

Kodee Wright	1st Place Poetry	High School Nightmare
Ryan Craig	2nd Place Poetry	Stopping by Wal-Mart on a Busy Evening: A Parody
Kyle Redman	3rd Place Poetry	In a Room
Kyle Redman	Honorable Mention Poetry	The Salmon King
Sam Krehbiel	Honorable Mention Poetry	Pneumonia Day
Aubry Stapleton	Honorable Mention Poetry	The Words that God Hears
Chelsea Peterson	Honorable Mention Poetry	Clock
Elizabeth Stein	Honorable Mention Poetry	Family Reunion
Elizabeth Stein	Honorable Mention Poetry	Piano Solo
Aubry Stapleton	Honorable Mention Poetry	Pink Ribbons
Katelyn Carrigan	Honorable Mention Poetry	Portrait of My Shadow
Alex Nall	Honorable Mention Poetry	Today I Think I Found My Heart
Bryana Vondran	Honorable Mention Poetry	Music
Alex Nall	1st Place Fiction	Aquamarine Geo
Makayla Trotter	2nd Place Fiction	Leaving Never Land
Mary Ann Carlson	3rd Place Fiction	Eighteen Holes
Angela Lee	Honorable Mention Fiction	The Painter
Julia Mindeman	Honorable Mention Fiction	Tofu
Megan Brienen	Honorable Mention Fiction	The Bus Ride Home
Angela Lee	1st Place Non-Fiction	Emily
Kathleen McGowan	2nd Place Non-Fiction	I Call It Love
Ashley Reynolds	3rd Place Non-Fiction	The Hospital Room
Ryan Piers	Honorable Mention Non-Fiction	It's Not Just Tearing Paper: Scenes From Working At a Movie Theater
Kelsey Arney	Honorable Mention Non-Fiction	Happy Endings
Amanda Young	Honorable Mention Non-Fiction	"The Usual"
Caitlin Rydinsky	Honorable Mention Non-Fiction	Running Water

1st Place Poetry

Kodee Wright

V.I.T. High School

High School Nightmare

Round about our black pot go,
In the horrid memories throw.
Hotdog that's tinted green
PowerAde, juice, caffeine
Spanish book, encrusted spit
Boil, bubble, don't yet quit.

Math homework marked with "F"
Drop of sweat from bad ref.
Eye of skank, and toe of foe
Sheet of ice, yellow snow,
Pencil stub and cook's hair net,
Bad school picture, can't forget.
Form a nightmare, enough to wake
In our pot, boil and bake.

Hair of teacher hated by all,
Favorite pen lost in the hall,
Bottled smell of 4th grade vomit
Covered with an inch of Comet.
Piece of chalk from the board
Diary and false award.
Banana peel, old and brown
Sash of ugly prom gown
Behold our stew, form a frown
Stir thrice times in our pot
Create bad mem'ries ne'er forgot.

1st Place Fiction

Alex Nall

United CUSD #304

Aquamarine Geo

Being switched at birth isn't that bad, I think to myself, as I do every morning at the breakfast table, it's just like getting over an addiction; one must go through a series of steps that lead to acceptance.

My father is sitting across from me, a shiny spoon with a load of Lucky Charms in it. As he attempts to eat his breakfast, a waterfall of the overlapping milk dribbles down my father's prickly chin.

Me, I am at the head of the table, scratching my head as to why this is the life I live in this corn-chomping county.

"So, today you've got school?" My father asks, a half chewed diamond oat escaping his jaws.

"Yep," I remark, staging my monotone as obvious as possible.

"Anything going on afterwards?"

"Band practice, then to Pete's for movie night." *Like every Monday evening.*

"Right right... so what flick is it tonight?"

Flick. God, flick. Only my father can take a commonly used word like 'flick' and make it into a word as vulgar to the lips as "diarrhea" or "scrotum."

"Dawn of the Dead," I say.

His bowling ball head perks up in a flash of excitement. "You don't say! You know I was just entering college when that came to drive-ins! Your mother and I actually saw it about—"

"Yeah, well this is a remake," I say, saving myself from the trepid tale.

My father's smile fades and his eyes blink a couple times. The burrows on his bald head above his eyebrows scrunch oddly and his cheeks drop a bit. He did the same thing when he heard our Grandma Elton died.

I bid my farewells and grab my skateboard and pack and head out the door.

He's probably still sitting there, letting his cereal decompose into a pool of psychedelic hues, the marshmallows sinking like blasted submarines. He's probably not aware that he's the biggest dork on the planet.

On Tuesday, after school, I lay out on the lawn doing rock god meditation, staring at the sky, praying that a reality show host will pop out and tell me it's all been a cruel joke for the world's viewing pleasure: a sixteen-year-old Truman Show.

The only person to appear is my father.

He is in banana colored shorts, a tanktop that has a goofy cardinal twirling a basketball on his finger, and a John Deere hat covering his bald noggin.

"Grrrrrrreat day," he says, miming Tony the Tiger, forever ruining Frosted Flakes to my tongue and ears.

