

## **2008 Writing Contest Essays**

Writing Contest Essay Archives, Centralia College – <http://www.centralia.edu/academics/writingcenter/>

## **2008 Essay Contest**

By Amanda Boyce

Three English 101 students were recognized June 7 for their winning essays in last year's essay writing contest.

Alexis Austin won the \$150 first place prize, Karen Lininger won \$100 for second place and Levi Althausen won \$50 for third place.

Austin, 19, Chehalis, wrote her winning essay for Don Foran's English class. The assignment was an exercise in observation and inference.

"I asked my students to capture one or two people in such a way that the reader gains appreciation for the writer's inference," said Foran.

Austin's essay was about a former schoolmate and her "joie de vivre" or "flair for life" that she had and still has.

It recapitulated how she acted at the various stages of life, said Foran.

Austin loves to write and was happy to receive the honor.

"Writing is a perfect way to express myself," said Austin. "It's very relaxing."

Lininger, 59, from the Capital Forest area, started her essay as a simple writing assignment in Susanne Weil's English class.

The students were to choose a picture from the media and write their observations. It was an exercise in critical thinking, observation of detail and inference,

said Weil. It combined observation and narration to get the students to think outside the box.

“I offered a creative alternative,” said Weil. “The students could write a story about what they saw.”

Lininger wrote about a painting of a mother and child at the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial Wall. The picture shows a soldier in the wall reaching out to them.

She chose to look from the perspective of the wall and describe how it must feel seeing all those visitors looking for their loved ones and carrying the weight of all those deaths, said Lininger.

“I have been writing all my life,” she said. “But this is the first time I have won a writing contest.”

Althausen, 21, Onalaska, has been attending the college for two years and, like Austin, wrote his essay for Foran’s English class.

His essay was about his brother coming home from military service. He compared the difference between being a boy and becoming a man.

“It makes me happy to receive this award,” said Althausen. “I definitely didn’t expect it.”

The awards recognize English students for their hard work.

“It’s important that we nurture the creative side of our student body,” said Doris Wood, writing contest coordinator and English Department chair.

The contest has grown rapidly since it started in spring of 1989.

Thirty students entered the contest.

The judges were Newt Stremple, publicist for Beyond Parallax; Joanie Meister, coordinator for the Work First Office; and Judith Metcalf, faculty librarian.

For more information about this last year's writing contest contact Wood in Kemp 111C, at ext. 319 or by e-mail at [dwood@centralia.ctc.edu](mailto:dwood@centralia.ctc.edu)

## A Beautiful Soul

by Alexis Austin

### First place

We sit on the stone steps, our feet shoved against the cement sidewalk of the boardwalk. The wind bites at us, the chill piercing our clothes and leaving places of numbness on our skin. She is lost in the ocean, eyes the color of thunderclouds watching the sun shift behind the horizon. Her fingers are exposed; she wears finger-less gloves. She likes to be able to feel things like the texture of the steps we sit on and the smooth wrapping over the cigarettes she thinks I don't know about. She smells of the lotion she put on in the car; the vanilla has begun to stain her skin with the scent of her house.

Her hair is a bright magenta; she dyes it every other week to hide the brown that reminds her she is her mother's daughter. I remember her hair being a mousy brown in middle school, but as soon as people started telling her how she had her mother's eyes and her mother's cheekbones she went out and bought a box of purple dye; the next day her hair was the color of eggplant.

She looks tired; her life has been going too fast for so long that she has forgotten how to sleep. She writes in her journal at two in the morning; every entry is a set of lyrics followed by ramblings that pour from her fingertips on the keyboard. She doesn't sleep anymore, she's forgotten how.

Life did slow down eventually. School stopped and we were set free to be reckless seventeen year olds. Our road trip was short, a jaunt down the coast to Seaside in a rickety car named Bertha. We would hold our breath when we stopped on the steep streets of Astoria. Her fingers would tighten on the wheel and turn a ghastly white; she

was sure the car would stop running and simply slide back down the street to dump us in the bitter salt water.

There are people in the world that have an aura of being poetic; there is a feeling of romanticism when you walk past them, a thought of awareness when they speak. She has that. Her voice is strong and clear when she finds something that arouses passion inside of her. She walks with direct and steady movements, her feet pounding into the ground with every step she takes. She knows what the world expects of teenagers; she walks to shatter that stereotype under her heel.

The wind is blowing harder now; her hair moves around as much as it can at only an inch long. We stopped on the way here to get our split-ends trimmed at the local salon and she told them to take it all. “I just want an inch or so left, just enough to show the color off a bit,” she told them as she sat in the chair. If her hair grows too long it goes into soft curls. She hates how it makes her look four years younger. She refuses to look delicate and soft; to her the curls seem to shout to the world that she is fragile, ready to break if you let her down too fast.

She has goose bumps on her skin. She left her jacket in the car, so sure that she would stay warm enough with the tee shirt she wore down here. Her skin looks more pink than it should and she shivers after a large gust of air races past us. I shift closer to her and wrap a blanket over her shoulders. Her smile is perfect from years of braces; she hated the complex wires and bands and was glad when they took them off just a few months after starting at our school. She aged nearly two years without the shimmer of metal between her lips. The look in her eyes when she came to school the next morning told us something had changed inside of her; she felt more graceful, more elegant.

The sunset has left a collage of pinks and oranges on the horizon; the last bit of color in the sky is a rich blue, the color of the ocean where light barely survives. I glance over at her again, expecting her to still be staring at the place where the sun has disappeared. Instead, she is looking at me, her lips cracking from the winter air, her eyes squinting at the edges as she smiles. “Don’t concentrate so hard on the world,” she says as she runs a hand listlessly through her hair. “Just relax and enjoy the ride.”

## Daddy's Girl

By Karen Lininger

### Second Place

I am a shadow, a wisp of a cloud, a memory, an image not yet seen, yet I can see that which is before me and around me. I am a part of something cold, something solid and unmoving. Yet, I am something breathing and alive. I am from the past and yet a part of the future. I still have the emotions formed deep within me from all those who I am. I was created in 1982 to memorialize those who had died, fighting in a war so far away. The ever-present sense of sadness that surrounds me and touches me from every angle, I have felt them all, for I am The Wall.

A woman – a wife – a lover – a companion – a widow now comes before me. A daughter – a child – a part of someone's genetic life, created from the bond of love, is with her. They kneel, their reflections hinted in the glossy surface of my ebony granite standing stoically before them, blending and melting within the blackness of the granite, disappearing and reappearing with their movements.

Names, I see names. Rows and rows of names etched boldly into the glossy granite. Names that belong to loved ones, fathers, sons, fiancés, friends, comrades, and those who were no more than a moment's passing of time. Yet, these names stand out, as if calling to those passing by, "remember me."

The woman and child kneel slowly; their hands reach out to touch with reverence the cold glossy wall before them. Their hands, little by little, move down the names and then pause, moving no further. The little girl's fingers slowly begin to trace the letters of the name before her. Her tiny fingers easily fit into the grooves made by an artist's chisel,

as she carefully traced each letter feeling every grain and groove that made up that name. Tears stain the cheeks of both, as they cry quietly, privately.

Suddenly, a form, an image, a shadow becomes visible within my shimmering granite. It kneels with a sigh before the woman and child. Hesitantly the shadowy form reaches a hand forward to touch the hand of the woman. As its hand touches the woman's hand, it becomes clear it is a soldier. His uniform shows the rigors of war: torn and tattered, moldy and mildewy, stained with sweat and blood. His cammoed face blends in with the shadowed and mottled color of the wall, yet I can see the tears of resignation on his cheeks.

The void between life and death was being breeched there before my eyes, as I watched in silence; the vision of a family parted by war. I could sense the feelings of the wife, now a widow, as she longed to touch her beloved husband and to feel his touch once again. I could also sense the deep sensation of loss that the young girl felt, as she took a small piece of paper from her pocket and laid it upon the wall. With a pencil, she began to slowly sweep back and forth across the paper and gradually the name etched into the wall began to appear upon the paper. It was as if putting that name upon the paper would help her to bring her Daddy home with her.

A soft breeze rustled the hair of both woman and child, as if a hand had reached out to touch them lovingly. The day around them was soft and silent, as large cumulus clouds moved gracefully across the opaque blue sky. The sun's rays warmed their backs; but it did not seem to warm the dark granite beneath their hands.

The soldier's look was intent upon his wife and daughter, even though the shells of war burst violently behind him, their bright and iridescent colors causing the reflective

shadows from the day outside to take on the hues of a sunset. His eyes showed clearly his love for his family he had had to leave behind when his County had called him. He had meant to come home, truly he had; but in life's scheme of things it had something different in store for him. The promise he had made to them, he had not been able to keep.

I feel other soldiers, sailors, marines, and fast movers moving about me, watching and keeping watch as the soldier kneels with his family. I could hear the restless sounds of their boots upon the earth hear the rattle of weapons carried and their hushed breathing. I knew how each wished that it was him kneeling with his own loved ones, even if it would be for but a short while. I could sense their longing and their resolution to the fate that kept them here. I felt the heartache from within and from without, I feel the tears and wept with them.

## A Man That Looks Familiar

By Levi Althaus

### Third Place

As the truck rumbles and jolts down the road I feel the seat belt loose across my neck. It's the beginning of my sophomore year and I waited all summer for my growth spurt to come, but alas, I am probably the smallest kid in my class. When I look in the side view mirror at my reflection I see a skinny boy with messy brown hair who is wearing hand-me-down clothes so big it is almost comical. I wonder at the ignorance of my parents believing that I could fit into clothes that my brother once wore, as if I could fill my brother's mold.

