THEODORE GARRISON CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CREATIVE WRITING FESTIVAL 2005

POETRY

First place:

Casey Johnson, Macomb High School t

Second place:

Kara Brown, Pekin High School

Third place:

Desiree Craig, Pleasant Valley High School

Honorable Mention:

Cody Morris, Pleasant Valley High School Doug Addy, Pekin Community High School Phillip Schissler, Pleasant Valley High School Christina Richards, Macomb High School Michael Bloom, Macomb High School Jessica Miller, Southeastern High School Stacy Hankins, Rochester High School Rita Trentadue, Pekin Community High School Megan Christianson, Pekin Community High School Steve Long, V.I.T. High School

FICTION

Honorable Mention:

Shea Sims, Rochester High School Phillip Schissler

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I can easily imagine dying of thirst; I am thirsty every day. I will do anything to feel a splash of pristine liquid against every inch of my flesh again, to smell the crispness of water and be able to do more than just quickly slide it past my parched lips and into my throat. I crave the feeling of water running down my bare body again, how clean and pure and fluid it would feel. I thirst for more.

equally patiently for them to let me be because I know I will never accept the fact that water is forbidden for my skin, and all I want to do is swim in it.

-depressive, anxiety-stricken girls just

like me on Dateline before and

hic death predictor. A rainstorm

calls for a hundred-percent chance of at least one suicide per day, it seems, as people run out of their houses into flash flood streets and dive off of bridges into polluted waters. And a snow flurry can be worse because humans of assorted ages roll around in the standing snow until they too are frozen snowflakes of crystallized skin. Just more excuses for people to complain about the weather or any thing else, for that matter.

drowning. If I every dive into water again, I want it to

last forever.

I remember the last time I really felt water on my skin. It was during the period when nobody y fingers underneath

not believe them and would not deprive myself of the sensation of running water streaming between my fingers. Then the tra

I hear the front door open and I look up in a daze. The rain seems to close in and I open my

and eagerly soaking in every drop of rain that clambers for his skin.

My mom and I both freeze at the entrance of the door, and we are aware that we are helpless victims once again, forced to accept this choice of fate. Instinctively I want to stop him, but I understand him more than ever now, as he plunges haphazardly into the rain. His determination is beautiful. To witness a suicide is so beautiful, I realize now, because it is the most elaborately courageous and bold death there is.

They say that you should always dance like nobody is watching you. My brother is dancing in

skin, and the agony becomes evident in his eyes. Yet he is still joyous in his death, as his limbs melt and fall beneath him, letting his entire body sink into the water and soil and become muddy with it. He bathes in the glory of his death, thrusting his hands into the air with the last amount of strength he has, as though the sky is his savior and its rain is the blood of the Lamb. I watch numbly as he dissolves away into a fantastic bloody mosaic of lifeless, flesh-colored liquid.

My mom, standing next to me, has water in her own eyes, and she fumbles in her pocket for her tear suppressant pills before she starts crying and destroying her skin. She hands me one as well, but I

Days pass by in blur of sympathy cards and syrupy phone calls and I am bitter all over again. I no longer look at the lingering puddles outside and yearn to jump in them, but I like to glance inside them

understand him.

On the way to his funeral it begins raining, and my mother curses as she flicks the windshield wipers on. Somehow they console me, the monotone slap, slap as they slick their squeegee blades rhythmically against the glass. They seem in as much of a trance as my mom and me.

Voices as monotone as the windshield wipers drone on at the funeral, and I ignore them as I walk -drenched soil. It is simply

tradition carried on to soothe the

Second Place Fiction

Katie Gettinger Macomb High School

I impatiently glanced down at my watch, desperately hoping that the hands might have moved on to some larger numbers since the last time I had checked. Unfortunately, only three minutes had past and I was still ten minutes early for the city bus. I took a seat on a bench near the bus stop, a little leery about the thought of having to stall until my transportation arrived. A pleasant looking young man on the bench looked up form his novel and smiled as I sat down, graciously scooting himself over to allow some room for me. He seemed warm and friendly, but I still felt uncomfortable having to sit and kill time while waiting for the bus. I had always been fond of punctuality, and patience was not one of my strongest virtues.

