find themselves a Sammy when they are down, whether it be a friend or family member. Everyone should find someone to talk to that they can trust. No one should feel disliked or useless, whether their society's version of “normal” or not. Trust me, it's not a good feeling.

If someone is being picked on, go up to them. Go up to them and stand up to the bullies. Become friends with the kid who is alone. Most of the time, even if they are alone, they want to be enlightened by the presence of another. They want to be talked to and to converse, even if they don't admit it. No one wants to feel hated.

Everyone wants to have that one person that they go to school for. Everyone wants to have that one person that they sit in a cold, metal chair all day long for, to see them everyday. Everyone wants that one person that makes themselves want to be a better person . Trust me, that's an amazing feeling.

This is one of those bedtime stories that I'm going to tell my child, Joy. I want her to know how not to treat people. I want her to know that those quiet people just want someone to talk to. I want her to know that those people are like everyone else. I don't want Joy to be a bully. I simply want Joy to be someone's Samantha.

Division I: Fiction—Third Place

My Enchanted Forest

By Darian Herndon

I perch on a branch in an old tree. I feel like I can take flight at any second, but I am so relaxed that I can't bear to move a muscle. I am surrounded by branches and leaves; I am concealed by their thickness. I could sit here for the rest of my life enjoying the sun streaming through leaves. The day is warm and windy. The breeze carries the whisper of a song.

The day shifts when the sun starts to fade and the air becomes cooler. There is nothing in the world I want to do more than to close my eyes. I want to sleep in this world of pureness. I want to wake up in this forest. I want to be a part of the forest myself.

Division II: Fiction—First Place

Forget You Not

By Maggie McMichael

You always held my hand when it rained; you said you didn't trust me around water. You said I was inconsistent, that I always changed my mind at the last second; you said that you had to hold my hand. You said if you didn't, I would wash away.

So I could have apologized when you said how scared you were of me. I could have held your hand too, when it snowed. I would say I didn't trust you to stay warm, and that I had to hold your hand because if I didn't, you would become as cold as me. Or maybe, as cold as your mother, who never approved of my tattoo and multicolored fingernails anyway.

But I never apologized, and I never held your hand when the rain began to freeze. I didn't say I was sorry when the warmth in your heart froze, when my petty nagging began to bother you, or when my idiosyncrasies became bad habits. Maybe I didn't because at the time, I wasn't sorry. I didn't realize I should have been, and that your hand shouldn't have been empty when the snowflakes hit the concrete.

Because now, mine is too, even as it rains.

Maybe it wasn't me, though; maybe I wasn't the person who drove you away. Maybe when you packed your suitcase you were thinking of your mother, and how happy she would be when you came home alone. Maybe you were imagining yourself far away in England, finally meeting that girl you used to chat with on the internet. Or maybe, you were thinking of yourself when you took your things off the shelves, but left the ones I bought you. I hoped that you weren't thinking of me, thinking of how I told you a long time ago you would be better off without me. I never said I would be better without you.

But now there are clear circles on the dusty TV stand, the one you always left coffee cups half-filled on. There were hangers in the closet swinging naked next to mine, only one pillow now sat on the unmade bed, and never had I missed the smell of your overbearing cologne so much. I knew that you would be taking your sweatpants with you, the ones I always wore, but would leave the plaid shirt I spilled yellow paint on. I knew your tooth brush would be gone, but you would leave your shampoo and shaving cream. "I can easily buy more," you would say, as you took one last sweep of our bathroom.

I wished you had taken it, and I wished you had taken the pictures of us out of their frames. I wished you had burned them so I wouldn't be sitting on the floor now with a lighter, trying to figure out the best way to go about frying my feelings and your memory. I wished you hadn't left your shirt so I wouldn't be tempted to put it on when I didn't want to run up the electricity bill. I wished you were sitting with me now, holding my hand while it rained, still so positive that I would be the one to go first, instead of how it was now.

The problem was I didn't miss you. I didn't miss the way you insisted on eating tuna

sandwiches even though it made the apartment smell like a sewer. I didn't miss your voice in the morning as you yelled the answers to Jeopardy reruns while I tried to sleep. I didn't miss the way you always got mad at me for going out to lunch with my friends, but were too interested in your phone to talk to me when I actually went out with you. I didn't miss the way you told me not to wear high heels and how my music was always two notches too loud when you were trying to think. I hated when you wouldn't help me with the groceries and promised you had the laundry under control but never got around to it.