Realizing that I am too small a boy to fill the seat, I stare at the man that is next to me. He has short, neat hair atop a strong, serious face. It almost makes him look as if he is clenching his jaw. His pants have that neat crease in the middle that must have taken hours to create. His shirt is wrinkle free, tucked in and just the right size to show that he could snap my neck like a twig (because it pretty much is a twig). All in all, he appears to be everything that I am not.

Sitting in the truck, I feel uncomfortable not knowing this man that is driving me to... I don't know where. I look at him hoping that he will acknowledge my presence but he always looks at the road ahead of him. He doesn't look to the side, even to see me. He is scared that if he doesn't keep his eyes on the road ahead he will see the past. As he drives I wait for him to ask me questions about my life or even to talk about his life. But he says nothing and wonders why the strange boy next to him is staring.

He prefers the silence. The silence is where he hides his war stories and the scars of the past. It's this silence that makes him a man. It's this silence that makes me a child. I can't handle not knowing what lies in the silence so I reach for the radio knob to drown it out. But all I hear is Kenny Chesney singing songs of women I am too young to know and drinks I am too small to handle. I turn the knob back to "off."

Once again in the silence I feel awkward and begin to fidget. I blush when I hear myself begin to snicker. I laugh when I feel uncomfortable and he knows this. He hears me laughing and looks at me with the confused look that someone gives another when he is being waved at by someone he doesn't know. But I know the truth now.

He has forgotten. He has forgotten the many nights of our childhood spent pondering whether or not there are aliens in the stars above. He has forgotten the box forts and wrestling matches. He has forgotten the sleeping bags sliding down stairs, the rope swings, gun fights and the half built tree forts. He has forgotten all of the nights of giggling until Christmas morning.

He is stern, silent and without emotion. He is a Marine, part of the elite. One of the men that has a stick jammed so far up his butt that he has no time to remember the past. But he is my brother; at least he looked at me.

I turn my head to the road that is ahead of me. I have agreed to leave the boy I once knew in the past, just as he has done. Now I will become friends with a man that looks familiar.

## **2007 Writing Contest Essays**

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## 2007 Essay Contest

By Corinne Strohbach

Last spring, members from Beyond Parallax recognized three students for their writing as a part of the 18<sup>th</sup> annual writing contest.

“It’s always inspiring and it is always a thrill to recognize others’ achievement,” said Doris Wood, English Department chair.

All three winners were from Susanne Weil’s English 101 class – and each essay was from the same writing assignment.

“We had an interesting assignment on wilderness writing,” said Weil.

The students were instructed to write about an encounter they had had in the wilderness.

Their challenge was to write so vividly that someone who was not there could relate to the experience.

Weil was impressed by her students writing and entered six of the essays from the assignment in the contest.

Still, she did not expect all of the winners to come from her entries.

“I was surprised all three winners were from my class, but not because I didn’t have faith in their writing,” she said.

Weil said that most years the winners are from a variety of classes and on various topics, so last year was unique.

Altogether 22 essays were entered, said Wood.

The first place winner, Elizabeth Frogner, 19, Adna, won a prize of \$150 for her essay, titled, “What I am.”

In the essay, she walks through the forest as a young girl who wishes she could become part of her surroundings.

Finally she comes to a waterfall where she takes a seat on the rocks where she imagines herself as one of the rocks.

Eventually, her parents’ voices interrupt her thoughts and bring her back to reality.

But, in the end she finds she is happy to be herself, despite all of her surroundings, said Frogner.

The story was mostly true, but Frogner said she had to use her imagination to remember the thoughts of a 5 year old.

The second place winner, Jenna Shriver, 17, Centralia, won a prize of \$100 for her essay, titled, “Hiking the Desert,” which was about a hiking trip her family took.

In the essay, Shriver illustrates her hike up Devil’s Staircase in the Superstition Mountains of Arizona. She describes the mountains and the image of a woman she sees in the clay.

The third place winner, Victoria Stedham, 18, Chehalis, was given a prize of \$50 for her essay about a camping trip she took with her family.

In Stedham’s essay, “The Memory of Trees,” she tells about an encounter with nature that reaches beyond the obvious camping experience and into an experience she had late one night with a cluster of trees beside her campsite.

In the story, the trees help Stedham to feel comfortable and at ease in the midst of her uncomfortable surroundings.

The essay contest is sponsored by Beyond Parallax. For more information about the 2007 contest, contact any member of the English Department faculty.

## Hiking the Desert

By Jenna Shriver

I slide across the hot seat of the car and launch myself out the open doors. As my booted feet hit the ground, a fine layer of red brown dust rises off the desert floor and into the air. I lift my head, and my eyes drink in the beautiful Superstition Mountains, their peaks the color of dried red clay, forming the silhouette of a sleeping woman. I'm surrounded by Arizona's dangerous, yet striking, wild. The cacti with their barbed arms blossom with unforeseen flowers of purple, orange, yellow, green, and pink, as towering mesquites stretch their branches toward the sky.

My family and I check the straps of our backpacks before setting out. As we begin our ascent, we enter Dutchman's State park, home of the lost Dutchman's gold mines, hidden in the folds of the lady's terra cotta dress. We slowly start our hike up the mountain, the sun bearing down on our covered heads, the warm wind doing nothing to lessen the ferocious heat. I round a corner and slide on some loose gravel, tumbling into a jumping cholla. Instantly my legs are covered in miniature barbs, making me grateful for the jeans and boots I am wearing. Prickle after prickle is picked out, staining my hands with tiny spots of blood from where the thorns had gone through my jeans. My brother pulls me out of the ditch, and we enter Siphon's Draw.

The Superstition Mountains hold many trails and paths. Siphon's Draw, which we hike, is a steep, narrow path that draws the hiker straight up the mountain like a funnel. There is only one way up the draw, and many times we move into the shrubs along the path to let those descending by. Many novice hikers, unaware of the desert's dangers, find themselves trapped in the cactus' prickly embrace or at the mercy of scorpions, rattlesnakes, and fire ants. As we scale upward, jackrabbits dart from shrub to shrub, their dusty fur coats camouflaging them within the dull greens and browns that rise up out of the mountain, a magnificent eagle spreads her brown, bronze tinted wings above us, providing transient shade with her dusky shadow. I look up during this brief respite and try to find the lady of the mountain, but her face is hidden from us as she lies in the mountain's embrace. I wonder why so many travel to Rushmore to see faces created by man when this beautiful woman was born through erosion: her face and bed carved from the mountain by wind and rain over time, her dusky red blanket, the mountain, folding up around her.

We're nearing the top of the mountain, with one last stretch to go. The pass is called Devil's Staircase. It spirals up the mountain, each step more treacherous than the last; we're climbing up from ledge to ledge, fitting hands and feet in narrow rock openings. Each rock face is taller than the average human, and I climb between my dad and brother. My brother scales the rock first; when he reaches the ledge, he leans down to grab my hands as my dad lifts me from below. Together they get me up each "stair" to the top of the mountain. Young people don't usually climb Devil's Staircase, so when we reach the top, many look down at the precarious staircase and shake their heads, probably wondering if we know how to descend safely. I have made this climb many times before, though, and am most likely more experienced than they.

Standing here on top of Siphon's Draw, I wipe my sweaty hands on my jeans, and feel like I'm standing in front of an open oven door, as the warm breeze blows in my face. I can see the whole mountain from here. I'm close enough to the lady to feel as though she is holding me in her embrace. I see miniscule hikers climbing Siphon's Draw,

marching like a line of ants. The desert is painted before me in an array of reds, browns, and dull greens, with the saguaro cacti and mesquite trees rising from the landscape. The sun will set soon, and the browns and greens will turn to pink and purple. A ruby disc will set the desert on fire, and the night will come alive with predators. I see something magnificent where others see something barren, and I know that no matter where I live, the desert, with its oppressive heat and clay sculpted landscape, will always be my home.

The Memory of Trees  
By Victoria Stedhom

When you are the kind of person I am, you really value your personal space. I'd say I spend about half of my free time trying to get away from people. I have trouble not so much with talking, but with conversing: as in saying what I want to say, listening to what someone else says, and then responding appropriately. I don't know how I ended up this way. I grew up in a talkative family, and I have a lot of talkative friends, but that could also explain why I've become so good at just sitting back and listening. I'm a very good audience, but a highly ineffective performer. Because of this, I'm now trapped. I feel smothered and I'm tearing myself apart.

I'm also in a strange place. We're staying at a campsite in South Dakota, not far from Mt. Rushmore. I suppose I ought to be pleased to be experiencing new and wonderful things, but it's a terrible clash with my psyche. We have two campers. The tiny pop-up camper is where my Uncle Colin, Cousin Chris, Uncle Brian, Auntie Paula, and Cousin Teddy are sleeping. The larger camper (more overall room, but not much more sleeping room) is where my Mom, Grandma, Sister Elizabeth, Cousin Amy and Cousin Katie are sleeping. I ought to be sleeping in the second camper, but I am steadily driving myself crazy with a toxic litany of mental dialog.

As a person who needs solitude to balance out her time around people, being stuck on this trip with ten other people is testing my strength of will. I want to scream or tear my hair out or do something to release my frustration, but I can't do anything. There are people asleep all around us, so I can't make much noise. I can't go anywhere. This place is unfamiliar to me, and I have yet to find a sanctuary for myself like I have at home. The overwhelmingly human feeling of people is bearing down on me with its oppressive bulk, and I can't breathe.

And that is why, at three in the morning, I am sitting outside, curled up in a folding chair in the parking space between the two campers, wrapped in a blanket and crying silently. I am trapped between two facets of my personality. I feel as if I've been torn into pieces and the jagged edges are rubbing raw all my thoughts and emotions. The night is dark all around, but I have placed my chair under a street lamp, and the light encircles me, both a cage and a shield. It protects me from the darkness, but it traps me in my thoughts.