I heard a rustling of papers and I looked across the street, a poor sight awaiting me. An older man sat with his back against the decaying brick front of a building, taking his place amongst a pile of waste. With delicate, deliberate and concentrated motions, he stuffed wads of old, dirty newspaper into his stained and worn out garments in an attempt to insulate himself for the coming winter. A small shoebox sat on the sidewalk in front of him along with a tattered corner of cardb

Like a creeping fog, several young boys appeared, slowly drifting towards the homeless man as he continued to concentrate upon his task. The boys were lean with finely chiseled faces, and a chilling look of evil mischief sparkled in their stony eyes and played upon their lips. They circled their prey like hyenas, cackling and snickering softly to each other as they closed in. Every motion was slow, casual, and precise, and soon the old man took notice of the slithering company and he halted in his work, his eyes darting to and fro as he surveyed each of his foes. He set down his papers and frowned in confusion, finally pointing to his handmade sign after several long seconds of silence, thinking perhaps the boys would be kind enough to leave some spare change.

In an instant they were upon him ripping at his clothes and pummeling his frail body. Hollow thuds and muffled sho

looked around, wondering if anyone would put a stop to these young hooligans and save the poor man. However, I realized that the only people in the general vicinity were the young man sitting next to me and myself.

I have to do something, I thought to myself, I have to go save him. I repeated it over and over in my head until suddenly I realized that I was still sitting on the bench, watching the fight with a drooping jaw. While half of my body screamed at me to go help my fellow man and to rescue this innocent soul who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, the other half of me stayed firmly planted to the park bench.

I need to step up. That man is in trouble, and I am the only one who can save him right now. What if his life depends on me? Perhaps the boys will beat him until his heart goes out, and his only chance of survival will be my intervention. No, I think to myself, more likely the boys would let him live. They would let him live out of spite, just to let the old man be forever ashamed of himself and Cut that out! Leave him alone

Doubt raced within my mind like freight train, plowing through any thought that stood in its way and cutting all the cohesiveness out of my plans. The boys could have reasons for attacking the man, I supposed, trying to rationalize the situation. Perhaps he had stolen their money or he is some sort of s arrest. No,

that should be taking place here is one I would make through my intervention into the fight. Those boys a cheap

nal and

quick to judge. Besides, do I really want to extend myself out to someone like him? Sure, what the boys are doing is unlawful, but does the man really deserve to be saved?

The question is whether I should really risk my own neck to try to help someone of his standings.

wild dogs? I would have to be a fool to take a risk like that. Why should I try to race back into the burning building

rescue of the homeless man. My bench mate outweighed me by at least thirty pounds, and he was, after

efficient than me. I watched as he just sat there, staring at the fight with a look of pity gleaming in his eyes. He made no motions to get up and help or to reprimand the boys.

Once more I thought of shouting, perhaps just to distract the attackers long enough for the old man to crawl to safety. But then what would happen? Once they discovered that they had lost their prey, would they ten descend upon me? Would my bench mate than perhaps try to defend me, or would he simply stare, his jaw slack, as I was beaten to a bloody pulp? Was my worth to him anymore than the homeless man on the street? Whatever the case, I c

I turned my head and began to read the front page of the newspaper in the dispenser next to the bench. I listened as the struggle winded down, and by the time I had read the first column of the paper it sounded like the boys had dispersed. The city bus groggily pulled up, and with a hiss it came to a stop and opened its doors. As I made my way to the bus and began to enter, I heard a soft, muffled sound. I looked across the street and saw the old man, his scraggly face buried in his hands. He was softly weeping to himself. I heard his whimpers and I swallowed hard, about to walk over and comfort him when suddenly my thoughts were interrupted.

me as I paused with one foot inside and one foot outside the bus. I came to my senses and remembered how long I had been waiting for the bus, and slowly, hesitantly, I climbed the stairs and found myself a seat. I sank down and sighed heavily, and finally my heart and mind agreed with each other and let my entire body feel the heavy impression of guilt.

It was too late. Beth scrunched up her face and began to cry softly like she does.

Mommy gave up and sat back against the tree. I shook Beth off of my arm and walked down the beach just a little. My eyes were cast do

looked up sharply with my fighting face and saw a family instantly stop laughing. There was a father at a grill with a jolly expression. There was a blond mother with a wrinkleless forehead and a perfectly made u p face. There were three children, two boys and a girl, lounging on the sand with their hands full of fruit. Their swimsuits shone with newness.

The father turned back to the grill and the mother to laughing and romping about with the children, but I stood there for a long time, staring, until the kids started to stare back.

I sighed and turned to walk back but tripped over a large ruffled lump that sobbed in the sand. Beth looked up at me through her tears and her snot-covered face.

looking flustered and digging through her makeup bag.

ke-

Mommy kept blathering on about

e

The road seemed to boil in the hot, eastern Kentucky sun. Dirt and dust flew into the air, provoked by small breaths of wind, a cruel taunt since they barely provided relief from the dog days of August. Summer had been particularly nasty that year, ushering in a whole new meaning to the word uncomfortable, and as Anna Brown put one foot in front of the other, feeling the hot grit between her toes, she was certain she now knew what it would feel like to be in Hell.