The problem, in fact, was that I missed the way you made me feel. I missed that you remembered to cut the crusts off my sandwiches but knew better than to ask for it off of my pizza. I missed your voice in the middle of the night, filled with love for only me. I missed the way you would play with my friend's kids as if they were your own, mentioning later how cute ours could be. And I missed how you would take me to bookstores Sunday morning just to let me talk about the ones you'd already read weeks before. I missed when you let me lay my head on your shoulder when we watched movies, and I loved when you wrote the grocery lists on old Sudoku puzzles just so I would have a game to play on the ride there.

But I had always told you we wouldn't last. I wasn't flighty or unreliable, I was smart. I was smart enough to see that the two of us would never snap perfectly together. I was smart enough to say no when you asked me to marry you, I just wasn't smart enough to explain why. So maybe it was me you were thinking of when you packed your suitcase. Maybe my face was on the picture you did take from its frame, probably stuffing it into your back pocket at the last second, and then regretting it as soon as you got in the taxi waiting outside. Maybe you thought the empty engagement ring box on the counter would make me regret my decision too, and your set of keys that sat next to it.

I suppose you were thinking of me, then. I suppose I was the reason you decided you might as well leave, certain that your mother and your friends would hug and console you, but secretly high five over your shoulder. It was my fault, for saying no, but I was doing you a favor.

So instead of going after you, instead of giving you a call and letting you hear me cry into the receiver, I spread the memories of us out on the wood floor. I wouldn't call you or email you and I wouldn't mail you the one shoe you accidentally left behind or reroute your National Geographic subscription to your mother's house. I wouldn't change the lock but would change the bed sheets. There would be no missed call on your cellphone, and your shampoo would be in the trash, the pictures we had taken ashes on top of it. I wouldn't get your hopes up again, and I wouldn't call you just to break you like one more sorry promise.

I would let it hurt, and then, you would get over it, and you would get over me.

The lighter in my hand was weighted, but I flicked it on. I would let it hurt both of us, because the more it hurt, the less likely we were to try it again. So the fire ate the paper, licking away our smiling faces as I ate back sobs and did nothing to wipe my tears. I let us sizzle and burn, hating the way it felt, hating the hole you left in my chest and the emptiness you left in the apartment. But I was letting you go, and the trashcan would find you as soon as I did. Shampoo, ring box, ashes: you were gone.

I hated how cold my hand felt when it rained.

Division II: Fiction—Second Place

The Tree by the River

By Katie Monette

“Wait, shh... Did you hear that?” Lynette silenced me. We sat still for a minute, looking at each other.

“Nah, I guess it’s gone,” I said, but just as I started to relax, I heard it: the sound of children yelling and screaming.

Again, Lynette and I looked at each other, our eyebrows knitted together in confusion. This time the noise continued. It sounded like normal kids just yelling and having fun, nothing out of the normal really. It was spring break, kids had probably come to play on the rope swing further down the river from where Lynette and I sat. That spot was pretty nice; it was separated from the main, wide open area that everyone went to by some woods and a few houses, so it was small and secluded. I mean, we had hung out there a lot when we were younger, too. The only thing that made hearing these kids down there kind of weird was the fact that it was almost eight in the evening. It was dark outside.

“They’re gonna get caught by that man over there,” I said casually. We had been through that, too. Right next to the gravel road and the little path that led to the spot with the swing was a large, pretty old house, and in that house lived a crabby old man who loved to call the cops on kids down at the river. Everyone who went there was convinced that he had no right to do so because it was a public waterway, right?

“Wait dude...” Lynette shushed me again. “Oh my god, did you hear that?”

I wasn’t listening. “No, man, what was it?”

“Are they... do you hear what those kids are saying? It totally sounds like they’re saying *hang him up...*”

I looked at her. I guess they *were* singing something together, but I didn’t hear anything too freaky. “I dunno, dude. Maybe they’re lynching someone with what’s left of that nasty old rope swing,” I joked. “That thing was always way too sketchy for me.”

We sat by the river for a while, not saying anything, just listening to the locusts and the sound of those kids down there having fun.

“*HANG HIM UP! HANG HIM UP!*”

It sounded like a group of little kids. My eyes widened and when I looked at Lynette, she was already staring back at me with eyes just as big.

“What the...?”

“Ellie! Is this not creepy to you?”

We were staring at each other. “You wanna go over there?” As soon as I could get the words out of my mouth, Lynette and I were up and practically running, then *really* running up the path that would take us around to the place with the swing instead of through the woods.