'What kind of person are you?' I ask myself again, 'that you can't even spend two days interacting like a normal human being? Why is this so hard? Why can't you just be the way everyone else is?' Arguing with oneself really is a fruitless pastime, but it's something I can't help doing. The other side of my heart, the part that's crying with me, responds, 'I can't help who I am. I just want some space. I just want to be alone. Is that too much to ask?' It's easy to forget that I have control here. It's easy to pretend that this will play out whether I want it to or not.

As time passes, I begin to notice how chilly it is. The air is crisp and clean and, most importantly, empty. No voices are forced upon me by the breeze; I only hear the skittering of insects above, around the street lamp. No smell of campfire comes to me, just sweet pine and faint grass. I close my eyes and inhale. Without my sense of sight, there is nothing human around me. Without realizing it, I have begun to relax.

I open my eyes again as the wind's cold feathers sweep my skin, but this time, I ignore the campers. I don't see the gravel road in front of me, and the street lamp is

nothing more than a moth's playground. I see for the first time that there is a little stand of trees across from me. I think they are pine of some sort, I don't know what kind. They are tall, straight, and skinny, rough barked and short limbed. At the end of each branch is a cluster of long needles, stretching out in every direction, a wild puff of deep green in the dimness.

I quietly get up, creep over to the camper, retrieve my folder, and return to my chair. These trees fascinate me. I take out my notebook and pen – I think it is a blue-ink calligraphy pen – but at the point details begin to fail me. I'm so used to drawing that the pen feels like it's a part of my hand, my arm knows exactly how to move, and I don't have to think at all. The nib glides over the paper, scratching out a soft message, its meaning lost and unimportant in that hushed moment. My drawing isn't that good. Mostly I draw out of my imagination, and even then it's mostly people. Never have I enjoyed still life, and I didn't do so well in my art classes because of it, but I draw these trees. I draw these trees, and with every line I place on the paper, I feel the tension bleed out of me, like ink to the paper, until I am relaxed.

Somewhere, I still have that picture. I didn't draw very well, but that wasn't the point. The point was that I needed to draw those trees. I don't know why. Even now I don't know why drawing those trees soothed me so much, but I remember the feeling of calm I had after I had finished. I remember the inner tranquility it gave me, matching my mind to the serene night. I stayed out there awhile longer before I finally went to bed. When we left the campsite later that week, I tried to look back at those trees fondly, but they were different in the sunlight. By the light of day, they were harsh and brittle. Without darkness behind them, they changed from a solid, protective mass to weak, spindly individuals. It didn't matter that they had lost their importance. They had given me a memory, a temporary sanctuary that I would not soon forget. I am thankful to them for that.

I still think it's a little silly to be thankful to trees.

What I am

by Liz Frogner

Perfection. It was in the shifting patchwork pattern of sky amid the boughs above me, in the pine needle cushion beneath my feet, and in the towering green and brown monarchs around me, the true kinds of the forest. I am small here, and insignificant – an ant standing on the roots of greatness.

*Twit, twit.* My head snaps up, and I breathe in the sound of things greater than myself: the rush of the wind, the heartbeat pulses of sap through the veins of the trees, and the almost imperceptible skittering of thousands of creeping things in the ground. *Twit.* There it is. Skipping from stone to root to stone, I follow the bright flash of blue feathers in the boughs above me. A jay's blue feather. I want to be the jay.

“Don't get too far ahead!” My mother's voice, calling me back to reality, back to my little girl tabernacle of flesh. I halt in uncertainty, glancing behind. The past stares back at me with half-lidded eyes. The known. The boring. I grin suddenly, as curiosity causes my heart to skip a beat, and I rush forward instead, into the future. I want to be the future. The trees part up ahead, and I run all the faster to see what spectacle awaits me around each new bend in the path. I want to be the first to see it, to witness it in all its unfolding glory before the others come and it corrodes away into nothing, back into the forest from whence it came. The wind catches my jacket and pulls me forward. I want to be the wind.

There's a sound now, a sort of roaring. Maybe there are lions in the forest. I swallow. It certainly seems the kind of place where they might be lurking, watching me with their intelligent cat eyes. Mmm, little girl kabob. I peek cautiously through the trees. But it's not a lion.

It's a waterfall! Beneath me is a sea of foam kicked up by the sheer force of the water. I can feel the spray on my face. The rest of the world floats away on the current as meaningless flotsam in a whirlpool of woes. I sit down on a stone outcropping, slick with moss and mist, and feel the pounding of the water in the trembling of the boulder beneath me. I close my eyes and become the rocks, shuddering under the blade of water that cuts through my back. I have sat for centuries on my haunches under the cold shower of water, rumbling like an old man with a thousand years of pent up annoyance and discontent. Always scowling at the world. Nevertheless, I will not move. There is too much patience in my iron blood, too much weight in my compact body. Moving is such a hassle, comprising years of struggle and heaving of my great birth. I have chosen to stay put. Others of my kind have chosen to move away, muttering about impertinent little streams, and leaving a chasm in their wake. Only I endure, for I am ancient. I am endless.

The creek giggles and laughs above me, and I change. I become the water. Suddenly I am fluid. I slide down the rocks on my stomach and plunge, open-mouthed, into the abyss, shrieking my delight. The air scatters away in terror. Some of it doesn't escape, though. I catch it in my mouth right before I hit the rocks below. The silly little air molecules pop quickly back up to the surface, dizzy and drunken. I laugh at them. Then I swirl round and round the grumpy old rocks, laughing as they scold me in their deep, coughing voices. I am free. I am eternally young.

*Thud. Thud.* Footsteps! With a jolt, I am human again, complete with long blond hair and thin, pale arms and legs. It is like being splashed with cold water to come back to myself, to find that my years are so few and my existence as fleeting as the wind. It

would be so easy to snuff out my little flame. I am small. I am alone. Shivering, I draw my knees up to my chest. I'm just an ant, after all.

"Liz, honey, there you are." I open my eyes to find my parents walking down the trampled path towards me, and somehow it doesn't matter anymore what I am. I may be an ant, but I am safe. I may not be old or endless, but I am so very alive. I am myself, perfectly happy in my own skin, and that is the greatest thing to be in the entire world.

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## **2005 Writing Contest Essays**

Writing Contest Essay Archives, Centralia College – <http://www.centralia.edu/academics/writingcenter/>

## 2005 Essay Contest

By Eric Schwartz

The English Department's annual essay contest winners were honored with certificates and cash prizes at a ceremony hosted last spring by Beyond Parallax.

Erik Gorham was named the winner of the contest for his essay entitled "The Mother," although he admittedly waited until the last minute to submit the piece.

"It came down to the essay being due," he said. "I didn't really think it out much."

Professor Don Foran submitted Gorham's essay.

"You never know what you are going to get from Erik," he said. "Sometimes I would assign an essay and he would turn something in that was just totally out there. But a lot of times it was better than what I was expecting."

"The Mother" appears to tell the story of a young man dealing with the pain of accidentally killing a boy and facing his mother, though the essay is clearly open for multiple interpretations.

"There are a lot of ways to look at it," Gorham said.

In addition to the honor of placing first, Gorham also received a check for \$150.

Jackie Snider was awarded second place, as well as a check for \$100, for "Pride" – an essay that focused on her own personal cultural pride.

"I come from multiple backgrounds," she said. "I wanted to express that in my essay."

The essay was based on a photo of a young Native American girl and was submitted by English professor Doris Wood.

Earning third place honors was Man Ieng Lao for her essay entitled "The Opo Brothers."

Her essay, which also earned her \$50, was a comparative work focusing on two of her favorite high school teachers.

In the essay, she describes how one of the teachers was funny and aroused interest from the students while the other was strict.

"I liked them both a lot," she said. "I chose to write about this because there are a lot of people who want to blame their teachers when they do poorly. But even though these teachers had different styles they had the same goal."

The contest, sponsored by Beyond Parallax, was first held in 1989, and has been an English Department fixture ever since, said Wood, who also organized the event.

"The cash awards are great encouragement for people," she said. "It's a great way to get them excited about writing."

## THE MOTHER

She walks with a swish of black cloth, carrying a pumpkin under her arm like the Headless Horseman.

Sharon shops here two days a week because seven minus two is five, and there are five points to the pentacle that she keyed into my car paint last week. If I'd seen her do it I would have turned her in, but she's craftier than that.

I thought I'd gotten rid of her when I moved thirty miles away and got a new job. My girlfriend of six years dumped me. My old friends shun me in public. But all that isn't good enough for Sharon Greely. She wants the vision of her son's mangled body to float in front of my eyes. She wants to remind me of what I've done until only a bullet in my head will make me forget.

I've dreamed about it many times-not for the last month, though. Over and over in my mind, Virgil is plastered across the grill of the truck like an overripe tomato. Two bloody teeth rattle against the windshield, spattering red specks on the glass. In my dream, I can actually hear the crunch as his skull is crushed under the tire, spewing his brains across the double yellow line.

This is what I think about every single day. Yes, I ran over Sharon's son and spread him all over the street. Anyone would have to say it was the right thing to do-anyone except the kid's parents. So Sharon comes to goggle at me now, muttering obscenities under her breath. I think she also wants to see if I've started drinking. Do I have heavy lines under my eyes? Am I getting a beer gut? Will my liver rot, will I drive off a bridge in a drunken haze? She hopes so.

Sharon has cursed me. My hair has been falling out ever since the trial, when I apologized to her. She stared at me silently while her husband Bill said something or other. I wasn't listening to him. Sharon was giving me a bloodshot, teary evil eye. She was thinking of an

ancient Hindu spell while I stammered about how I wished I hadn't squashed Virgil like a jelly roll.

The jury had understood. I was driving 500 gallons of propane when I hit Virgil Greely. I had a choice between the boy on the bicycle and the oncoming log truck yawning all over the road.

