

**1<sup>st</sup> Place – Short Story Category**  
**Grades 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>**  
**“The Escapades of Donald Trump”**  
**By**  
**Jude Oster**

The Escapades of Donald Trump

Darkness. Donald Trump wakes up in a dark, damp cave. Confused, he mumbles, “Immigrants,” under his breath as he wipes dirt off his luxurious pants. The million dollars! It’s gone! Trump frantically searches for a small loan of a million dollars his father had lent him. Enraged he screams like a madman. He unveils a gold plated iPhone 6. The date is 7/11/18. “Never forget,” he says as he stumbles towards the cave exit, which is blocked off by a metal gate. Over an intercom, a dull voice states, “Not so fast, Mr. Trump.” “Bernie!” Trump screams, “Where have you hidden my million dollars?” Trump was infuriated now. He whips out his phone to call Sarah Palin, but no cell service could reach the cave. “Where...where am I,” Donald said fearfully. “Near a wall,” a high pitched voice said. Hillary was also a conspirator along with Bernie. Trump tells what he last remembers, “Oh my goodness. I totally forgot. Once I became the greatest President of the United states, I built a wall to keep the illegals out.” “I do not care,” Hillary said, “To escape, you must engage in Presidential Combat. Your first combatant: President Obama. As the room fills with light, he hears a voice, “Hello...I uh... am Obama... and you will lose.” Trump swivels around to see Obama, armed with the Bill of Rights and half a burrito. Because Trump is unarmed, he uses his greatest weapon: his speech. He proceeds to insult Obama with vulgar and hateful words. Obama, discouraged by Trump, walks away in defeat.

A sound of screeching metal comes from behind. The door has opened. "Proceed to your next challenge, Mr. Trump," Bernie says in his dull, incoherent voice. He walks out to see a wall with Trump's face covering it. A crowd of people gathered near the gates. "Oh no," Trump says in anxiety. "I must escape before they see me. They must be mad." Trump searches for a way to get away. He checks his phone. He has a cell signal. Trump calls the Air Force, requesting for an immediate evacuation. But they're held up fighting Kim Jon Un in North Korea. "Hmm." Trump is pondering his fate now. "Hey over there!" Trump has been spotted. He runs faster than ever before, jumping over rocks and such. He reaches the wall. Suddenly, he feels an unexplained strength come over him. He leaps up, grabbing hold of a brick on the wall. He flings his way up. He is home. "Not so fast, President." Trump turns around to see Bill Clinton, with a saxophone in hand. "Before I can allow you to continue to defeat my crazy wife, you must play me in a solo contest. Choose your instrument wisely," Bill says. Five men walk out, holding an instrument in hand an electric guitar, a tenor saxophone, a clarinet, a trombone, and a sitar. "I'll take the electric guitar." Donald says. Bill begins to play a sweet solo, gracefully transitioning note to note; he was not sharp nor flat. After he finishes, Bill says mockingly, "Beat that." Donald then begins to shred on the guitar, racing up and down the neck like a professional. The strings begin to break. First the G, Then B. All the strings begin to snap as smoke arises from the guitar. The body goes up in flames, unable to control itself after being played by Donald. Donald smashes the guitar on the concrete floor of the wall.

Bill, in awe from what he had just witnessed, shows Donald the way to the exit. He is now on Texan soil. He walks to a parking lot, where his platinum Bugatti, the Trumpmobile, sits. Donald hops in, and speeds all the way to Washington D.C. He arrives at the White House, which is heavily guarded by Bernie-Bots. Donald jumps the fence and sprints half way to the

White House, but is stopped in the court yard by a squad of Bernie-Bots. Trump is surrounded. They handcuff him and lead him to the oval office. Inside sits Hillary. "Trump, my old enemy, I am just gonna tell you being president is the best," Hillary says. "Yes I know, I WAS president," Trump says angrily. "How did I even end up in this mess in the first place?" "Your vice president was our inside man. He drugged your coffee with sleeping pills while you worked. Carried you right out." "Well, your time as president is over." He uses Ju-Jitsu to dismantle a Bernie-Bot, and stares straight at Hillary. He waits a few seconds, before saying, "You're fired." At that moment the Secret Service busts in and escorts Hillary out. Trump has won. Hillary was not convicted of crime and released, and the rest of the conspirators were never found. Trump serves two more years before Kanye West becomes the most narcissistic president ever. But that's a story for another time.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Place – Short Story Category

Grades 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>

### “The Supersonic Slug”

By

Ethan Isgritt

#### The Supersonic Slug

In the distant land of Slugville, in Slug City, there is only one who can protect the civilians from evil. This is his story. Many years ago, a slug was born who was destined for greatness. Little did he know that he would soon be transformed into the greatest slug the world had ever known.

Sam Slug was watching the chemical plant for which he worked. “Just another boring day of smelling toxic chemicals,” he thought. “Hello, Mr. Slug, an all-new shipment of highly radioactive chemicals has arrived,” said one of his coworkers. “Bring it here,” Sam replied. Soon Sam Slug stood above the largest vat of toxins he had ever seen. “Wow,” breathed Sam. “I wonder what that could be for.” Suddenly, a nearby barrel of toxic waste was knocked over, and a flickering flame quickly spread throughout the facility. Havoc ensued as workers headed for the exits. Fear seized Sam Slug as sweat from the ever-growing heat wave rolled down his face. He tried to reach the nearest exit, but molten metal pipes crashed down before him. Frantically scanning the chaos, he found a door. Slowly making his way to the door, Sam almost reached it before he was hit by the falling, burning balcony. The last thing he remembered was falling, falling, falling.

In a subconscious state, Sam brace himself as memories came flooding into his vision. He was suspended in an endless void, with darkness swimming close to him and spreading out over infinite space. “Too close, and too cold,” he thought. He remembered the burning plant, and somehow he knew he was the only survivor. He felt strange, as if this incident had changed his destiny forever, and his previous life was burning, crumbling into ashes.

Sam opened his eyes slowly. He was under a pile of rubble. "I should be dead," he reminded himself. Surprisingly, there was not a scratch on his body, even though his dark blue skin had changed into a lighter, glowing purplish color. Sam wanted out of this toxic trap. Suddenly, he had struck a hold in the melted metal and was flying hundreds of feet over Slug City at Supersonic speed. The chemicals transformed him forever.