“Let’s go down there and just tell them to scram before that old man calls the cops,” I said breathlessly. I think both me and Lynette knew we were just going to see what in the world those kids were up to.

“I mean... It *had* to be coming from that spot with the rope swing, right?” Lynette asked.

“Like, there’s nowhere else those voices could be coming from... Right?”

We had reached the gravel road that led straight to the rope swing, but we couldn’t hear the voices anymore.

“Dude... What if we get there and there isn’t anyone there?” Lynette whispered to me.

“God, Lyn, don’t even say that!” I whispered back harshly. We were by the old man’s house now, walking as lightly as we could on the crunchy gravel.

The path narrowed, leading down to the small beach with the tree over the river. There was a big NO SWIMMING sign posted, but that had never stopped anyone.

We had gotten to the path that led right to the beach, but by now it was pitch dark and the only light was the faint glow from some path lights by the old man’s house. The greenish light on the rusty old signs looked just like a horror movie, but I knew if I tried to joke about it with Lynette she would freak out big time.

“I guess... uh...” Lynette fumbled for her phone and switched on the flashlight option. “Do you wanna go first?”

I gave her a look that said *wimp* but really, I was just as petrified as she was to walk down there.

I took her phone, but kept the light shining at the ground. I guess some weird, basic fear made me not want to see what was in the darkness on that beach, even though I was trying to convince myself that it was just a bunch of random kids with parents who somehow didn’t care that they were playing by a river at night. That totally sounds plausible, huh?

I picked my way carefully down the trail, trying not to screw myself up on a root or in some mud, or maybe trying to waste time. I could hear Lynette right behind me, stepping right where my feet had been.

The path opened up; we had reached the bank by the river. With Lynette at my side and a sick feeling in my gut, I raised the light to get a view of the beach in front of us.

What had I *really* expected? Of course there was nothing. Completely empty. There was no sight of any kids, no footprints, nothing. Just the quiet river and the rope swing above it, swaying ever so slightly.

As I stood stock-still, trying to process what had just happened, Lynette turned and had blundered halfway back towards the gravel road by the time I could untwist my thoughts enough to go after her.

“Wait! Lyn! Lynette, come on!” My mind was racing as fast as my feet were.

Did I expect that beach to be empty? Did the kids run and hide? If they did, where was the evidence that they had been there? The footprints, maybe some shoes or trash...

The next day was a Thursday. In our evening spring break boredom, Lynette and I flipped to the local news station. They were showing some kind of historical special, with a pretty, young little journalist walking around some old guy’s house with the man himself, poking around in all of his memories and priceless junk.

“Hey, Ellie, that wouldn’t happen to be that oldster who lives by the river, would it? You know, the one who busts everyone?” Lynette pointed at the screen.

Sure enough, the camera panned out to his front yard and it was definitely the big house on that gravel road. The voice speaking was the old man’s.

“I’ve lived in this same spot my whole life. I built this house myself. I’ve seen this town go through it all, the good and the bad.”

“The good and the bad, huh? Can you give us an example of each?” asked the vapid little newslady.

The camera followed the man as he dug into a closet and pulled out a crumpled shoebox, which he opened to reveal a stack of ancient newspaper clippings. The scene cut to him locating the one he wanted, and the camera zoomed in on the picture as he explained.

“Alright, this was probably the mid 40s. I was just a kid, myself. See, these kids, and I mean kids, they only could have been ten years old at the most, hung a little black kid over the river down here. The kid just wanted to be friends with them, he didn’t know any better, but these kids had parents in the KKK. So they hanged him in this tree down here, right over the river. I wasn’t home, but the neighbors heard them yelling all sorts of terrible stuff. I came home to a crowd of people in my front yard and I saw them cut the kid down. That has to be the worst thing I’ve ever seen in all of the years I’ve been here.”

When I looked at Lynette, she looked like she was gonna puke. I felt the same way.

“And what’s the best time you’ve had here?”

“I couldn’t pinpoint it. Just watching the town evolve, but retain the mystique has been very special to me.”

Division II: Fiction—Third Place

Rotten Apple

By Harris Baumann

An apple a day keeps the doctors away. That phrase is how I lived my life. I never went to a doctor in over thirty years, and I felt great. And all I had to do is eat one apple every day. I admit it may sound somewhat ridiculous, but you do not know what I have been through with doctors. As a child, my parents had frequent trips to the hospital in Queens, requiring surgical procedures by the “most skilled” doctors in the state. But as I see them, doctors are maniacs who could do whatever they wanted to do with the human body, having control all to themselves, being able to end a life just as much as being able to save it.