I had a responsibility to the people around me. I would have killed myself and at least five other people if I'd let the log truck hit my propane tank. In the courtroom, I had a good argument. I saved as many as I could.

Sharon continues to watch me as I arrange the milk cartons. For two years she has stared at me in the store and on the street, with eyes as dark and lifeless as creosote. Bill divorced her a year ago, I heard. Sharon's only purpose in life now is to hate me. She's started wearing weird Celtic jewelry and black beads-I'm pretty sure she's taken up some sort of witchcraft. Her house is probably full of voodoo dolls, each with a little red and white Suburban Propane hat. I have developed a pain in my foot lately, but I don't limp when Sharon can see me.

Now she's buying a large case of herbal tea and a bunch of rice cakes. I think she wants to live as long as possible so she can glare her hatred at me for many years to come. She can do whatever she wants. I know she's responsible for the ants in my apartment and my bout of bronchitis last month, but I'm not giving in. I'm not going to crack.

## Pride

Two dark, little eyes stare steadily into the camera. The eyes belong to a little girl in a black and white photo. She stands alone, in the foreground, while everything else around her is a blur. Sunlight pours down, and bathes her in a warm glow. She wears not regular, modern day clothing, but the ceremonial dress of a Native American tribe. Looking at this photo, at this little girl, is almost like suddenly wandering upon an Indian tribe in the distant past.

The artist's choice to leave the photo in black and white was breathtaking, but also says a lot about the subject. This photo captures a moment of beauty, of a girl who is not only connected to her culture, but proud of it as well. If it were in color, it would make it seem too modern, and instead black and white gives it an aged look. It is almost like a photo from centuries ago. In color so many of the important factors of the photo would be lost.

The picture is beautiful in its contrasts; always my eyes are drawn to her youthful face. It seems "off" somehow, and at first I can't decide what it is about it that is so different. Instead of a childish, cheeky grin, she stares ahead stoic. Her expression radiates a distinguished pride. Even her carriage, standing straight and head up, sends this feeling. It is a pride in her culture and race. Even the halo of light that dances around her head looks like she is surrounded by pride. This photo shows the importance of culture; it makes us who we are as individuals. Pride in one's history should be valued universally, no matter one's age or race.

Pictures can convey all sorts of messages and meanings, without ever having to use a written word. The photo of the lone Indian girl carries viewers away, bringing them

back to a place that existed even before the United States of America. By focusing only on the girl and her youth, this picture shows the passing of a cultural knowledge. From the feathers in her hair, to the moccasins on her feet and the activity swirling around her she is living, breathing in her ancestry. I found this photo appealing because in today's society, we are losing more and more of our ties with our heritage. Many people don't participate in or learn about traditions. We've become an out-of-touch, fast-paced, materialistic nation. Maybe, if more people slowed down and tried to be like this girl, we would be better off.

## The Opo Brothers

Education provides students an insight into knowledge and teachers play a very important role in it. They act as role models for their students. Have students ever thought that they should be thankful to their teachers for teaching and inspiring them? The most important thing for me during high school is that two very different teachers had an impact on my learning; they helped me develop gratitude when it would have been easier to complain about methods.

In my high school, students used to call the two teachers "the Opo Brothers."

They were famous in the school and all students and staff respected them since they were the Head of Discipline and Head of Study. But why were they called "Opo Brothers?" It was not because their names were Opo. Actually, Opo had the meaning of "opposite". This was obvious to all. Mr. Chan was tall and thin who wore glasses; Mr. Lee was short and fat. Actually, he looked as if he was a Pokemon.

There were so many differences between them. One could spot these differences from the start of a school day to the end. Mr. Chan was always the first person who arrived at the school with his tidy suit and suitcase. There was never a smile on his face which made him unapproachable to students. Mr. Lee was totally different; he ran to school as if he was one of the students. As I have said, this short and fat "monster" looked so funny when he successfully made his way to the school just on time. Before classes started every morning, they had to give all students a short speech. When they stood side by side, it was such a strong contrast that many of us would cover our mouths and laugh as quietly as possible because we did not want to get caught by the taller brother.

Wherever Mr. Lee was students would laugh and cheer. He was a funny person, and a smile was always on his face as if it was glued on. He used interactive methods to teach students.

He never used books or gave us quizzes or tests, and students liked him so much. He taught us Physics and he always brought along a lot of different materials with him. One time, he taught us about force. He brought a pair of boxing gloves and a sand bag with him to demonstrate the concept of force. He was easily understood. Mr. Chan was on a different track. We regarded his classes as a nightmare because they were boring. He taught us history and he carried a lot of books. Obviously, it would be bad if many students fell asleep during his classes. These "sleeping beauties" would get caught and be punished if they were unlucky. The "death toll" was high in his classes because he was the Head of Discipline.

During the break, Mr. Chan would go down to the playground to stop students hanging around. He didn't want students to waste their time doing nothing, and he wanted them to spend their time reading books during the break. A group of people usually gathered at one corner in the playground. It was because Mr. Lee was having his breakfast there in the playground. He loved to talk with his students about their own affairs, jokes and current news. Mr. Chan wanted to stop him doing this but due to the fact that Mr. Lee was the Head of Study, Mr. Chan could do nothing about him. Mr. Lee became our safe boat in the middle of the high school sea.

During lunch time, teachers usually went to the canteen to have lunch. Mr. Chan was usually accompanied by his boring colleague, forming a strong fleet. Students would not get close to them and they fled to Mr. Lee who could "protect" them from being bombarded with these "weapons of mass destruction." Instead, Mr. Lee launched his funny missile to all of the students who had lunch with him. He made everyone happy and enjoyed their times. Although he was not an attractive man, there were still a lot of students who wanted to talk to him.

When school finished in late afternoon, students would rush out of the gate to go home. It was so stunning to us that after the bell rang, Mr. Lee would be running out just like we students

did. Sometimes he might not be the first person to get out of the school because he could not run as fast as his students due to his clumsiness. He thought that when school finished, it was the end of work and time for enjoyment with his family. Mr. Chan, as you could guess, was the last person who left the school. He stayed in the office checking students' homework and marking tests till evening.

My opinion is that some teachers seem to be isolated from their students and sometimes even push their students too harshly. Mr. Chan did. What I experienced was that I felt stress, and that virtually prevented me from asking questions and telling him about my difficulties. Besides, I thought learning history as a kind of pressure instead of an enjoyable process. This made learning less effective. However, a teacher like Mr. Lee, who was more approachable and placed more importance on the stimulation of interest, undoubtedly was welcomed by the students. I could learn more effectively in his classes since I felt free to ask questions when I had doubts.

Nevertheless, I realized later that boredom is not only the fault of the teachers. As a student, I also need to have self-evaluation on how to make learning effective; we can't always blame our teachers for bad grades. At first, I really could not understand how these two teachers could be so different, but now I do know that they were really good teachers. Mr. Lee, without a doubt, was a friendly teacher who always made his class enjoyable. He was successful in arousing students' interest in learning. Mr. Chan, in spite of his dull character, was a keen teacher and tried to use all means to persuade students to study harder. He could even spend more of his time on students than stay with his family. Although they have "Opposite" personalities, I realize that both of them carry the same characteristics in which they are very eager and making every effort to help their students.

Thus, if teachers make an effort in teaching us, then why don't we also make an effort in studying in order to have a sense of gratitude toward them? This is the question that I had never thought of before meeting the "Oppo Brothers." Having pondered over it, I gradually changed my attitude on learning and I know that it is time for me to concentrate and work hard on studies. On the other hand, I want to become a teacher in the future and if my dream comes true, I will definitely become another "Mr. Lee" who gave happiness and knowledge to students, and made learning an interesting part of my life. I think it will be quite interesting and enjoyable to teach the next generation.

## **2004 Writing Contest Essays**

Writing Contest Essay Archives, Centralia College – <http://www.centralia.edu/academics/writingcenter/>

## 2004 Essay Contest

By: Argenis Villa

Three students received monetary prizes and certificates of achievement for winning the annual English Department writing contest sponsored by the Beyond Parallax Club.

Amanda Migliaccio, Tracey Garrett and Edie Stulken won prizes of \$150, \$100 and \$50, respectively for their first, second and third place contest standings.

Migliaccio, 16, of Centralia, wrote a comparison-contrast essay for her English 101 class analyzing the differences and similarities between the “Harry Potter” and “Lord of the Rings” series.

Migliaccio predicted which series would become a literary classic and which would simply become a passing fad.

“‘Harry Potter’ is an interesting series but it will never be a classic,” said Migliaccio. “It is intended mostly for entertainment purposes while ‘Lord of the Rings’ is better written.”

Migliaccio did admit that she was a little biased: “I’ve read the ‘Lord of the Rings’ series six times and the ‘Harry Potter’ series only once,” she said.

Second place winner, Garret, 40, of Centralia, wrote an autobiographical narrative essay, also for her English 101 class, about a cherished personal artifact that she no longer had.

The news of her second place honor and the cash prize came as a pleasant surprise, Garrett said.

“I was having a terrible day and I had completely forgotten about my essay,” she said. “But when I heard that I had won \$100 it really brightened up my day.”

The third place essay was not an essay written for an English class but for an ethics class.

Stulken, 30, of Centralia, wrote an analysis of the movie, “The Mission,” for her Introduction to Ethics class.

The movie was about the Spaniard conquest of the Guarani people of South America, said Stulken.

Dr. Don Foran, who was Stulken’s ethics instructor, said her analysis stood out from all the other analyses.

“Edie did an uncommonly fine job of focusing on several largely philosophical, religious, and human themes portrayed in that film,” said Foran. “She grappled with several key ideas from that movie.”

English faculty usually submit their students’ entries for the annual writing contest and a panel of judges selects the three most well-written essays.

The panel consisted of Teresa Kimball, Margaret Snyder and Michelle Thomas.