In an abandoned suburb of Slug City was one of the most evil mollusks the world had ever known-the Sinister Snail. Sinister Snail and his gang of cronies lived in the sewage system, where no one could learn of their evil wickedness. "None will know of us until it is too late!" thought Sinister Snail.

Meanwhile, Sam Slug was hiding. He was not sure if displaying his newfound power was such a good idea. "I will use my power to fight crime in Slug City," thought Sam. "But first, I need a name." Then the most perfect name came to him on the spot. "I am the Supersonic Slug!"

Sinister Snail was contemplating his schemes for world domination. He suddenly concocted a twisted and violent plan. He exclaimed, "I will fly my Snail Plane over Slug City and drop salt bombs over the helpless slugs! No one will be able to stop me when the salt makes contact with the slugs!" He was very sure of his seemingly infallible plan.

On a rainy day, Supersonic Slug was flying over the city when a squawking flock of birds caused him to plummet down, down, into the streets where he was sucked into the sewage system with the flowing rainwater. "Ugh," he thought, "I don't know how I can get out of here!" he sloshed along in the nasty, swirling sewage as rain poured down all around. Then, he heard a sound like voices. He leaned in close to the wall and heard, "The plane is ready for launch. The time for world domination has come. The salt bombs are loaded, and it is time for Slug City to know the name of Sinister Snail!" Sam Slug gasped. If this snail dumps salt over the city, the citizens would melt, and then Slug City would belong to Sinister Snail. "I have to do something! It is time to use my power for the greater good." He slinked along the passage until he was in a room. He saw an evil-looking snail in a plane. Suddenly the engine started. The

plane flew out towards the city square. “Well, here goes nothing,” Sam thought. He flew out, following the jet streaking across the dark skies. At a supersonic speed, he flew up and used his sticky slug body to stick to the plane. He felt the wind and water droplets on his eyestalks as the plane began to dump the salt! Sam heard maniacal laughing from inside the cockpit. He looked around fast, and saw that if he stuck himself to the bottom of the wing, it could bring the plane down. He hurried positioned himself to the underside of the right wing. Then, the plane began to spin, and as it spun he could hear the shouts of the Sinister Snail from the inside. The salt was flying through the air, and Sam could feel his left eyestalk beginning to burn. The plane was reaching the ground now, and then it crashed. Sam felt a sharp jolt like an electric current through his body, and then he smelled smoke drifting from the engine. He slid over the cockpit area and the glass was shattered. The Sinister Snail, mortally wounded, sat inside. He said, “Who are you? How did you defeat me?” “I am the Supersonic Slug,” Sam replied.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place – Short Story Category**

**Grades 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>**

**“Jane’s Little Diary”**

**By**

**Lydia Wells**

Jane’s Little Diary

*If I had to*

*I would put myself right beside you*

I sit on the bench, wresting with my thousands of thoughts. Eternity passed before my lips in cold, hard breaths. The book in my hand, these collections of letters, words, heartbreaks spill out onto my eyes. A beautiful leather cover, the edges lined with gold, the color of her lovely eyes, the color of her weeping sadness. The ground is blanketed in pure white snow. The trees are barren, dry, and left to fend for themselves in the harshness of Winter’s tiny hands.

“Jane, Jane, Jane,” I whisper to myself. “I’m sorry to let myself in like this, but it’s...”

“It’s for the best, I am about to say. But I can’t say these words when this is merely selfishness. I want to know her heart’s endless depths, her expressive handwriting. I want to know, to taste, to hear her through these flimsy pages. I’m about to read her diary. I was her husband, right? And she would’ve wanted me to, right?”

*Would you like that? Would you like that?*

But she’s gone. Dead in my eyes. Never to be found in this world of mine, never to be sought for again. I have made so many mistakes that each one has become a burden, each memory the last vestiges of her soul, her beautiful, horrible ghost. Dead, so dead, as her limbs splattered on the pavement at the oddest angles, dead and she hit the ground and fell asleep.

*And I don't mind*

*If you say this love is the last time*

Because she's gone. Her love is now but an empty soul. A lifeless player in the grand scheme of Immensity. A lifeless player who has had life ripped from his soul.

*So now I'll ask, "Would you like that? Would you like that?"*

But this is your diary, Jane, I muse sadly, and I must discover this world of secrets.

*Something's getting in the way.*

I open the cover. **Dedicated to my daddy, my mum, and the love of my Life, Jasper.** A tear splashes on the word **Love**, and I quickly drag my sleeve over my eyes. The next page turns, and her life begins –

*Something's just about to break*

**8/12/2001**

**My name is Jane Clermont Edwards, and this is my life in black and white. My ink will run dry over these pages; these names will be forever hallowed. In three weeks I am going to marry my beloved Jasper Collins-my breathing turns ragged-and I have finally picked out the perfect dress. It's simple, not too much lace, but it hangs around me like Faerie gossamer webbing. Ethereal, and perfect. Jasper will love it. Meredith is to be my bridesmaid, and the wedding will take place by the sea. Mum and Daddy will be there, too, even after our estrangement. I wish Saira could be here. RIP my little sister.**

*I will try to find my place*

I devour the letters, these words, these loves, grasping for another mention of me. One more piece, one more need. An... obsession to figure her out, to remember these ephemeral wisps of her scent, her laughter.

*In the diary of Jane*

*So tell me how it should be*

**8/22/2001**

**Jasper drew a portrait of me, with a beautiful white bird in the background. He made me feel beautiful, something that I've grown to love and realize. Lacie almost tore it by accident, but it came away from her klutzy hands without a scratch. Doesn't that mean we'll be together, forever, if it can go through that hardship? No fault on Lacie, though. She means well, but I won't let her cook the food for our wedding. Jasper won't cook the food, either, after what happened last time. There are still burn marks over the dishwasher. But I love him still the same.**

*Try to find out what makes you tick*

*As I lie down, sore and sick,*

*Do you like that?*

Jane died. I saw her on the video clip, recognized her bright yellow scarf as she jumped from the Twin Towers. The cup of coffee had fallen from my hands, down onto the floor, the tiles, staining a pure white and ugly, seething brown.

I'd keel over, and memories of her had come rushing through me, through my hands, and through the blood raging through my skull. I'd seen her, laughing, at a golden, autumn picnic with some of our old college buddies. Her eyes, so beautiful, had glowed in the noonday sun. We'd built piles and piles of red, brown, and orange leaves, jumping in and scattering joy into the wind. A beautiful, crinkly yellow leaf dangled over her cheek. I'd never seen her so happy then when I asked her to marry me.