Eventually, my parents died. I was placed into Madam Popula’s Foster Center in Long Island. Madam Popula was in her late 60’s when I first arrived. She looked like the typical grandmother, with frizzy white hair, wearing vintage dresses, and a kind smile she always wore in front of all of the children. She walked with a bit of a limp, and was so frail, but put others before herself. To this day, she was the kindest woman I’ve ever met.

The house we lived in was fairly large, with enough bedrooms for the 8 children and her. It was about two stories, 5 bedrooms on each floor, and the kitchen was downstairs. The boys slept on the top floor, while Madam Popula and the girls slept on the bottom floor. Outside there was a basketball court, where we played whenever we could. The only problem was that there were two bathrooms, one on each story, so every day it was a war to see who could get there first.

Madam Popula was actually the person to first teach me ‘an apple a day keeps the doctors away.’ I didn’t believe it at first, finding it ridiculous. But, I eventually learned to love that phrase, and it became one of the biggest parts of my life. I learned to look at that woman and see my mother in her eyes. It was because of her I was able to move on from my parents and start a new life with her and my ‘siblings’.

That was why, in the fall of ’86, when Madam Popula died, I thought I was six again, learning that my parents had just left the Earth. And it was more painful the second time around. The orphanage had to be closed down since she had no one to take it, and I was separated from my foster brothers and sisters.

I was sent to Mr. and Mrs. Malum’s Orphanage for Teenagers. To say the least, it was the exact opposite of Madam Popula’s. They knew how low the chances were of a teenager being adopted, so they had other plans for us. There were about 21 teens there, girls outnumbering us boys at about 3 to 1, and they made every one of us do their housework. We lived in a two story apartment in Manhattan, with three small bedrooms and one bathroom, girls on the top floor, and the Malums and boys on bottom. The roof had cracks in it and it leaked when it rained. The floor felt like it would collapse wherever we took a step. Our jobs were to make the apartment less dangerous. Our reward? Mr. Malum would bring home eight slices of pizza a night. I never was fast enough to grab a slice, so instead I was able to sneak an apple away from the kitchen

every night, making sure the Malums never found out, or else I would be in worse shape than their shabby apartment.

When we worked we were paired with partners. I was paired with Ana Pupilla. She was certainly a sight to behold, with her long blond hair flowing down her back. She had these crystal clear blue eyes that looked like you were looking into the purest of water. She was just a few inches shorter than me, but was growing fast. She always joked about my apple ‘obsession’, and she always urged me to go to a doctor’s office. Every time, I said that I’ll be fine, and there was nothing an apple couldn’t do that a doctor could. And every time, she would just roll her eyes and walk away.

I left the orphanage at 18 years old, and never looked back. I still miss most of the kids there, and I hope that they were able to have good lives. I went to college in California and got my degree in the spring of ’93. I spent the next few years out there, and was able to become the assistant manager at the local grocery store. It wasn’t much money, but it was enough to pay rent, plus I got an employee’s discount.

In ’97 though, my apartment burned down. I remember it perfectly. That day I was eating my daily apple on my lunch break. I bit into my apple, and immediately spit it out. The inside was a sickly brown color. I threw that rotten apple away, and went back to work, thinking nothing of it. At about midnight though, I woke coughing from tons of smoke. I jumped out of bed and made for the first floor. I was able to get out, but others weren’t so lucky. I found out that apparently, my neighbor Miss Pomum left her stove on, and she fell asleep. Saddest part, she never woke up.

The next day, I was late for work. My boss asked me what happened, and to this day I remember that conversation like it was yesterday.

“Alan, why are you late? You’re never late.” Mr. Goodman asked me that fateful day.

“I’m sorry Mr. Goodman, a lot of stuff has happened this week,” I said, thinking he heard about the fire. Usually, the big guy, would get enraged, his bald head turning a crimson red, but that day he gave me a sad smile and a look of sympathy.

“Are you okay?” he asked. I wanted to say yes, I was fine, but instead, this came out.

“Not really.” I then explained to him how my building burned down, how I lost all of my belongings, and how I now had no place left to stay.

When I was finished, the giant man just put his hand on my shoulder. “Go home.”

I was confused. “But sir, my home burned down,” I said.

He just shook his head. “No, go home.” Then, it clicked. I thanked him, and left his office. I went outside, got in my car, and drove. For the next 5 days I drove. After a tiring journey, I pulled up to the curb and got out of the car, setting foot on Queens, New York.