For more information on this year’s contest, contact Doris Wood in Kemp 111C, at ext. 319 or by e-mail at [dwood@centralia.ctc.edu](mailto:dwood@centralia.ctc.edu).

By Amanda Migliaccio

The “Harry Potter” books, by J. K. Rowling, have become amazingly popular. From movies and video games to art sets and folders, the icons from these books can be found in homes across the globe. Is this series a classic or a passing fad? The “Harry Potter” books are most often compared to the classic “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien. Though containing many similarities, each of these fantasies possesses a distinct personality.

The British authors, J. R. R. Tolkien and J. K. Rowling, shared similar plot development and literary styles. The fantasies they wrote both revolved around the battle between good and evil. Tolkien set his fantasy in a medieval-type period, in which sword and bow were the major weapons, and castles and towers were scattered across the land. Walking and horseback riding were the only methods of travel. Rowling set her fantasy in the modern world where witches and wizards live unknown to the Muggle society. Here transportation could be accomplished by a broomstick, flying car or motorcycle, and floo powder. Both authors used their creativity to form unusual creatures for their books. Tolkien's works contained ents, orcs, nazgul, elves, and hobbits. Rowling, who used several creatures similar to Tolkien's, such as trolls and goblins, also added some creatures of her own, including centaurs, hippogriffs, boggarts, and dementors. These creatures added a flavorful variety to these novels. The protagonists of each story, Frodo and Harry, were actively involved in the activities of the good side, and both were important to the successful defeat of evil. Prophecy played an intricate part in these heroes' lives. Frodo was involved by Faramir's dream, which told of the awakening of Isildur's Bane (the ring) and how a Halfling (hobbit) would be involved. Harry, at age 15, found out that a prophecy had been made shortly before he was born. This prophecy foretold of the birth of a child whom Voldemort would consider his equal. It was revealed that one of them must die for the other to prosper.

For Harry Potter, the main character in the Rowling series, and Frodo Baggins, the main character of the Tolkien trilogy, family connection was important, though each author developed it differently. Though both were orphans who had been raised by relatives, Frodo dearly loved his cousin Bilbo, while Harry detested his aunt and uncle. Harry discovered that his safety depended on living with those relatives. Frodo's safety hinged on leaving those he loved behind.

Both characters received, in one way or another, an item of great importance. Each significant article provided its possessor with both supernatural power and overwhelming burden. For Frodo, this article was the Ring of Power, which he inherited as a gift from Bilbo. As a result, Frodo also inherited the burden of destroying the ring. The lightning-shaped scar on Harry's forehead proved to be pivotal in Harry's destiny. Harry received his scar from the malevolence of Voldemort, who was trying to kill Harry at the time. As a result, Harry received the fate of defeating Lord Voldemort or dying in the attempt.

While Harry and Frodo had to accomplish the nearly impossible, each had friends to support him along the way. Frodo began his journey with the aid of three fellow hobbits: Merry, Pippin, and Sam. Sam diligently supported Frodo even after the ring was destroyed. In addition, Frodo set out in the fellowship of five companions who were not hobbits. These companions--two men, a wizard, an elf, and a dwarf--gladly bore some of the weight of Frodo's mission. Likewise, Ron and Hermione, fellow students at Hogwarts and his closest friends, aided Harry through his adventures. Harry also found assistance from creatures like giants and house elves. The level of commitment in the friendships, however, was different. Frodo's friends were exceptional. Frodo had friends who supported him through thick and thin to achieve the goal of destroying the ring. Frodo's friends gave up everything, including their homes and lives, to assist their friend. They were bound together to stand through the difficult times. Harry's friends were average. Though they did help in his adventures, Harry's friends were constantly bickering with each other and with Harry. Sometimes they doubted him and refused to speak to him. Because they had no dangerous goal to accomplish that would bind them together, they allowed small things to stunt the growth of their friendship.

Interestingly, the role of women was very different in the two series. In the fellowship formed in the first book of the Rings' trilogy, there were no women. In fact, women did not play a very important role until Eowen attacked the Lord of the Nazgul and helped to destroy him. On the other hand, females were as important as males in the “Harry Potter” books. Hermione was smarter than both Harry and Ron, and she contributed much of the knowledge the other two needed.

Both characters had a wise wizard to guide them. Frodo had Gandalf; Harry had Dumbledore. Common to both series was the secretive behavior of these trusted advisers. Gandalf and Dumbledore both kept to themselves information that really should have been passed on to the heroes. Often, this caused problems when the heroes acted unexpectedly or when something hindered Gandalf or Dumbledore from advising the hero's next action.

The effect adventure had upon the main characters was different. Frodo sacrificed much through his adventures. His friends were stripped away from him, and he lost his health, his possessions, and even his finger. Harry, on the other hand, actually gained possessions. He received more friends, comfort, knowledge, and tools as he proceeded through his adventures.

In “The Lord of the Rings,” the theme was easily perceived. The goal was to destroy the Ring of Power. Everything in the three books worked toward that goal. On the other hand, the “Harry Potter” books had no specific theme that could be identified from the beginning. Perhaps implied, the theme could have been the need to defeat Voldemort. However, the books tended to wander to areas uninvolved with Voldemort, such as the quidditch games and school exams.

Both books included death experiences. In “The Lord of the Rings,” first Gandalf, who later returned to life to continue the fight, and then Boromir died. In the fourth and fifth “Harry Potter” books, Rowling also killed someone off. First killed was Cedric, who the reader barely knew. The second death, though, was personal. Sirius, Harry's godfather, died, and his death caused the reader to mourn with Harry. Although death is present in both books, the authors deal differently with the reasons of death. In The Lord of the Rings, death and near-death experiences were always because the character sacrificed his or her own life for others. Even after Boromir tried to take the ring from Frodo, he still maintained his honor by fighting to the death to defend the hobbits, Merry and Pippin. In “Harry Potter,” the deaths seemed almost accidental. Cedric died by two words; Sirius practically tripped and died. There was no noble purpose for their death. They died in vain.

The most lasting aspect of the two books, however, was the feelings they each left behind. After reading “The Lord of the Rings,” a reader could not help but feel a desire for the noble, sacrificial love manifested in this masterpiece. Often, the trilogy has been re-read to again experience the courage, respect, and loyalty portrayed in nearly all the characters. The books left an awesome longing to live in such a wonderful time. By the end of the first book, most readers would have willingly died for characters like Aragorn, Frodo, or Legolas. When reading “Harry Potter,” readers were often captivated by the book's suspense. However, once the book was finished, the feelings it left behind were not so pleasant. Especially in The Order of the Phoenix, the strong emotions of hatred, anxiety, confusion, and fear that Harry experienced were overwhelming. These emotions left no desire to be a part of that world.

Although the stories were similar in many aspects of their plots and characters, each had unique characteristics. “The Lord of the Rings” has a depth to its story that is lacking in “Harry Potter.” That is why the Rowling series may be more than a passing fad, but does not merit the classic status that “The Lord of the Rings” has achieved.

Memories of: "It's It!" and my mother

By Tracey Garrett

I have fond memories of the "It's it!" frozen confections. I can still picture these treats in my mind and my taste buds still quiver in anticipation. . . the time was the summer of 1977. The place was San Rafael, California, a small hamlet just inland from the San Francisco Bay. I was 13 years old and the sole child left in the home of my mother. My father had left our family two years prior, and one by one, my two brothers and only sister defected to different destinations. My mother and I were left alone together for the first time. I did not know how to be an only child; suddenly, I was in the spotlight after years of "sharing" her with many siblings. My mother tried to hide her pain from the breakdown of our family structure. She remained optimistic that wonderful things were going to happen in our lives so we needed to get ready for it. She placed us both on a strict diet and made sure the two of us had plenty to do to keep our minds off of food and the sudden emptiness in our lives. Enter the "It's It!"...

An "It's It!" was a delicious combination of two Oatmeal cookies filled with premium vanilla ice cream and put together sandwich style, then lavishly enrobed with a rich chocolate coating. An "It's It!" was the perfect dessert to end a night at "Arthur Murray's Dance Studio" where we were taking disco dance lessons. And to a chubby 13-year-old girl, already a well-seasoned dieter, an "It's It!" was a delirious taste sensation after weeks of a protein diet consisting of meat, cheese, salad, and cottage cheese washed down with 12 oz. bottles of diet soda (Tab or Fresca). It is hard to describe the sensory rush you get from sweet foods after abstaining from them for a while, but I will attempt to... It's like finally getting on the roller coaster after a long wait in line.. It's like getting a week's vacation after working for 2 months without a day off...I remember tearing into the clear wrapper of that ice cream bar, still unbelieving that I was going to be allowed a relief from my parentally imposed diet. I remember the first bite...an explosion of rich chocolate and cool creamy sweetness all rolled into one! It was an awesome delight to a teenager kept on a sugar fast for weeks. My mother had given me a temporary reprieve from dieting hell, but it would become a regular treat to look forward to. The "It's It!" became our semi-weekly splurge of carbohydrates, a shared experience bonding my mother and me, and a symbol of the budding mendship forming between us.

Over the next two years, my mother and I would go touring the beautiful Sonoma and Napa wine country, attend operas and ballets at the San Francisco Opera House, experience plays like "The King and I" with Yul Brenner and Deborah Kerr and "Annie Get Your Gun" with Debbie Reynolds, engage in more dance lessons at "Arthur Murray's," and indulge ourselves every two weeks with an "It's It!" as a reward. My mother had longed to do these things for many years, but my father was disinterested, and she had four children. This was an emancipating time for her, and a sweet memory made for an adolescent girl. Too soon it ended; my mother started dating and became engaged to a man I could not stand, and just before my 16th birthday, I too left home. I would not see, nor speak to my mother for two years to come.