I'm walking, now, walking to my house, I think, and I'm angry, so angry I could kill. So angry that whoever did this would have their neck snapped in an instant by me. They would turn to ashes in my cold, chapped hands.

But I am mostly angry at myself. Angry that I hadn't stopped her from going to work, angry that she even worked there as one of the secretaries.

*Do you like that?*

*There's a fine line between love and hate*

*And I don't mind*

**8/23/2001**

**I sneaked a peak at Jasper's rings. I approve, whole-heartedly, as the golden rings were engraved with the endless knot. Jasper, however, doesn't know, so I can only tell you, dear diary, that I love him more than earth combined with heaven. That whatever legends of the past will only amount to a third of the love I have for Jasper. My sweet, loving Jasper... My husband.**

**Well, not to get too sentimental, I found out that Melissa (she went to the US) had her little girl named Kae.**

I laugh. Of course she's sentimental, too sentimental for her own good. But at least she was my wife for a little bit, legally. I wish she could've experienced the wedding ceremony, the formalities of it.

*Just let me say that*

*I like that, I like that*

*Something's getting in the way*

**8/30/2001**

**I'm pregnant! I'm so happy! Jasper will be so excited!!!!**

No...

I freeze, and nearly drop the book. I pause right where I am on the sidewalk, staring at the cars zooming past me, numb to all but the one thought of her, and my – *our*- unborn child. Two lives. Who hadn't the autopsy revealed that? Why didn't she tell me?! I read, hoping, wondering....

**But, of course, I have to give Jasper MY own wedding present. I will tell him right after our official vows, have to give him a card or sing him a song.**

**I think, if it's a girl, I'll name her Jourdain, and for boy, I'd name him Mark. I'll tell him or her that I love him every day.**

*Something's getting in the way*

*I will try to find my place in the*

*Diary Of Jane*

I'm seeing her eyes, I'm seeing her running toward me, arms open, eyes smiling, the snow twinkling with her laughter, her words

I'm loving her, everything's darkening, but her image is as clear as the First Snowfall.

**1<sup>st</sup> Place – Short Story Category**  
**Grades 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>**  
**“Partonia 256, Saga 2: The Dark Eastern Forest”**  
**By**  
**Blake Beckworth-Wilkerson**

Partonia 256, Saga 2: The Dark Eastern Forest

Partonia 256, a planet light years away. Slightly larger than Earth, also supports complex life.

Perhaps the most difficult region to comprehend is the Dark Eastern Forests of the large continent known as Puligonia. These forests support a wide variety of massive plant life. Giant, tropical, tree-like ‘plants’ that literally grow up to the lavender skies. Like most tropical plants seen on Earth, the ones here support humongous, broad leaves to help photosynthesize as much light as they can bear from the binary star system (in which Partonia 256 orbits around). However, this extreme growth can (and will) greatly affect the ecosystem for the life below the canopy, and this is where our story will begin...

The issue with having hundreds of square miles with ‘trees’ that grow a thousand meters tall is the fact that all life on the understory lives in near complete darkness! (This is because these ‘trees’ block out any and all sunlight, before it even has a chance to reach the understory). So, the organisms here must adapt to such harsh conditions.

The first, and most abundant creatures that live here are called Lamporodon. The average Lamporodon doesn’t grow much over a meter tall (from its stubby legs to the top of its ‘pinhead’). It’s a quadruped, dark navy blue in color with a small, stubby tail. Lamporodon (like all other creatures of this alien forest) have extremely sensitive eyes, even a small, human-made flashlight can permanently blind these strange beasts. With no sunlight available, the Lamporodon must ‘create’ their own light.

Lamporodon live in small herds, eating a wide variety of algae, moss, and other things of that sort. When they eat this moss, the stomach digests most of the content – revealing millions of

bioluminescent microorganisms. The acids in the Lamporodon's digestive track are relatively weak and cannot digest these microorganisms. Instead, these harmless microorganisms are passed into the bloodstream.

Due to living in complete darkness, Lamporodon have very thin, transparent, navy skin. So with large amounts of bioluminescent organisms coursing through their veins, the Lamporodon always seem to generate a faint, lavender colored glow. Just bright enough for other herd members to recognize one another.

Usually a male will hold dominance over three or four females in which he can freely mate with. However, this makes male Lamporodon quite aggressive and territorial to other males. Occasionally the males will engage in stand-offs; these 'stand-offs' aren't usually violent, but instead focuses more on the intimidation aspect. The males will grunt and stamp their feet as they push blood into their foreheads and elephant-like ears (increasing the purple glow caused by the microorganisms in their blood and organs.

Eventually one of the males will back down and the situation will calm, and the herd will once again be peaceful – the neighbors are another matter...

Above the Lamporodon herd, in the foliage, lives an obnoxious clan of Mastmania. The Mastmania do not fear the Lamporodon and vice versa. But the small, lightweight Mastmania bear a striking resemblance to primates found on planet Earth.

And just like primates, Mastmania are quite social with one another. They use their disturbingly large eyes to absorb as much of the limited amount of light as possible, which is barely enough to where Mastmania can still locate one another and enough so they can find the fruits they eat. These fruits are encased in a thin membrane of bioluminescent microorganisms, which give the fruits a dim red, orange, yellow, blue, or purple glow. These microorganisms are beneficial to both the fruits and the Mastmania. It helps the Mastmania to find the fruits to eat, which in turn helps the fruit spread their seeds (because after eating the fruit, the Mastmania will later defecate the undigested seeds out elsewhere in the forest).

Unlike the Lamporodon, the Mastmania have fur and hair covering their bodies. So the bioluminescent content is not visible externally. Instead the Mastmania will use their hands and feet to wipe off the material from the red colored fruits and then wipe the content onto the tips of their tails. (For some unknown reason, the Mastmania will only put red bioluminescence on the tails). Having the tips of their tails glow will help other Mastmania locate the other clan members in times of danger...

Another, relatively unknown creature of the Bioluminescent Forests are the Zwie birds. These tiny "birds" are covered with lime green feathers, but what's so unique about these little animals? Well for one, they have not one, but two pairs of wings. These 4 wings greatly improve speed, acceleration, and agility during flight (which is very much needed for a hand-sized 'bird' that flies at 50mph in a dark and highly dense forest).

Zwie birds have keen vision, but that only helps so much; especially when they're in a forest that's near complete darkness... however, they still rely on their illuminated surroundings for safe and proper flight.