I was able to get a job as mail boy at CNN, just able to break even. Over the next 15 years, I was able to work my way up the business ladder, and became weatherman for CNN. The name Alan Pierce was broadcasted live every night for the next 6 months. When I first got my job as a meteorologist, I developed a strange cough, but thought nothing of it.

Then came that fateful day. I went into work that morning, feeling extremely bad. The night before, I was so busy I forgot to eat my apple, so part of me was freaking out. But, a weatherman had to keep a straight face. It was a minute or two before I had to go on the air, and I was coughing up a storm, worse than any time before. The co-anchor, Lindsay Stewarts, came up to me.

“Alan, are you okay?” she asked.

In between coughs, I replied. “Yeah Linds, I’m fine. Must be a little cold or something.”

“Are you sure? For as long as you’ve worked at CNN, you’ve never been sick. ‘An apple a day!’ Right? ”

“I said I’m fine so just drop it!” I yelled. I looked at her, and immediately felt guilty. She looked extremely hurt. If only I paid more warning to what she said. I was halfway through my report, when I felt pain in my right side, and saw black.

I woke up an hour later in a hospital bed. I started to panic, when Lindsay came in. She looked uncomfortable, and I soon found out why. She was told by my doctor that I had stage 3 lung cancer. Turns out all that smoke I breathed in from my apartment fire contained asbestos, and it seeped into my lungs. She then said she would give me time to process this.

I still can’t believe it. For over a year, I have been in and out of hospitals, but gradually getting worse. I wish I had listened to all of my friends, Ana, Lindsay, who tried to warn me, but I shrugged them off. I sometimes wonder now what would have happened if I didn’t have my fear of doctors, or maybe if my parents weren’t sick when I was a kid. But mostly, I think about the day this all started. I think about that stove, the fire, and that apple. I wonder if maybe it was a sign. That maybe I should have listened mostly to that rotten apple.

Division II: Nonfiction—First Place

The Good-Willed Stereotype

By Gracie Babineaux

There are certain events that happen in your life that can make you realize things you never did before. A death can make you see how short and valuable life is. Losing a house can help you learn the true meaning of a home. For me, that certain event was a move. A 3 hour car ride and a truckload of packed boxes made me see people and myself in a different way. The new people and place both helped me further discover and develop this new view I have taken, but mostly it was the unexpected stereotypes.

In the majority of cases, stereotypes are unpleasant little things that are never brought up in politically correct conversations. They are usually flat out wrong and mentioning them will just get the person who brought them up, a bucket load of embarrassment and shame. In most of my experiences with them, all of this applies. Though, moving was one of the experiences that was an exception. The stereotypes did not bring me down but made me stronger. They did not make me ashamed of who I am. They made me prouder than ever.

My family and I are from way down south in Vermilion Parish, more specifically Forked Island (pronounced For-*ked*). There is also a Cow Island and Pecan Island in the area (pronounced normally). There is one caution light and most of the roads are still gravel and dirt. Unlike most people think, we did not live in a swamp. We lived in the marsh. It was about a 30 minute drive straight into the Gulf of Mexico and with each hurricane that distance is getting shorter. I guess by most we would be called “Cajuns”, but I do not really consider us anything but normal.

As “Cajuns,” we have an accent, replacing our “th’s” for “d’s” and saying “mais la” quite often. Personally, I called shorts, “short pants” until I was 7 years old. For most people, if you did not grow up with us, you do not really understand us all that well. Our little phrases like “save it up” and “get down” could prove to be quite perplexing for the inexperienced. As a child growing up here, I never realized that my normal was definitely *abnormal* to most people. It was just the way my family was. Blood was thick and my granny’s gravy was thicker.

As I got older, I learned the meaning of the word “stereotype” and began to discover which ones applied to me. I never really thought much of them because truthfully, I did not believe they existed. I saw them on TV and read about them on the internet but I could not grasp the concept. I could not believe that someone could *really* think that we all had webbed feet or a T-Boy in the family tree (except for the fact that I did). To me, the whole idea was ridiculous.

I never would have thought that moving 3 hours east to Covington, LA would shed a light on how real they were.

I moved to Covington a little over a year ago. It was a tough move because not only were

we leaving behind our family and friends, we were also leaving behind our culture and way of life. I was leaving the land of lush, old oak trees for towering pines and rolling hills. I knew things would be a lot different, but I never expected the bombardment of pre-conceived notions thrown at me once I opened my mouth. As soon as “the” came out as “duh”, everyone already thought they knew the kind of person I was.