I don't comment and continue staring at the sky. He smacks his lips and then says, "Hey, I've got something for you. You're gonna like it."

I don't move. At the word "something" I had a catalog of images flood my mind, including a series of fishing lures, a boyhood slingshot, or the remains of baseball cards, weathered and wrinkled.

“C’mon slowpoke, promise, this one’s good.”

He’s got my attention now. The “promise” that this is not what it will be makes me get off the grass and follow him to the garage where he opens the door.

I see a short sky blue vehicle sitting where my mother’s minivan usually is. I say nothing.

He walks over and places his arm on the hood and proudly examines it. For some reason he calls it a “her” but in its deteriorating state I don’t think a gender can be placed upon the automobile.

“Got her from Herb McKeown for fifteen hundred. He wanted twenty but with a couple of promises of some of your mother’s homemade pies I was able to shake him down.”

I’m tuning out. The twisted story involving Ol’ Herb and his infatuation with my mother’s baked goods are unimportant to me right now. I am fixated on the heap that is in front of me. The hood has a fountain-sized dent in it making the scenario of an elephant sitting on top of it seem reasonable. Every window is cracked, the doors keyed, the wheels replaced by four small spares. I noticed all this after seeing there was no radio inside. Not even speakers.

I knew it had been too good to be true but I pitied my father and his goofy cardinal shirt so I asked, “What make is it?”

He blinked a few times. He dropped his jaw and rolled his tongue around.

“Weeeelllll,” he peered at the tailgate and a look of utter confusion came across his stale face, “It’s a Geo.”

I think when I sighed I took in gas fumes but at this point it didn’t matter. It couldn’t get worse but I probed anyway, “And this is for?”

He looked at me, “Well, you’re sixteen aren’t you? You’re gonna need it! I mean you’re gonna need something better than that skateboard.” He nodded and walked back to the garage door, “You’ve made it sixteen years without messing up and well... we’re proud of you.”

I didn’t know what to do. I had a tinted aquamarine Geo with spares as tires and no radio. What did my father expect of me? Did he want me to go up to him and jump for joy! Like a kid on Christmas? I couldn’t believe this...

I kicked the siding, half expecting it to tip over like a dumb cow. My father had opened up his heart to me and yet the most noticeable emotion inside me besides frustration, embarrassment, anger, and empathy for myself, was the residing feeling that I felt grateful.

I imagined better thoughts of my dad and me and I went to the kitchen and went up to my father and I gave him a soft but presentable hug, my eyes closed the entire time. He surprisingly said nothing. No “Well, that’s just grrrreeeat!” or any of that. Just merely happy to receive it.

I then retreated back outside to forget it ever happened.

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1st Place Non-Fiction

Angela Lee

Washington High School

Emily

She stood quietly at the well-shrouded window and parted the dark curtains with her fingertips. White light from the brisk afternoon roared into the room like a flash flood and sent the shadows fleeing to the corners. She jerked the curtains closed and snapped her eyelids shut, her head aching from pupils that could not drink in the brightness so quickly.

Sighing and rubbing her temples with anxiety, she let a moment pass before daring to open the curtains again. This time, she only pushed the fabric panels a few inches apart. She began with her eyes closed, and gradually raised her eyelids so her dark pupils could sip the light as slowly as one drinks a cup of hot tea. She pressed her face close to the windowpane and bated her breath so it wouldn't fog the glass and obstruct her view of the outside.

A blanket of snow from the night before lay undisturbed on the ground of the park across the street, but footsteps and wheels from carts and buggies had trodden it away on the streets and sidewalks. The people bustled along, stepping quickly towards their destinations, day-dreaming of the kitchen stoves that would thaw their fingers when they arrived. Across the way, one couple took their time as they walked along, whispering softly in each other's ears. The man offered the woman his arm, and she smiled as she pulled a white delicate hand out of her fur muff and slid it across his left elbow. The man put his gloved right hand on hers, warming more than just the flesh.

They took no notice of the watching eyes behind the windowpane, but the eyes followed them until they were completely out of sight. The watcher shivered for want of the warmth those lovers felt even amidst the cold afternoon air. Hearing her call, a tall figure stepped up behind her and slipped his left hand into her right, silently beckoning her to step away from the window. There they stood, quietly studying each other's eyes—hers dark and lonely, his clear and mysterious. The warmth of his fingertips intertwined with hers spread through her hand and up her arm, but stopped there for want of being even closer. He pulled her in, never letting go of her hand and spun her around so her arms crossed in front of her own chest holding his hands on either side. She closed her eyes and lifted her chin so their cheeks met and the warmth spread through her entirely.

And when the cold had departed from her mind, he too made his exit, leaving a kiss on her hand before returning to the imagination from which he had come. Sighing, but with a smile on her face, she closed the curtains and seated herself at her desk where parchment and ink stood ready for her hand's directions.

He always left in such a hurry, never revealing his identity, only warming her heart and hands, which wrote him letters after he'd gone. And so again, they began their task, scribbling the first line across the parchment.

I'm nobody. Who are you?