Over 20 years have passed since this time in my life. I am now married and the mother of two sons (ages 7 and 8). Once again I am on the protein diet, only this time it is self-imposed. Lately I have been having cravings for an old favorite treat.. I long to taste an "It's It!" again. My husband remembers these treats as well, and together we have searched Lewis County and Olympia looking for that familiar white box with green lettering and three delicious cookie ice cream sandwiches nestled inside, but they are not to be found here, or perhaps anywhere else. I do not know when they discontinued selling my all time favorite treats. I know there are plenty of other ice cream novelties out there that are just as delicious, but none of them would take me back to a time of simplicity and innocence long ago surrendered. None of them would ever bring back these stirring and bittersweet memories of times spent with my mother. I long to share this treat from my past with my sons today. . . but we will have to make do with what we have available now, and someday, perhaps, they too will reflect on a favorite food item shared with me, maybe long ago discontinued, but forever remembered.

\*Footnote: my husband Mike remembers the "It's It!" ice cream confections from as little as five years ago. His uncle owned the AM/PM in Grand Mound, and Mike worked the night shift for six years. AM/PM used to stock these ice cream novelties and Mike would indulge in these treats often. His uncle sold the AM/PM and they no longer stock the "It's It!"

If might is right, there is no place for love in the world" ("The Mission," Joffe).

By Edie Stulkin

The 1986 film "The Mission," directed by Roland Joffe, is laced with a number of ethical and moral dilemmas between and amongst its characters. The ultimate moral dilemma, however, lies in the separate paths two of the movie's main characters take in dealing with conflict and standing up for what they believe is truth and rightness. These two characters are Father Gabriel, a Jesuit missionary who sought to convert the Guarini Indians of 18th-century South America, and Rodrigo Mendoza, a slave trader and mercenary who converts to the Jesuit order after battling his own personal demons and learns the value of love by the same people he previously sought to kill or enslave. Both men, although sworn religious under vows of holy obedience, disobey their superiors: so is it any more right for Father Gabriel to disobey the Cardinal by staying at the mission after being ordered to leave, than for Mendoza to disobey Father Gabriel by leading the Guarini in warfare against the Spaniards? Since obedience was not strictly adhered to in the paths chosen by Father Gabriel and Mendoza, the movie asks the audience to witness and analyze deeper ethical motivations.

Lawrence Hinman introduces ethics students to the Divine Command Theory in his text, "Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory." This theory, suggested by Hinman as meaning "we ought to do whatever God wills," is the motivation, or rather the justification, behind many of the ethical and moral decisions made throughout the movie (Hinman, 31). However, if both Father Gabriel and Mendoza were truly committed to the Divine Command Theory and the blind obedience of paternalism that seems to go hand in hand with the structure of that moral position, they would not have disobeyed leaders who have been ordained to "speak for God." Instead, however, there appeared to be an internal struggle within these characters associated with the inevitable problems that come from making decisions solely based on the Divine Command Theory. Hinman suggests the divine command theories of morality still leave a conflict: "in each faith community there might be disagreement about how to understand and to interpret God's command" (31). The movie also probes the question, "How do we determine whether our church leaders are truly speaking for God, or rather speaking out of political pressures and motivations?" The Guarini King makes this accusation against the Cardinal when he tries to play the "will of God" card as a justification for forcing the Guarini out of their homes. This confrontation appears to cause extreme discomfort to Father Gabriel during this scene, and one can only imagine the same accusations were floating through his thoughts as well.

The Cardinal appears to be the ultimate decision maker in the fate of the Guarini people and in the future of the Jesuit order. The pressures involved in having to make such weighty and weighted moral and ethical decisions are immeasurable. However, after viewing the Cardinal's visit to the San Carlos Mission above the falls, and his obvious displays of awe and delight at the people and community there, his decision to allow the Spaniards to take over this mission came as a huge surprise. The moral positions underlying this decision appear to be an unfortunate combination of absolutism and misguided utilitarianism. Indeed the motivation contained in the utilitarian belief that "the end must justify the means" was evident in the Cardinal's statement, "A surgeon, in order to save the body, must hack off a limb." However, in order to justify the necessity for hacking off the limb in order to save the body, the "limb" must be a poisonous threat to the body. If the Cardinal had taken more of a relativistic point of view, he may have determined that the "threat" in the eyes of the Guarini would have been the church itself. It was perfectly obvious, however, that the Cardinal was not using relativism as a factor in his decision making, and thus fell victim to the "twin dangers of intolerance and lack of understanding" that often accompany absolutism (Hinman, 53). In fact Hinman cautions that "those who believe that they have the absolute truth are rarely motivated to look beyond their own beliefs for further enlightenment, and too often they feel little motivation to understand the moral worldviews of other cultures from within" (Hinman, 53).

Though told to abandon the native Guarini, the Jesuits stayed on, and Rodrigo, who no longer killed even to eat, was forced to choose between his vows and his sword. He chose to fight and to disobey his "divine commands." Father Gabriel chose to "fight" with love, rather than with weapons, which he believed was his "divine command." Neither priest is successful, thus leaving the audience to continue to question the rightness of might versus love.

The closing scene of the movie is indicative of the outcome of many poor decisions humans have made in their justification for using might as a means of achievement: the children are left to "pick up the pieces." While watching the war scenes towards the end of the film between the Spaniards and the Guarini, there was one instance in which the director allowed its audience to watch the war through the eyes of a young girl. Through her eyes, nothing about the war seemed justified. It is a shame that more decisions are

not made through the eyes of children, who embody so much innocence and pure truth.

## **2003 Writing Contest Essays**

Writing Contest Essay Archives, Centralia College – <http://www.centralia.edu/academics/writingcenter/>

## **2003 Essay Contest**

Aaron Millman placed first and Silas Newkirk and Mary Olsen tied for second place in the English Department's annual essay writing contest.

They were honored last spring during a reception in the Writing Center.

Millman, 19, from Winlock, received a \$150 award. His essay was submitted by Linda Foss.

Newkirk, 17, from Centralia, received a \$75 award. His essay was submitted by Sharon Mitchler.

Olsen, 44, from Winlock, received a \$75 award. Her essay was submitted by Don Foran.

The contest was coordinated by Doris Wood of the English Department and sponsored by Beyond Parallax, the college's literary and visual arts journal.

The essays were juried by three readers – Judy Metcalf, Joan Meister and Laju Nankani – who selected the winners.

For information about the 2004 essay writing contest contact Wood in Kemp 111B, at ext. 319 or by e-mail at [dwood@centralia.ctc.edu](mailto:dwood@centralia.ctc.edu).

By Aaron Millman

Most people's first experience with death is associated with a death of a family member or someone close to the family. In my case, however, I grew up around death. When I was a small child, my mom worked so I spent the days with my grandma. Her house sat next to our family's business, a funeral home. Looking back, I never actually really knew what my dad did. All I knew was that he worked in the building next to Grandma's house. I lived with this naïve view of my father's work until a cool, fall day when I was three or four years old. To this very day, the smell of white cake still reminds me of death.

The day started out as usual. Mommy hurried around the house getting ready for work and making sure I was dressed while Daddy went out for coffee. Around eight, Daddy picked me up and we drove to Grandma's house. I jumped out of the car and ran up the steps. After struggling with the ancient, heavy front door, I waltzed into the kitchen and sat down next to my grandma. Grandma and I spent the morning doing the crossword puzzle in the newspaper, which means I colored on the comics. As if an alarm clock had rung, Grandma rose from her chair at ten o'clock to get dressed. Like every other day I watched her shuffle out of the kitchen in her fuzzy purple bathrobe as the "Price Is Right" came on.

Most days spent at Grandma's entailed hours of solitaire and afternoon tea with the garden society ladies. This day was out of the ordinary. Once Grandma had gotten dressed, she appeared in the kitchen doorway with her apron on. This was very unusual. She never put her apron on unless she was going to cook something. I sat in a dazed state as my grandma started getting things out of the cupboard. Eventually, she glanced my way and said, "Sorry, honey, I forgot you were here," she exclaimed. As a peace offering for forgetting me, she offered to let me help her.

I got up on the stool and Grandma tied the apron tightly around me. Grandma always said a true lady, or in my case gentleman, never cooks without an apron. After my apron was on we began mixing all sorts of stuff together in the mixing machine. Having never cooked before, the entire process was fascinating. In the end, we had made a two-layer white cake with chocolate flavored frosting. As I recall, the frosting was died pink and I was absolutely thrilled with the idea of having made a cake.

Noon arrived and it was time to have lunch. As usual, I helped Grandma set the table. Rather than have lunch first, I tried to convince her that we must eat the cake first. She finally relented, but said we would have to wait for daddy to come in from working. Being impatient, I immediately dashed out the kitchen door and tore down the sidewalk towards the funeral home. I ran up the steep stairs to the side entrance. On any other day, I would have stopped to play on the casket ramp or perhaps go up the elevator, but there was no time for playing that day.

The side entrance led into the main chapel. It was really dark and the cool stale air enveloped me as I noticed that everything was draped in sprays of pink flowers. Fearlessly, I skipped across the dreary room and opened the door to the stairway. I had always been told never, for any reason, to go up these stairs. This managed to escape my memory for a moment due to the thought of eating the delectable cake waiting on the kitchen table. A little reluctantly, I began to climb the stairs. As an adult, these stairs still seem foreboding and scary; as a three-year old it was much more terrifying. The stairwell was lit only by a small chandelier at the very top of the two flights of stairs. On that rainy fall day, it was rather hard to make out each step, let alone how high I had climbed.