So it seems all the organisms in this ecosystem rely completely on bioluminescent microorganisms for their survival.

Nearby, on the banks of a still moving river is the currently peaceful Lamporodon herd with the surprisingly quiet Mastmania clan enjoying a cool refreshment...

...No more than a couple of meters away lurks the top predator of this region. And it too relies on the bioluminescent organisms for survival, however, not in the way you might expect. For an ambush predator, camouflage is key, so for this three meter long Fabrosuchus has no need to be self luminous (for this would give away his location). So thus, Fabrosuchus is one of the only creatures in this ecosystem that isn't luminous. To be an effective killer it is armed with a large, vertically flattened tail to give it sudden bursts of acceleration while in the water. On land, Fabrosuchus uses its surprising long legs to spring at high speeds along land. Along its back, Fabrosuchus is armed with small osteoderms for

defense. In short, Fabrosuchus is quite similar to Earth's crocodilians; although four pairs of lens-covered, light sensitive, purple eyes is a clear difference.

Each one of the 8 eyes works independently with each eye processing dozens of images (similar to an Earth House Fly). As soon as a single droplet of light comes into view, Fabrosuchus will be inspecting the scene. Luckily for this predator a whole herd of illuminated Lamporodon and Mastmania are currently at the river's edge.

Carelessly, a juvenile Mastmania moves closer to the water, ignoring the signs of potential danger, foolishly the young creature allows its tail to come to cover over the water...

*SHRIEK!*

Suddenly all the Mast Mania turn tail and run. And the Lamporodon herd quickly huddles up for protection.

The limp body of the Mastmania dangles, lifelessly from the bloody jaws of its attacker. With a low growl, the Fabrosuchus quickly turns round and dives back into the black river – with the young Mastmania locked away in its jaws.

These Bioluminescent Forests, though quite extraterrestrial will one day disappear from Partonia 256... In the future the climate of the planet will drastically change. This change will be the causes of a global ice age that will test all forms of life on Partonia 256 for the next few thousand years....

**1<sup>st</sup> Place – Short Story Category**  
**Adult**  
**“Musings on a Nighttime Drive”**  
**By**  
**Fred Zhu**

Musings on a Nighttime Drive

Dark has already fallen when I back my 2003 Honda Civic out of the driveway and onto the street where I've lived almost all my life. I shift into first gear and ease off the clutch, stepping on the accelerator at the same time. The engine rises from a purr to a roar, and as the gears bite, the car starts moving forward. I slide down to the stop sign at the end of Fawn Court. In the rear view mirror, Christmas lights blink from the house on the cul-de-sac at the opposite end. A nice old lady lives there - Mary, I think, is her name. I briefly wonder how she's been doing, then turn right.

Traveling down Fall Creek Drive for the ten-thousandth time in my life, I pass Travis Hammack's house, his Mustang parked on the curb outside. He must have driven back from UT a couple of days ago. I only saw him once this semester, one afternoon while walking on 21st Street after a semi-date with a girl whom I didn't know was a Republican until after I'd sat down with my coffee. It didn't go horribly, but I said goodbye to her at Jester, and never saw her again - an unspoken but mutual agreement, perhaps. A handful of houses have Christmas decorations up, but not as many like in years past, it seems. The inflatable Santas, wire reindeer, and candy cane ornaments that I remember from childhood aren't there anymore. Maybe everyone's just gotten lazy. Then again, it also used to snow during the holidays in Texas - that too is a distant memory. Truth be told, it doesn't feel much like Christmas season at all. As I pull up to the stop sign that connects Fall Creek to Silver Sage, it suddenly occurs to me that this is my very first winter as an adult.

A minute and three right turns later, I'm on Haltom Road. Hitting forty, I change to fourth gear and cruise down the neighborhoods towards Haltom High School. As I cross the bridge, with the creek

below and Buffalo Ridge Park and so many childhood memories to the right shrouded in darkness, I'm left to remember my four year tenure at that three-story citadel up ahead. Mr. Dilks, Mr. Hofford, Ms. Finch, Mr. Belland, Bendersky, Brink, Mrs. Bradley, Mrs. Ayala, Mr. Vandenburg, Mr. Newton, and a couple more . . . half of them gone, half still there. All of it seems so long ago. One year ago, back home after my first semester of college, already seems like a lifetime apart. Two years back, the winter break when Raul, Bongani, and I went storm drain exploring and geocaching with a certain ex-friend of ours, is like some past existence, some dream that I only vaguely remember. If only I knew even half the things then as I do now . . . by God, how I wish I could have those years back. Such is nostalgia, those rose-colored glasses through which you see a bygone time, a simpler time. That's not to say I don't remember the bad parts. The asshole administrators, the shitty lunches, those "dates" that were never so, anxiety, my awful haircut, those baggy clothes I wouldn't be caught dead in these days . . .

Of course, I remember the good too - Academic Quiz League, playing with the band at halftime on Friday nights under those massive stadium lights, hanging out and chatting after school in Mrs. Bradley's room, SkillsUSA in Corpus Christi senior year, the friendships I made with people I'll love and trust forever. Some of these friendships came down with me to Austin; others went their separate ways after graduation. Which reminds me - this break, while everyone's in town, I really should catch up with some of the latter.

The road runs across the front of the school, and I turn my head to glimpse into the front doors I walked through for four years. I pass the band hall last, where I spent so many afternoons for the first three. A lone light shines in the back of the instrument storage area, casting an eerie glow down the long hallway. It's strange seeing it so empty. For some reason, I half-expect to see Mr. Hull's black SUV in the parking lot just outside - of course, it isn't. He might be a band director, but in the end he's only human.

The water tower looms closer as I wind up the hill towards the bridge that straddles Loop 820. The buffalo they painted on its side (Haltom High's mascot) a few years ago still looks as ugly as ever.

The lights at the bridge are green, so I accelerate across, paying little mind to the cars on the highway just below, faintly remembering that a motel used to stand on the grass lot at the far end.

Past the threshold, I've now entered what I consider to be the "old" part of town. Neighborhoods of Baby Boomer houses and fewer streetlights in between. The water tower recedes in the rear view mirror. The street my mom used to turn onto to drop me off during middle school has been replaced by a cul-de-sac, cut off from the main one I'm on. Like the buffalo on the water tower, I think it was a retarded decision.