I was a Cajun. I walked around barefoot, fished and crabbed every day, and ate rice and gravy every night for supper. My family was always cooking those mysterious little crawfish that live in the mud and we shouted “Ah Yieeee!” randomly throughout the day. Never mind that all of them except for the “Ah Yiee!” part were true. I *did* walk around barefoot, fished and crabbed a lot, ate rice and gravy more often than I liked to admit, and had a grandpa and multiple cousins who had their very own crawfish pond.

The stereotypes that I thought were nonexistent were, in fact, in existence. By no means was anyone rude or malicious in their assumptions. If anything, they were just plain curious. After all, the “Cajun” stereotype was not degrading like it was when my grandpa was younger. Being a Cajun used to be a disgrace, but now everything Cajun was in demand. It was *interesting* to be Cajun.

At school, I was shy at first. As soon as I got comfortable though, people began to turn their heads at the unusual sound of my foreign speech. Question after question came at me about my way of life and at first, I wasn’t sure if they were joking or being serious. Some of them were so crazy, I couldn’t be sure on whether I should even answer. I soon figured out that these people were completely serious. They were genuinely interested in my answers. Eventually I decided that instead of being aggravated or insulted by the overwhelming number of the inquiries, I would have a little fun. I couldn’t help the subtle hints of sarcasm that inevitably crept in. “Are you a *Cajun*?”

“Well I guess I could be called that.”

“Do you own shoes?”

“No”, I would say sarcastically while blatantly staring at my shoe-covered feet.

“Did you ride a pirogue to school every day before you moved here?”

“Yes actually,” I would reply sarcastically again, “My pet alligators would pull it.”

“Are your feet seriously, like, webbed?”

“Definitely. You have NO idea what I go through buying flip-flops.”

It went on like that for weeks, along with comments on how I say “parish”, “quarter”, “drawer”, “marry”, and other words. “You say them differently”, they would say. To this day, I still cannot hear any “difference” between my words and theirs. All in all, it was amusing.

When I really think about it though, it blows my mind. All of these people were so willing to accept all of these stereotypes as true and *did not know any different*. They believed them to the

point of actually coming up and asking me about them. Many tried to start conversations about living with pet alligators. My mom and dad would ask me why I never was offended. They said that they would have taken offense and been angry about the whole situation. How come I did not think that these people really *were* just trying to offend the new girl who spoke weirdly?

Honestly? I have no idea.

Maybe it is because I am naïve and oblivious. Maybe it is because I would have to *feel* like they were insults for them to become an actual insult. Maybe it is because my family raised me to be proud of who I am and where I come from. I've never felt ashamed or embarrassed of my culture, so why should anyone be making fun of it? I have come to find that you can only be torn down or insulted if you let yourself. In the famous words of my mother, "Someone calling you ugly should never stop you from being beautiful."

Moving has made me realize that not everyone says "dat" and "dere" and "dem" or walks around barefoot all the time or actually *does* have a cousin named T-Boy who owns an alligator farm. But I do, and I think that's really cool.

Division II: Nonfiction—Second Place

Pursuit of Happiness

By Kevin Dang

In the journey of every human being, he or she will face countless tribulations and with these challenges, will come emotions that will create memories that one will cherish forever. But in our adventure, there is one emotion that undoubtedly makes the greatest impact. It has been pondered at by countless philosophers and has been the ultimate goal of everyone ever, alive or dead; that is the pursuit of happiness. In my own life, I've often wondered about what makes me happy and found a multitude of answers: ice cream, the beach, cat videos, women, or friends and family. However, as Aristotle puts it, "Happiness depends upon ourselves" and these possessions do not always necessarily make me happy. For the most part, these versions of happiness are superficial and don't last that long. To be genuinely, perfectly content does not seem to occur very frequently in this life. And yet there are three situations of where I was able to find a glimpse of what true bliss can be: having nothing to do and having everything to do.

After a good 17 years on this planet, I have concluded that one of the only ways to be truly happy is to be in an environment where you are free from all stress. Trying to relax with a task that needs to be done is like trying to play a video game with your mom nagging at you to do your chores; it just doesn't work. Unfortunately, to be completely void of stress is nearly impossible. Accomplishing a goal only seems to sprout more things to do along the way, and if by some miracle, you ever are able to finish everything, there will always be more. While these adventures can be fun and rewarding, they can also be challenging and exhausting. To be in a state where everything is perfectly finished, where there is no more task to be done, is my idea of happiness. And I say "idea" because I honestly have yet to reach this state because there is always work to be done for me. However, I hope that one day I will be granted this chance to be, "free as a bird". I imagine I might go fishing somewhere on a lake, hopefully without any mosquitoes, with some sweet tea on a clear, blue skyed day.