Eternity had seemed to pass when I reached the summit of the stairs. Standing in the dim light from the ancient chandelier, I peered down the long, dark hallway. The span of the hall was lined with doors which led to various rooms that I had never seen before. Curiously, yet warily, I walked past the heavy oak doors. Each one looked like it was hiding wonderful things from me, but something told me to be cautious. I ran my small hands over the intricate brass doorknobs. The cool metal enticed me to open the portals which led to worlds unknown. One room contained large, strange boxes which looked big enough to hold things as tall as Daddy. Another room had funny stone jars that looked like the one on the mantle at my aunt's house. At the very end of the hallway was a door taller than the rest. It had a funny drawing on it and several brass locks. In the recesses of my mind, I decided that Daddy must be hiding behind this door. If I had known how to read, I would have read the sign that says, "Do Not Enter." Not possessing this ability, I reached up towards the brass knob.

The old door creaked open just like every door opens in horror movies. Instead of monster behind the door, I found a small room with dark paneling. This room led to yet

another door. On this door was a sign that looked like a pirate flag. This intrigued me further and assured me that daddy must be playing hide and seek with me. I pushed down the latch and threw open the door. I did not find Daddy. Instead, I found a fat, blue man lying on a steel table. His glazed-over eyes seemed to be staring right at the depths of my soul. I screamed in horror. I had never seen such a macabre sight before (and still haven't for that matter). A man wearing a mask, black rubber gloves up to his elbows, and a white hospital apron covered in blood came around the corner with something resembling a large needle attached to some kind of machine with tubes. My horror escalated to terror (which has yet to be paralleled today). Somehow I managed to turn and run out of the morgue.

Screaming like a banshee, I darted through the small, paneled room into the hall. I raced past the countless doors, rapidly approaching the stairs. In the dim light, I tripped over the edge of the runner in the middle of the floor. Falling to the floor, I skinned my knee on the heavy brocade carpet. I sat crying in a high pitched tone, which only dogs can hear, clinging to the newel post in the eerie light of the stairwell. Suddenly, my dad appeared. Whether I believed he had played a cruel joke on me or that the man standing in front of me was not actually my Daddy, I resumed my shrieking and sort of crawled down the stairs. At the landing, I got to my feet and picked up the pace. Slamming the door behind me, I made my way across the dark chapel towards the door.

Flying down the ramp and across the sidewalk, I heard Grandma calling me from the kitchen doorway. Even though she can't hear when you're sitting next to her, she had heard my screams. I leapt into her thin, frail arms and she carried me into the warmth and safety of her overly orange kitchen. As I cried relentlessly, she sat down in her chair with me in her arms. Daddy entered and helped Grandma console me. How they got me to stop crying, I do not know. However, I do remember the overwhelming smell of white cake. The smell of the white cake that had once smelled so sweet and had given me the motivation to venture into the forbidden world of the funeral home now reminded me of that dead, blue corpse lying on the cold table. Through my tears, I stared at that cake, completely disgusted.

## A Walk to School

By Mary Olsen

The screen door slaps shut behind us as we step out onto the porch. My still sleepy brain is jolted awake by the icy morning air. Tendrils of wood-smoke spiral upward from neighboring chimneys, tingeing the air with a pungent scent.

My daughter tucks her hand into mine. I gently press it against my cheek relishing its softness and warmth. Her younger brother bounds past us. The straps of his Pokemon backpack tap out a rhythm as he bounces down the porch steps.

Leaves skitter along the sidewalk. Dry and brittle, they crunch and crackle under our feet. A wispy veil of fog hangs in the air muting the brilliant colors of fall. A flaming maple drapes over the backyard fence, its scarlet leaves etched with a delicate pattern of frost. Leaves of yellow, orange and brown, a myriad of shades intertwine to weave an autumn tapestry.

Grasshoppers criss-cross our path alighting briefly before vanishing with a whirl of their wings. My son pauses. His blonde hair glints in the sunlight as he crouches down to examine a grasshopper balancing on a twig. It zips away and is camouflaged in the tawny grass. Snatching a branch from the ground, he bats at a pile of leaves. They flutter and twist in the breeze before scattering at his feet. He skips ahead, the stick scratching out a trail as it drags behind him.

Blue eyes peer at us from beneath a bush. "Here kitty, kitty," my daughter calls. Enticed from her hiding place, the cat strolls out from under the bush and meanders back and forth between us. Scooping the animal into her arms, my daughter buries her face into the cat's powder white fur. Flicking her tail with annoyance, the cat squirms free and leaps to the ground. She trots over to the neighbor's pond and gazes intently at the large Koi that shimmer silver and gold in the murky water. She looks like a porcelain figurine perched on a carpet of golden leaves.

My daughter grasps my hand and begins to swing our arms higher and higher. Giggling, she lifts our hands above her head and begins to spin. Her short brown hair floats and bobs as she twirls. I stop her dizzying pirouettes and pull her close to me. She snuggles under my jacket to keep warm.

As we near the school steps, we stop. Squinting our eyes against the dazzling sunlight, we crane our faces skyward. A flock of Canadian geese glides overhead, a black wedge cutting through the cloudless sky. Honking brazenly, the geese herald their departure south.

I feel a gentle tugging on my arm. Bending down to whisper good-bye, I sweep my daughter's hair from her eyes. Soft kisses brush my cheek. My son grabs me around my waist and rocks me back and forth in a giant bear hug. I linger to watch as they sprint up the stairs side-by-side and the school doors shut them safely inside.

By Silas Newkirk

The World Book Dictionary defines the word father as “a male parent,” However, this three-word definition falls short of what a real father should be. A father is more than just a male who is biologically involved in the process of conception. His parental identity involves two very important attributes.

First, a real father is a giver. Kathleen A. Kost in her article, “The Function of Fathers; What Poor Men Say About Fatherhood,” calls this aspect of fatherhood “univocal reciprocity” (500). This means that fathers give to their children without the expectation of anything in return (Kost 500).

The most common way fathers give is in the area of economic support. Common terms, like “the breadwinner” or “the one who brings home the bacon,” show how society expects fathers to provide financially for their families. The Bible, a time-honored document, in First Timothy 5:8, condemns a man who does not financially provide for his family.

However, a father’s providing for his children’s well being involves more than just providing for them financially. It also involves giving of his time to be with them. In the June 17, 2002, Jet magazine article, “Celebrity Dads Share Thoughts on Fatherhood,” all eighteen dads agree that spending time with their children is one of the highest priorities of their lives (12). In the article, Emmett Smith, football player for the Dallas Cowboys, relates, “While I truly enjoy my career as a professional football player, spending time at home with my three children is my heart” (Celebrity Dads 18). Likewise, hip-hop music singer, Master P says, “My parents separated and that made me want to always be there for my children. So no matter how busy my schedule may be, I always spend time with them” (Celebrity Dads 13).

The second attribute of a real father involves love. In First Corinthians 13:5, in the New International Version Bible, it says that one of the qualities of love is “it is not self-seeking.” E. H. Erickson in his book, Identity and the Life Cycle, uses the term “generativity” instead of love (53). Generativity is the ability of one person to care for another person without regard for his own self-interest (Erikson 54). A good picture of self-sacrificing love is the Dad who changes that stinky diaper or walks the floor with a

fussy child in his arms. He does these things because he loves his child not because he enjoys doing them.

As an illustration, a dad with ten children, who lives in Centralia, Washington, receives one week of vacation yearly. Each year he begins his vacation by asking each child what he or she would like to do while he is off work. Year after year he visits Northwest Trek, various zoos, the Pacific Science Center or plays walleyball, hopscotch and freeze tag on his vacation time. This is a father who lives the immortal quote from Distilled Wisdom, “Love goes without that another may have” (244).

Likewise, a father’s love involves caring enough to discipline a child. Often the word discipline carries the image of a father with a spanking switch. However, Zig Ziglar in his book, Raising Positive Kids in a Negative World, shows that discipline comes from the word disciple that involves teaching or training (209). To quote Ziglar, “Discipline is teaching a child the way he should go” (209).

The pediatrician, William Sears, writes in his book, Keys to Becoming a Father, “In order for a father to become an effective disciplinarian, he must first become a baby nurturer” (105). He relates how a father who lovingly spends time getting to know his infant child will build a bond of trust and from that trust will gain the ability to discipline (Sears 107). Sears confirms that fathers that set fair limits and are sensitive to nurture their children are the best disciplinarians (Sears 105).

As an example, the Centralia father shows sensitivity and creativity by appropriately disciplining each of his ten children. When his nine-year-old son throws a rock through the plastic patio roof, he makes him pay to have it fixed. In the case of his four-year-old who has the bad habit of spitting on his siblings, the dad unexpectedly drenches the child with a bucket of cold water. Likewise when his children can’t get along, he ties them together for a day at the wrist like Siamese twins joined at the hand. This forces them to figure out ways to work, play and eat with only one hand free. In this way his children learn to appreciate each other as they work together to accomplish even the simplest task.

Anyone who has known a true father realizes that he is more than a male parent. He is a man who gives not only financially but of his time to love and discipline the

children he is responsible for. Some men, like the Centralia dad, realize that the more they work at giving their love away the more likely it is to be returned.

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## **2002 Writing Contest Essays**

Writing Contest Essay Archives, Centralia College – <http://www.centralia.edu/academics/writingcenter/>

Nothing published for 2002

## **2001 Writing Contest Essays**

Writing Contest Essay Archives, Centralia College – <http://www.centralia.edu/academics/writingcenter/>

## **2001 Essay Contest**

Each spring the English Department sponsors an essay writing contest. Last year's winners were Reby McFadden, first place; Julie Chan, second place; Ryo Nakamura, third place. The winners were awarded \$150, \$100 and \$50 respectively. This was the 11<sup>th</sup> year of the contest. The awards are made possible by the Centralia College Foundation.