Haltom Road curves a little after crossing the railroad tracks. To the right is the library, closed but still lit. Often, I imagine a little kid stowing away in there past closing time, spending the entire night roaming the shelves and picking out books. Sometimes, that kid is me. I've told myself I'll write a story about that some day, but I never do. I still go often when I'm home for the break, a relic of childhood, and one I always undertake alone.

Just beyond the library in the darkness is North Oaks Middle School. I've only been inside there twice since finishing eighth grade - once sophomore year of high school for the band's winter concert, the other time just last week to reacquaint with some old teachers. Hard to believe my little sister goes there now. It was an interesting time, for better or worse.

For the next five or so miles, Haltom Road runs perfectly straight. I remember where I am by the streets that intersect it, by the handful of landmarks I know along the way. For the most part, it's just houses. Still cruising at forty, I pass Mack Road, where Raul lives. From impromptu barbecues to waking up with the most God-awful hangover last New Year's there, lots of memories have been made at his house. Then comes Stanley Keller, where Bongani lived before we graduated and came down to Austin and his family decided to move to North Dakota. Farther down at the intersection with Broadway Avenue, I almost pull into the drive-through for Lisa's Chicken (their gizzards are sublime), but decide against it at the last second.

The road is empty save for myself, quiet but for the gentle hum of my engine. Here and there a window is lit in the old houses on either side, and I muse on what secret worlds exist within, on the lives of people I'll never know. Between the glow of the dashboard and my headlights, all is peaceful in the world. I take the tally of my mental road map, the one that has gradually grown in the two years since I got my driver's license. Next is 28th Street, then Belknap. Beach Street is to the right; Denton Highway on the left. I recall where so-and-so lives, this-and-that place I've been to. Kenny lives over there, the Church's Chicken that Comer hated working at is that way too, and farther still that way is My Lan . . .

My mind wanders from location to location, to all the memories attached to them, not just on Haltom Road, but across all of Fort Worth that I've acquired over the course of growing up here. Then I go further, thinking to Austin and everything I've come to associate with that name . . . UT, college parties, speaking face-to-face with professors with Wikipedia articles about them, the best friends I've ever had, and more yet to come. My mind's eye travels even further, unbounded by time and space, to the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California my ninth grade year, visiting the East Coast as a rising senior, all the times I've gone back to China over the years, and more. That's what I like about these solitary nighttime drives, left alone with all your thoughts. There's no telling where your mind will go.

Crossing Belknap, I realize that I'm quickly approaching the southernmost part of my mental road map - Highway 121. Beyond is the frontier, and the whole rest of the world along with it. Without a second thought, I accelerate onto the ramp and into fifth gear. The lights of downtown Fort Worth shine up ahead. A few minutes later as I near the interchange with I-35, I'm faced with two choices. One of them will lead me north, back towards my childhood, familiarity, and everything in between. The other will take me south, deep into the frontier, downtown Fort Worth, and beyond . . . if I keep going for two hours, I'll reach Waco. Another hour, and the lights of Austin, my new home, will be shining down upon me.

On any other night, I would have gone back the way I'd come. But for whatever reason, tonight I don't feel so inclined. I merge onto the interstate and begin the long drive south to Austin, where as always the new life I've found there will welcome me back with open arms.

\* \* \*

All is peaceful, not a care on my mind, flying at eighty miles per hour down the interstate stretching to infinity ahead. The stars twinkle above, peppered across the canopy of darkness. My thoughts accompany me into the long night, and for that I'm grateful. I truly am.

For between the cities, between the friends I've left behind and the friends that await on the other side, it's lonely driving alone.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Place – Short Story Category

Adult

*“Emily”*

By

Taylor Scott

Emily

A sharp push against her hip and her head turns quick – just fast enough to briefly glimpse at the source then they’re gone. A phone rings in her palm jolting her attention away – a handoff. Reflexively her thumb slides across the screen. The words pour out before she can register what’s happening. Commands. The speaker wants her to act. From the urgency in the grating voice she needs to act quickly. Her brain races to catch up. *I have to focus*, she tells herself trying to catch her breath and tune out the thundering of her heartbeat. *It all comes down to this. Focus!* The phone call ends as abruptly as it began. Suddenly her panic chokes her. Thoughts race through her mind – *What did they say? Where was I suppose to go? A gate? Which one?* She felt the tension of time working against her.

Suddenly she took in the room. Turning in circles she tried to fix her eyes on just one point – *Focus! Which direction?!* - but there was so much going on around her. People scurrying from one place to another. Hundreds of people in every direction. All moving. Slow or fast. Moving. The clock pressing her for action. Her heart thumping so hard against the back of her eardrums it seemed almost certain they would burst open at any moment. Tick-tock. *How much time has passed since that voice had barked orders at me? FOCUS!! Deep breath. One thing at a time...* She closed her eyes. She imagined the black phone held to her ear. That voice echoed in her mind. *What’s the first thing I heard? Move to the East gate.* Her legs, after what seemed like hours of slow spinning in a hurricane of activity, finally set in motion. Sprinting hurriedly across the marble floor, revolving herself with athletic agility through the herd of people. All those mornings of five a.m. sessions on the treadmill seemed worth it now, just to get through this.

Arriving at her destination seemed anti-climatic as she drew in her surroundings. There were only an elderly gate agent and a woman with a baby before her. *This can't be right. But he said East gate I remember that clearly.* She darted her eyes to the LED screen above the agent's desk – "EAST GATE". *I'm in the right place, but where is* – something brushed across the exposed top flesh of her feet. Startled she jumped back and screamed. With the confused eyes of strangers trained on her, she attempted to pull herself together. *Look normal. Don't blow this now.* On the ground before her was a red duffel bag. She seized hold of the thick white straps and drew it close. It was so light. Perhaps even empty. With only a second of hesitation she yanked open the zipper and peered inside. It was empty. *What is this? Is this some kind of joke?* Anxiously her trembling hands pried the smooth nylon interior of the bag. On the right-end her finger felt a slight catch. Turning it inside-out she noticed raised stitching in a different color than the rest. Pressing firmly against it informed her there was something inside. With her nails and then her teeth she worked the stitching until it gave way to the contents. *A SIM card.* Her hands were shaking so furiously it seemed impossible to place the tiny chip into the slot on the phone.