The second scenario where bliss has found me, unlike the first, is something I've experienced many times so far. Quite ironically, what plagues the chance to be free of all worry also provides a happiness in its own right. I am talking about the happiness achieved when you complete a goal. Sure, work isn't always fun but when I'm given a challenge, there are times when I am willing to accept it. And when I work with all my skill and succeed, I get into a zone that nothing else can compare. The one moment where all your struggles and adversity come to fruition can make you feel like you are on top of the world. Now combine this with some breaks of doing absolutely nothing productive every now and then, and I think life would be pretty good.

Happiness is the truth that every human that has ever walked on the planet has searched for. I believe that my peace of mind is found in these environments, but at the same time I know that reaching these states of nirvana constantly and consistently will probably never happen. Having too much of one can cause boredom or stress, and besides life is usually never that convenient. So I learned to be like Aristotle and create my own happiness and relish the little

moments. They may never be perfect, but for now, my pleasures of ice cream and cat videos will suffice.

Division II: Nonfiction—Third Place

The Good, the Bad, and the Worst

By Anna Grace Koepp

There are always good days and there are always bad days. Some will be asked how their day was, to which they would throw their hands up and exclaim “horrible!” Then, right after would launch into a detailed, scene by scene reenactment of what caused their day to be “horrible.” The trigger to a so-called bad day may be a flat tire, an argument with a boss, or maybe a lunch order that was messed up. Days can be horrible even though nothing genuinely horrible even took place. I’ve always taken the good or mediocre days for granted in my life. My mediocre days now include fighting with my boss or the wrong lunch, but I never thought I would have the worst day of my life when I was so young.

Freshman year I went to my first high school dance. My school likes to throw a “back to school” dance as an ice breaker for the new students a few weeks into the school year. Lucky for me, I already had a best friend who happened to be a senior. The dance was after our first home football game, and as the last seconds of the game flicked down on the scoreboard the student section was counting down with it. The night had only begun.

Once the crowd had cleared my senior and I rushed to the auditorium so we would have all the dancing time necessary for it to be a good night. The music blared as we danced all night and contributed to the teenage perspiration and celebration of that night’s victory on the field. Things were winding down more and more as the night reached midnight. I gave my senior one big hug goodbye and headed home for the weekend.

The next morning my mom woke me up, which was strange on a Saturday. After I rubbed the sleepiness from my eyes I could tell something was not right by looking at her. She has always had the worst poker face. She took a deep breath and sighed like she had the weight of the world on her. After another breath she told me my best friend had killed herself after she got home from the dance that night. The world and everything I knew about it felt like it was crashing down around me through the haze of my mind.

Even after almost three years later I can’t describe exactly how I felt that day and the days that followed. There’s a monstrosity of feelings that consumes the entire body, and it’s an indescribable event that still sickens me. Unless a person knows the feeling of a loved one who has passed, they don’t understand the concept of true loss. There’s a nauseating feeling followed shortly after by the limbs not being capable of holding up a body. My body felt weak and I didn’t know how I was going to put one foot in front of the other, much less go about my life.

I will never be able to forget that day even though I try my hardest to block it out constantly. Things to get easier despite in the beginning when it feels like nothing will ever be okay. There are still times I’ll see something and think to myself that she would like that, but quickly after I remember that she’s still gone. There are five stages of grief, and books write them

out as if they have a sequential order. That is very incorrect. I still endure all five stages on some days, and it feels like a never-ending ride. I'm so drained of feeling hopeless on some days, and it infuriates me that she made the decision to leave me and everyone else who loves her behind. People will always have good days, and they will without-a-doubt have bad days, but how one handles them shows who they are. Although the death of my friend still devastates me, I know that the loss of her brought about a new extraordinary life in the world that I wish to encounter one day.

Division I: Poetry—First Place

Who am I? And Who I am.

Amanda Phillips

Tortured souls of the unequal tyrants
Desire of difference from The Sames
Women in the streets and news of their rants
White men with rights exactly as they came

Equal birth, divided by presence
Sent into this world not knowing their worth.
Then divided by people far too dense
To realize their reason upon this Earth.