## Exploring Elephants – First Place

By Reby McFadden

As I had so many times before, I took my long fingers and lay them on the solid ivory keys. I pressed my fingers into the imprinted grooves and rested my hands on the white bars, letting them melt into the ivory. I was locked onto this piano and into this moment. I slowly closed my eyes and took a deep breath. While exhaling, I relaxed myself into a state of tranquillity. I could see and hear the music I was about to play in my mind. As I saw myself playing the arrangement, I transfixed my mind solely on the goal of perfection. For those few seconds, I sat in silence, there on a dark bench, as the audience gazed at my silhouette.

With my eyes closed, I began to perform. It was almost mindless, playing this work of art, from memory. My fingers were trained to travel to certain spots on the keyboard. After fourteen years, I knew "A" was three keys below "D", which was two keys from "F". Fourteen years ago I sat in front of a piano not knowing what to expect, staring at the keys blankly, not knowing they could help me create masterpieces.

As I played, I thought of the struggles I had gone through to play this piece, and was thinking of my piano teacher's advice, "There are three things for you to remember when playing the piano: position, rhythm, and markings. If someone can master those three things, they can play the piano." Though I knew it took little effort to play a piano, performing a song was difficult. To put emotion, passion, feeling and grace into music, making it more than just notes on a page takes effort, hard work and dedication.

I remembered how my father had traded a car for our piano, so many years ago. The day he brought it home I was ecstatic. I sat and pounded on the keys for hours, thinking I was the next Mozart. Soon, I started taking lessons every Monday with a wonderfully kind teacher who lived down the road. The first day of lessons I was nervously excited. When I arrived, the teacher and I sat on the same bench. We began by curving our fingers into balls, then placing them on the keys ready to play. She helped me find the place where to put my hands on the piano; she called this position. She told me every song has its own position, depending on the notes in the piece. After we found our position, she began to explain to me the placement of the notes on the keyboard. She showed me the location of middle C, and she explained this was the most important key on the piano; not to forget it. She sent me home to practice after only thirty minutes; the time went fast.

As I continued to perform, I realized how well I was doing. The notes and rhythms were coming so easily, though I knew it hadn't always been so simple for me. My teacher had pounded into my brain so many times: a quarter note receives one count, a half note receives two counts, and a whole note receives four counts. I remembered her sitting on the bench next to me, pounding her pencil on the piano, and trying to get me to count aloud, as if it would help me feel the rhythm. She regularly said, "Everything can be counted based on a quarter, half, and whole notes." She was right, there were quarter, half, and whole rests where you stopped playing, and there were eighth rests, which were counted as half a quarter rest. I thought to myself, "Knowing this information about rhythm makes counting unmistakable."

While I continued to play the piano, I noticed the audience reacting to the movement and changes in the song. The crowd would be on the edges of their seat one moment, while I was playing dramatically, loud and powerful. The next moment, they were relaxed and laid back, absorbing the smooth and enchanting melodies. The audience was responding to the markings in the music and the performance I was making. I knew I had to follow the composer's ideas, the markings, to create the masterpiece he envisioned. As I prepared for this performance at my home studio, I paid close attention to all the dynamics, slurs, and staccato markings, to allow the music to tell its story. I remembered my teacher telling me, "These markings are like the composer's words to you, and a story to your listeners. If you follow the artist's instructions you can make the audience feel what he imagined!"

My teacher and I discussed markings in music in several of my lessons. She showed me what each marking symbolized, reminding me they never go away. In our first few lessons we worked on slurring, connecting the notes to make them smooth. She emphasized not picking up my hand in order to make a glossier sound. Since this was a difficult skill to master, I practiced the slurring technique every day.

However, we soon moved onto dynamics, because they are in every piece of music. Some pieces are loud, symbolized by an "f" for forte, and some are soft, symbolized by a "p" for piano. I was reminded constantly that dynamics were the biggest shaper of music, and dynamics created the mood of a piece.

As I was playing, I approached a fast section in the music, with random staccato markings. I recalled my teacher telling me, "It's like a period above or below a note. A staccato marking makes the note short and snappy, but full of life. It helps create excitement in a piece." The staccato notes I played quickly penetrated into the crowd. My hands were full of vigor and the audience members and I were on the edge of our seats.

I dropped my whole body into the last note of the composition. I held that note, with my eyes closed, until it vanished into the intense air. I lifted my hands from the piano and opened my eyes; the audience was completely silent. As I stood to take my bow and thought of the accomplishment I had made, the audience rose with me and began to applaud. I knew how to play the piano, and because of that I had made a connection with these people. I felt amazed that my fingers were connected to the keys of the piano, which made the music that touched these people's lives. This was not mindless; I had a talent.

## My Worst Nightmare - Second Place

By Julie Chan

As a child, all I ever wanted to do was to go to school. I was a very outgoing and optimistic child yet after I found out what school was like, I never wanted to go back. The classmates that I wanted to like me hated me for what I was. I was called a chink, gook, and many other hateful things. They told me to go back to where I came from, but where was that? I was born here and this is the only home that I have ever known.

Aside from hurting me verbally they also physically hurt me. I remember an instance when I was pushed down concrete stairs, which resulted in a big bruise on my forehead and a bloody nose. They also threw rocks at me and hurt me in every way that they could think of. I was only in kindergarten. How could people be so cruel to a child? Why were these children (my classmates) so hateful? I recall begging my parents to not make me go to school again a week after school started, but I had no choice. They told me that my classmates didn't like me because I was Chinese, but I didn't understand. So what if I am Chinese?

Life wasn't any better in middle school. People called me even worse things and hurt me even more than before. I recall an instance when a classmate that I didn't even know pushed me against an open locker and called me a stupid f\*\*\*\*\* Chinese. That hurt me so much I didn't even notice the blood that was trickling down from the cut on my hand. It seemed as if someone had thrown daggers at me, each one piercing my heart, never to be removed. Aside from the handful of friends that I ate lunch and did homework with, I avoided everybody else. I had no choice. I had gone from being optimistic, to being a person who is pessimistic. I was afraid that I would once again be hurt. I didn't trust anybody, not even my friends. The only people that I could trust were my family, but most of the time it was just me, myself, and I. I loved and hated school at the same time. I loved going to school and learning, but I hated the way I was being treated.

Although high school was a lot better, there were still a few immature people. There was a girl that called me a Chinese bastard in front of all of her friends, and in that instance, I realized something. They weren't important. They only made fun of me because they were insecure and making me look bad, made them look good. From then on, I didn't show them that the words hurt me worse than a slap across the face could. I didn't want them to have the pleasure of knowing that they hurt me. I would not let them succeed. Going to teachers had never worked. It only made my classmates hate me even more and I knew that I had to learn how to fend for myself because when I finally graduated and left the school, nobody would be there to fend for me.

There was this one experience when I was walking out of a local grocery store, Yardbirds, when this man started to yell at my brother and me. We had never met the man before, but he didn't care. He just opened his mouth, and started to yell many hateful things to me across the parking lot.

I have cried myself to sleep many nights. I used to be so excited when I knew that school started again that I wouldn't be able to sleep. Now I can't sleep because I am too terrified of the way that some people will judge and treat me.

What I experienced as a child is an experience that will haunt me forever. I will never be as open to people as I was before. I have gone from a very happy girl to a very unsure and scared person. Now when I enter new environments and meet new people, I become very intimidated. I don't know what to expect. Will they like me? How will they treat me? Will they judge me for what I am, or who I am? Is race really that big of a deal? Does being Chinese make me less human?

## Dreaming Night - Third Place

By Ryo Nakamura

Stars are a symbol of dreams to Japanese. We offer our every dream to the stars. A proverb says that "if you wish on a falling star, your dream will come true." We celebrate the "Tanabata" (the Star Festival) in Japan. It comes from a Chinese legend in which "Hikoboshi," the Herdsman (Altair) and "Orihime," the Weaver (Vega) were hard-working, but after they married, they became lazy. The Emperor of Heaven got angry, and the two had to live separated by the Milky Way. Orihime was so sad that she cried every day. The Emperor felt sorry for them and allowed them to cross the Milky Way and meet once a year on the night of July 7th. On that night, people can look up in the sky and romantically imagine that the two are crossing the Milky Way and meeting each other.

I remember vividly the first time I saw a beautiful starry night. I was ten-years-old, in the fourth grade, and it was Tanabata, the seventh night of July. I went camping in the mountains in "Tenkawamura" (sky-river village), south of Nara, Japan, with my family of five. The village is famous for its displays of dazzlingly beautiful stars in the night sky. My two brothers and I had each written a wish on a paper strip the previous night to offer to the falling stars.

A year before, my two brothers and I had visited our cousins' families on Awaji island to celebrate Tanabata together. Each child wrote a wish on a paper strip and decorated a bamboo branch with them. Then everybody waited for stars to fall, but unfortunately no stars shot across the night sky. We three brothers went back very disappointed. We talked with our parents about our dashed hopes, and my father said, "OK boys, next year I will show you a beautiful starry night."

"Really?" we three brothers asked again.

"I promise," my father replied.

So now it was the following year. It was a cloudy day in Tenkawa, so we doubted that we'd see a starry sky that night. We waited for the night, chatting with each other in front of a campfire. It was gradually getting darker, and various insects began to chirp around us. When it got quite dark, the sky suddenly cleared up, and we could see countless stars twinkling in the sky. We all felt as if we could reach out and touch the stars--they were twinkling so close to us. The beauty of the scene was beyond description--I was so surprised that words failed me. Suddenly a star shot through the night sky.

"Did you see it?" I asked my two brothers.

"Yes, but we couldn't offer our wishes to it," they said. But very shortly after that, many stars started to fall around us incessantly like snow. My two brothers and I offered our wishes to the falling stars.

I wished, "I want to become a professional soccer player."

That night, the "dreaming night," my family slept well under the starlight, pulling the stars' blanket over our heads. I still remember that night vividly.

My wish did not come true; I am not a soccer player. However, every July 7th, I think about that starry night in Tenkawa.