Seconds later she was viewing pictures. Photographs of a sign – "Annie's Souvenirs", a stuffed animal – a pelican with a fish tail protruding from its gullet, and what appeared to be an Annie's Souvenirs employee – a haggard looking woman with despondent eyes. *Games!! I finally get to this point – this close to the end – and still they want to play games?? When will it end?!* Just beneath her panic lie the rage only a mother in this situation is capable of feeling. It began to boil her from the inside out. A new fuel pumped through her veins. Callously she threw the duffel across her neck and set out for the gift shop. Time flew by now. Less than a minute had passed and already she was hurriedly sifting through stuffed animals under the white bulbs of light Annie had strung across the faux grass ceiling of her shop. The acrid smell of coconut and lime assaulting her senses was tempered only by the lack of walls at the Northern and Eastern sections of the perimeter. A happy song of ukuleles poured from somewhere up above, mixing with the hum of everyday commotion carrying on just outside Annie's shop.

What had to be at least fifty different variations of stuffed sunny vacation memorabilia and not a single bird, let alone pelican. Marching assiduously to the desk she flicked her thumb across the phone's screen searching for the pelican picture. She was so distracted it wasn't until she put the phone on the counter and began speaking to the attendant that she realized she was face-to-face with the haggard woman on her phone. Stunned she lost her words. She searched the woman's face for any sign of recognition. Blank. It occurs to her that despondent was probably ten years ago. This woman was completely apathetic. Putting the picture of the stuffed pelican at eye level she barely got out the words *Do you have* – before the woman turned on her heel and disappeared behind the thick faded green velvet curtain that hung behind her. When she reappeared she had in her hand the pelican. The woman slid it purposefully across the counter. Their eyes met again. Somehow the vacancy behind the woman's expression sent a message this time. Understanding. Maybe even empathy. Perhaps this woman knew more than she had originally thought.

Carefully she picked up the stuffed bird. The haggard woman disappeared behind the green velvet without a single word. *Its heavy*, she thought, turning her attention back to the pelican. *Much too heavy for a stuffed animal. There must be something inside.* Turning it over in search of a zipper or other opening, the tag hanging from the foot caught her eye. It was folded in half and held together at the open seam with a single sliver of gold tape, sparsely larger than a staple. She could make out just enough of the inside of the tag to know it was a handwritten message. The trill of the cell phone alerting her of a text broke through the silence of her thoughts. Rattled, she almost dropped the pelican, but recovered and hurriedly snatched the cell phone from the counter. The text read: OPEN IT. Realizing "it" was the tag she placed the pelican on the counter and ripped open the paper card. The handwriting reminded her of her grandmother's. Sprawled letters with short close loops and long tails. The instructions enclosed were to place the pelican in the duffel and take it to the E-train leaving at 4:30 p.m. Place the duffel on the blue bench next to the newsstand and walk North. Pressing the button on the side of her phone, she read the time – four o'clock!

Racing through the crowd she opted to take a taxi from the pool waiting at the front entrance over finding her own car in the too distant parking garage. Promising the driver an extra sixty dollars to rush sent them speeding through intersections and arriving at the side entrance of the train station at 4:22 p.m. She threw a wad of bills, all that she had, in the driver's direction and bolted from the taxi. More crowds to push through as she made her way to the E-train platform. The familiar tinge of sweat, old wood, and industrial cleaning solution filled her with emotion as she remembered the many trips she made to this train station with her late husband. Seeing him off on more business trips than she could count. Missing him the moment the train whistled and the wheels began to chug. That all felt like a time so distant it could have happened in another life. *If only Steven had been here now to take this on with me. He had always been so good under pressure. He would have known the right thing to say to assure me all these months that we would get her back. That she was ok. That she was alive... Focus Heather! This is almost over!*

Panting for breath she charged through the glass doors of the station and stepped onto the E-train platform. Looking in either direction she spotted the newsstand and then the blue bench. There was a man sitting on it reading a newspaper. *Is he one of them? Should I leave it here even with him there? What if he's not with them and he steals it or something?* She checks the time – 4:29. She didn't have time to worry about that man. She dropped the red duffle on the far end of the bench as though the contents might explode at any moment and rushed off, heading North.

Without another directive she felt lost for a moment. *How far do I walk? Who will tell me where to get my daughter?* Each step felt heavy. It had been three-hundred-and-seventy-four days since Emily went missing. Each day worse with worry than the one before it. She had pushed aside her exhaustion by channeling her anger. Her rage. Other than the love she felt for her daughter and the grief she felt for Steven, her rage was all that consumed her. It fed her everyday as she dug deeper and deeper for any reason not to give up all hope. But, now, walking down the platform she just felt empty. She knew this was the end. They had always been so clear in their directions, and there was always a new direction

given. Now, nothing. After all they had done to her. All they had taken from her. They had gotten what they wanted.

It took an eternity to drift to the front entrance. It took even longer to walk the twelve blocks home. Her mind was all-at-once racing with images and thoughts of the family she once had and then blank. She had no will left in her to try to fight the tears dripping across her face. Fleeting moments of her rage would consume her then die out with despair. She tried to yell at God, but struggled to gather her strength. Other than her overwhelming desire to fall to pieces in her daughter's bed, to smell the last of Emily's strawberry-scented shampoo on her pillow, and let herself remember her - there was nothing preventing her from collapsing on the sidewalk where she stood and praying for the end to come. She entered the lobby of her building. The cool air inside made her realize she was sweating. Without looking at anybody she boarded the elevator and pressed the button for her floor. The jolt of the car made her stumble backwards. Holding the chair rail for strength she tried to even her breath. The car came to a stop and she begrudgingly drug her feet across the carpet to the doors.

When the doors opened a surge of energy struck her. She leapt forward from the car and paused. Staring straight ahead at long hall before her. Shock paralyzed her. Unable to will herself into motion, she crumbled, falling to her knees. Her hands went to her mascara-stained cheeks as though she needed to feel something real. She needed to know this wasn't a dream. As the squealing blonde figure at the end of the hall skipped nearer to her the reality began to sink in. Not able to utter words she simply let out a guttural scream and threw her arms out wide. Like a wounded and battered warrior finally killing the last of his enemies, she knew it was finally over. Sobbing with joy like the moment she finally got to hold Emily after eighteen hours of birth, she caught her daughter in her arms and held her close, unable to let go. They sat clinging to one another weeping. Together. Home.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Place – Short Story Category

Adult

“Ira”

By

Melanie Jones

#### Ira

I watched the snow flutter down and drown in the stained ice and murky water puddles around blue and yellow tarps draped over sticks stabbed into the ground. There were sleeping bags rolled out, some inhabiting the scraggly faces of the homeless- some old and some young. My home was the one nested in the corner near the heavily needled branches of the biggest tree in the community of homes in the small woods bordering a suburban neighborhood in Trenton, New Jersey. The wind was blowing, and my ginger hair and tarps were lifting and falling with the flow of the breeze. My nose was probably close to the shade of my hair, and my ears most likely blended into the side of my head.