With freedom of speech, but judgment of words
Extremities far too much for the rest
Such beautiful pieces, scared to be heard
Closed-eyed opinions from those they thought best

Differences stole her greatest moments
Appearances lost opportunities
She's not judged by thoughts only by movements
Trapped inside a body, she cannot flea

Lawfully, she had to be accepted
Lawfully, she was treated just like them
All she needed was a new perspective
To see into the secret hearts of men

They said love was blind, but couldn't help see
Personalities of the outside in
"Can't they realize it's who we want to be?"
"That is just the way it has always been."

Shadows were our friends. We were unexplained.
I'd rather be this way than be alone.
We were different because we loved the same
They gave us a name, and let us be known.

Trapped in a prison, the keys are all fake
The prisons without iron, only flesh
Kept from adventures, no stories to make
This is not living, death couldn't be less

Although we were not made to be broken
And our purposes were never quite clear
For the whispers of faith, I revoked them
And freed myself of any and all fear.

Division I: Poetry—Second Place

A Fallen Angel

By Hillary Bohm

Standing in front of me,
So I could clearly see,
Hand in an eternal salute,
Mud on one steel-toed boot,
Sad gleam in his eyes,
Depression hidden in a disguise.
Battle scars tell it all,
A reminder of what he saw.
Stoically trying to fight
For what everyone thinks is right
Freedom on the mind
Loyalties made to bind
But so somber, so longing,
Doing right but only wronging,
One leg, only a phantom reminder
Of what only made him blinder.
A fallen angel with broken wings,
Who would have thought of all silly things
That he'd be my hero

Division I: Poetry—Third Place

Blank Words

By Grace Brauner

Words written on pages
But what do they mean.
 Silence is speaking
 While a drum beats.
 Our ears listen closely
But our minds are far off
In a land full of dragons
And bright colored dots.
 A buzzer is buzzing
 A clock is tick-tocking
 A rainbow is brewing
 In an old wooden pot.
Our hearts are all golden
 But don't know a thing
Of words written on pages
 What can they mean?

Division II: Poetry—First Place

Body

By Isabella Biondini

What am I?
a collection of cells and neurons
all tangled together
a mess of mad
electricity
eyes of oceans
and sea foam
salty like the
sweat that descends
down your
face
lungs that collect
the winter winds
to keep me alive
hold me
close
so I don't
freeze
shall I course through
your veins
like the fire that
fuels my beating
heart

Division II: Poetry—Second Place

Defeating Nature

By Ashleigh Nave

I like to think that when we die, we defeat Nature.
It's a demanding thought
But Nature, she is a demanding thing.
For our entire lives we are doomed to follow her,
The helpless babe to the groaning old man.
And when our bodies finally give up,
When with a sigh they collapse over our still
fighting soul,
Nature snatches us up
Dust to dust.

Einstein said energy can be neither created nor
destroyed.
When I die, my soul will go elsewhere.
But the energy inside me,
The collection of all my past thoughts and loves and
passions
Nature, she will to be able to contain it.
It is not hers to have.
Every word I never wrote, every story I never told
All the brilliance I may have wasted
I hope to God Nature cannot contain it.

Bryant said in his *Thanatopsis*,
"So live!"
And I will live, every moment.
I will greedily hoard each second of life,
Collect and use all knowledge I find.
And when I do die,
When my body collapses over my still fighting soul,
I hope to God Nature does not contain the excess.
I hope it pours out; everything I never used,
To dance laughing over Nature's desperate claws,
I defeat her maddening cycle,
To escape the "Dust to dust".
I hope it spreads far and side, searching.
And I hope- oh, I hope-
That it is captured by someone who is living.

Division II: Poetry—Third Place

Plucked

By Sammy Burke

Simply picked, taken.
Moved from place to place.
Same customs, same people
A whole different space.
Saying hello isn't the same
As well as saying goodbye.
Parents try to understand,
So they just say, "try."
It's always here to there,
Not ready or prepared.
No warning, no sign.
Just two words:
"It's time."

It's something we're used to,
Same old, same old.
No need to get attached.
Just do what you're told.
Make friends with yourself,
And you'll be okay.
No heartbreak, no feelings,
No goodbyes to say.

The hard part isn't to leave,
It's leaving behind who you were.
Complimenting or criticizing
Maybe a sadness you could cure.
Most of that is forgotten
By people who once knew you.
And remembered seem to be
Things irrelevant and untrue.

But "Everything's okay",
You tell yourself at night.
And you know that by God's word
Everything will be all right.

However, you worry about things,
Like a life you have to reconstruct.
But, what you're really worried about it

Is when you're comfortable and happy,
And still you just get plucked.