“How is the lil’ un feelin’ today, Calla,” my neighbor Frankie asked while limping and, somehow, stomping at the same time. She was a robust older lady, with graying red hair, and though she looked quite mean (and could be if you got on her bad side), she had a heart of gold.

“She’s doin’ good. She sure is kickin’ it though, feels like my stomach is a drum.” I was seven months pregnant, and though I knew not what gender my baby was, I knew what I felt like it was. It felt like a girl; I don’t know what it was, if it was my motherly intuitions or just my gut feeling, but I *knew* it was a girl. I had already decided on her name, and though I couldn’t decorate her room, or give her the love of a big family, I could give her a beautiful name, a name that would always remind her to be watchful in life, but to have fun as well: Ira.

“That’s good. That means lil’ Ira is healthy. A strong baby,” Frankie vowed this with such vigor that she started leaning forward so much that I thought she might fall face first into the almost solid ice, but somehow she stayed standing.

“I s’pose so, that’s what I like to believe.”

“Well don’t stop. A’ight hun, I gotta run, but keep covered, even if ya go for a walk.”

“Okay, thanks Frankie, see ya tonight.”

The camp started humming with chitter and chatter of both passerby animals and my neighbors. Bottles started clinking, and I knew that it was time to start my daily walking. I was sixteen, and pregnant. I had been in love, though most doubt it. However, you can be in love at any age, and Elijah was my first. For everything. Elijah had been an eighteen year old street musician who could scrape by with his smile and husky singing voice, and though he didn’t have an apartment, or a job that made him wealthy, he was mine and I was his. Elijah would still be here if it wasn’t for bad luck; wrong place, wrong time. He went into the neighborhood Seven-Eleven to get a bottle of water, when a robber came in. Elijah tried to talk some sense into the robber, but failed and was shot. I was about two months pregnant, and since I hadn’t really begun to show, I hadn’t told Elijah yet; I was waiting for the perfect moment, and I kept getting more and more anxious— I should have told him as soon as I found out.

I got up off a cheap, plastic beach lounge that had become my bed, and hobbled up the slight hill that led to a street leading into the city. Taking a right, I walked into the beginning of town, and immediately noticed a crowd forming near a bent light-post; curious as to what was happening, I walked over and asked a person what was going on.

“The old lady was crossing the street when a speeder came racing down.” Old lady? Then it hit me, this was Frankie’s street, she would walk up and down picking up trash on the sidewalks.

“I’m afraid I can’t really see, can you tell me what she looks like? Is she okay?” I was trying not to be frantic and overbearing in the questioning but I had already started breathing heavily. Ira started kicking more, but it was more painful than ever, so I started rubbing my stomach in a soothing, circular manner while trying to calm my breathing.

“Okay, she has a rugged blue coat on, graying red hair...She’s probably a little shorter than five foot.” My hyperventilating sped up, it was Frankie. Frankie had helped me out on the streets since I was kicked out of my parents’ house two years ago. We had traveled from Baltimore to Trenton together, she had helped me survive this far in my pregnancy, had been so much more than my friend. Ira started beating harder, and then the overwhelming feeling of what can only be described as the ultimate bladder relief hit me.

“Oh my god,” I smacked the person next to me on the shoulder, “I think my water just broke.” I saw the panic rise quickly in the person’s eyes as the stranger looked down, gasped, fumbled for her phone, dialed 911, and helped me on to the curb. My breathing got heavier and I broke out into an intensifying sweat. A sharp, repetitive pain started pulsing in my lower back.

Too soon, I faded into the abyss.

          *His green eyes sparkled behind his long black eyelashes. He was playing a simple song on his untuned guitar and singing along in his deep, enchanting voice. I stood across the street, opposite of him, just hypnotised by the loud beating of my heart and the heat spreading up my neck to my face. He was beautiful. Suddenly, he looked up, and made eye contact with me. He put his index finger up into the air to tell me to wait. He stopped playing and slung his guitar*

*over his shoulder, he checked both ways on the street, and jogged across. He stopped in front of me, and looked down.*

*“Hi, I’m Elijah.” Elijah, beautiful.*

The loud rumble of an ambulance crashing over potholes made me slowly ascend out of the forced slumber. The affliction in my back had calmed down to echo, and the chrome cabinetry of the ambulance blinked into view. A loud, pain-filled scream filled my ears as it was released from my lungs from the realization of a blooming strain from my hips.

“Good! Tom, She’s up,” a petite brunette medic yelled over my screams. “Alright hon, you got this, just push.” I pushed, and pushed, and pushed. I pushed knowing I wouldn’t be able to raise this baby properly, and that I wouldn’t have the access to care for my two month premature child, but I wanted to try.

“We gotta lean her forward more, she’s not getting enough momentum by herself,” rushed someone from behind me, who I assumed must be Tom. Suddenly the gurney’s back was pushed forward, and I let out a louder scream and pushed as hard I possibly could.

A baby’s hello was screamed to the world, trapping us all in the noise as I bled onto the gurney.

I lost my touch with reality, and let my eyelids close as I fainted to sleep.

*A soft and tender touch embraced my hand, and as I turned to face the right a beautiful smile met my eyes. I looked up and saw him. I could have stayed here forever, with Elijah. Here, in the nook of our favorite tree looking at the stars, dreaming of the lives we would have soon, painting pictures with our minds of the house we would share one day, imagining the family we would grow to have and love.*

*“Calla, Calla, my beautiful Calla,” he whispered into my ear, “I love you Calla. Ira will love you, you will be a wonderful mother. I will always be there with you, never forget. I will be there until you find love again.”*

*“How did you know? I didn’t tell you about Ira,” Elijah flashed his sparkling smile. “Oh my God, Ira! I was in labor! In an ambulance! Oh my God, Frankie! Elijah, Frankie she...she...” I was hiccuping in mad hysteria.*

*“Shh....It’s okay, she’s fine. Frankie is fine...She is in a safe place, but you have to go raise our baby. I’m sorry I have to leave you again, Calla.”*

*“It’s okay, you will be there every step of the way and protect me, I know. I know. I will love and raise Ira to be a wonderful, beautiful angel just like her daddy was. I’ll tell her about all about you: your quirks, your smile, your love, your faith that every human had a good side. All of it.”*

*“I have to go now, bye Calla. I love you, Calla.”*

*“I love you too. Bye, Elijah,” I said, choking on my words.*

I climbed out of my mind and into a bright hospital light, with a whining baby in a fiberglass crib with wheels. She was swaddled in a pink blanket and a pink baby hat. I knew I had to raise her, work to live, and live for her. I had to live for Elijah.

There was a knock on the door, and an old nurse with black hair came in.

“How are you?” she asked, *lonely*.

“Can I hold my baby?” I asked back while stumbling through my words. She brought me my beautiful child, and I cradled her in my arms.

“What’s her name?”

“Ira, her name is Ira Mae.”

**1<sup>st</sup> Place – Poetry Category**

**Grades 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>**

***“Where the World Ends”***

**By**

**Ethan Isgitt**

Where the World Ends

As the sand and the wind whip my weathered face

My mind wanders back to another place

Where the heat and dryness are not everywhere

And my eyes did not burn from the dust in the air

Where the sun was no a furnace in the dead sky

A place where the birds now extinct still did fly

Where plants and trees were still rooted to the ground

Where animals once common could be found

But now the barren earth embraces death

As a dying world, a broken world, takes its last breath

Our home planet, now green with life no more

Was taken for granted by our ancestors before

But who does the blame falls on for the great tragedy?

Could it be the frivolous, wasteful humanity?

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place – Poetry Category**

**Grades 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>**

***“A Second Home”***

**By**

**Lydia Wells**

A Second Home

You say I'm full of laziness

But here is where I love to be

You say I'm a good student

And here is where I love to be

You say, you say, you say,

But I don't hate your homework;

I don't hate the essays, I don't I don't.

The clamor of many students

Filling up the hallways-

You forget they are all my family.

You say I have the best papers, the best grades,

But at home I am nothing.

Here, I have a second home

So please let me stay here,

Here, I love to be.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place – Poetry Category**  
**Grades 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>**  
***“Victory in the Face of Fear”***  
**By**  
**Taylor Key**

Victory in the Face of Fear

The whistle blows and the girls get ready,  
The ball comes over fast and steady.  
The players yell and pass the ball,  
The setter sets long and tall,  
As the hitter comes up as strong as a wall.  
The libero sees our hitter’s place,  
And moves to be at her base.  
The ball comes down with a snap  
And finds its way in the gap.  
Scoring the point, victory is near,  
The team gets together and does a cheer.  
Serve the ball and have no fear.

**1<sup>st</sup> Place – Poetry Category**  
**Grades 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>**  
***“Do You Still Love Me”***  
**By**  
**Kaylee Lathrop**

Do You Still Love Me?

Do you remember holding something so small in your arms?  
Something that you helped to create  
A tear in your eye, while I cried for the first time  
That’s when I was the only that mattered to you  
“A bundle of joy”, mother would say  
As I got older things seemed to change  
Even more now that I started sports  
You only see me as a trophy  
Nothing more; and object for show  
To tell you friends about  
But now you’re disappointed  
I’m no longer shiny,  
I’m dull, collecting dust  
I’m not your pride and joy  
Your heart turned cold  
Will I ever get to be the one you cared for?  
Everything that I’ve doesn’t make you happy  
All you see is a mistake  
Something you can’t fix  
No matter how much you yell  
I tried so hard to get your approval  
But all you did was look at my flaws

I get that I'll never be the light in your eye

I just wanted to make you proud

But I can't even do that

And I just have one question

Do you still love me?

Even though I have failed you countless times

I just want to know

Do you still love me?

**1<sup>st</sup> Place – Poetry Category  
Adult**

***“For My Mother’s Mother, Whose Strength Only Natural Forces Could  
Match”***

**By  
Kelly Alana Swift**

For My Mother’s Mother, Whose Strength Only Natural Forces Could Match

You are done, you declare  
reclining like a helpless thing, hemming by the fine  
metal pins to this cramped fluorescent room,  
spitting piss and vinegar at plastic tubes  
tentacling into your thin, weathered husk. You’re done  
you vow, done with all of this, deaf at nurses  
instructing you how to avert the hooded  
inevitable sitting with us as we chatter all day,  
laughing about our lives as sane people.

Your broad smile is ours.  
Your mortality is hers  
and mine.

Tornado alley isn’t soft on aging goats  
whose decades amiable coastal breezes  
caressed; your stubbornness buckled  
under your bad knee and here you sulk,  
swinging counterpunches, done with wind,  
done with caned putters to the morning paper,  
done with this restless summer sky

denying you respite. On the complacent rise  
of the dawn of your last breath, the same  
glimmering copper sun will wheel up  
a Garden Grove sidewalk, uncompromising nas oyou,  
to Oklahoma across the ferocious, gusting planet –

but you're not finished yet.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place – Poetry Category**  
**Adult**  
***“Like Colors”***  
**By**  
**Kelly Alana Swift**

Like Colors

Since before corrosive lye scrunched the first  
soiled garments, our souls were meant  
to converge here  
in this rattling concrete laundromat  
perspiring lethargy at the height of summer  
or hardening our bones in bottomless winter.

You, oldest and dearest friend, embrace  
like warm fabrics tumbling from the dryer,  
cozy on my cheek. You are abrupt clouds  
of fragrant detergent, the spin cycle  
rolling and rolling as we watch.

What we talk about doesn't matter.  
Your rough hands fold efficiently; your airy eyes  
brighten when I laugh. Before the first  
load of laundry and before time, I was meant  
to fasten to you, slow as the earth whirled, and admire  
your static cling to my senses,  
like colors seeping to fresh sheets.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place – Poetry Category**  
**Adult**  
***“The Write Way”***  
**By**  
**Beverly Caldwell**

The Write Way

is seldom easy.

There are many obstacles

along the path,

many sweet diversions.

You will know you are headed

in the write direction

when all your mental goings-forth

feel like comings-home,

when you've tried

the busy thoroughfares of life

but prefer the traffic of words

in quiet neighborhoods of thought.

That's how you'll know:

what's write is right,

and you are the writeful heir

to the little-known

but shining kingdom

of poems.