Not that Anna would have gone to Hell, that is. She had always prided herself on being a good girl. She went to church every Sunday, helped out around the house, and, unlike most of the children in

ear of

to trust, and he trusts me. Got no brothers.

Honorable Mention Fiction

Phillip Schissler Pleasant Valley High School

walking down a gravel road, surrounded by ground that will give birth to some kind of plant in the next

The telephone poles on the side of the road walk beside me. They look like big humans, with their backs straight and their arms outstretched, reaching for my hand. Some of the poles stand tall, looking forwards and backwards, sending beauty and filth (or beautiful filth) along their black cables. Further down the road a pole stands snapped in half at the middle, disconnected and curtsying to its own apathy. The rest stand, but their black cables send nothing but static and butter knives.

I hear the roar of a vehicle approaching from behind, and turn to see a white telephone repair truck driving towards me, polluting the air with dust and hope. The repairman pulls up next to me. On *Solutions Inc.*

turns his head

going into town to get

in. The interior closes in on me, an overwhelming brown. It smells hot and musty. I turn to look at the repairman. He meets my gaze and

window for a few moments, then turn again to abserve my pilot, Theo. Looking into his eyes I can see magnificent galaxies exploding with calculated bursts of light, and time before time existed. Looking at his muscular arm, I can see one million years of evolution squirming and growing under his tight sleeve. A harmonica peeks curiously out of his shirt pocket. On his shirt there is a picture of model, parked outside the mall in her Mercedes Benz convertible. An outline of a handgun stares at me from his right jeans pocket. Paint stains boldly dot his jeans like stars from the pockets down. Books populate the floor of his truck like lily pads on a pond of brown carpet.

truck towards the pole. I notice his eyes again. He walks up to the pole; leaning slightly forward he bows his head, and puts his right hand against the pole. My window is still down, and I can hear him mumbling

fixing anything. He takes his hand off the pole and slowly walks back to the truck, and we drive to the next pole in silence.

Honorable Mention Fiction

Georgia Leake Macomb High School

Dan woke the next morning feeling empty. His hands were still clenched tightly to the pillow that he held close to his body. His eyes felt tight, and when he shut them they felt thick. He must have cried himself to sleep. Rolling over, Dan looked around his bedroom; this was the room that he had grown up in his whole entire life. He began to remember everything, so many memories in this house. He looked at his closet door partially open, a hooded sweatshirt hung from the doorknob. He remembered the many nights as a 5 year old when he would be waiting in his bed for his mom to tuck him. Hearing something rustle in the closet, he would scream and cover his head. A figure would jump out.

all over. She would sit on the edge of his bed and say,

Dan smiled remembering how they would keep going back and forth until he finally would get tired and say,

As Dan lay there in bed, he thought of how fast she went; how for 17 years of his life, she had been the best mom that she could be. Everything he was, everything he had grown up to be was because of her. He wondered if she knew that when she went, if she knew how much she had meant to him.

Honorable Mention Fiction

Betty is her best friend, and her biggest competition. She is my grandmother, and I, well, I am just a pawn in one of their many battles. The reason they get along so poorly is the same reason the positive end of a magnet repels another positive. Both women are in their early sixties, loud, obnoxious, and lazy. They have tried to outdo each other for as long as I have know them; always complaining about the other one, but acting disgustingly sweet as they show off a new kitchen, or trinket. They specialize in

offering put-downs that drip with honey from their voi

To put how serious these on-going competitions are to these ladies into perspective, my grandma once spent over \$200 on an antique pickle jar, with the sole intent of making Betty jealous. Except, she would never tell Betty she bought it. No,

mother-in-law. Free. If there is anything that gets

she could not answer. Of course, she spoke for a long time about their relationship, but she never really answered my question. Looking back, I see that they needed each other, not for reasons of fulfillment or any of those analytical explanations, but simply because no one else wanted to be around them.

My English teacher, Mr. Hannigan, asked us to write a story about the happenings over the

Then God showed me what was in that hand. It was full of something that made all the little sparkle pieces in your skin turn shiny and the colors in your eyes look like stained glass.

I would tell you what it was because it was so simple and pretty and it smelled nice, but God put a

-like, and God smiled,

and away the light-thing went into G

The God stood up and pulled me to my feet because God has a nice strong grip, and I smacked my hands on my jeans to get the dust off of them and God did it too, even though the dust on those hands or jeans. I wondered if the nice thing was going to be okay in those jeans, but this was God, after all, so I thought it most likely so.

And I was all sweaty and hot, but God was fine. I went back downstairs and sat in my chair again

"Twenty years from now; You will feel more regret by The things that you didn't do Than by the things that you did do." --Mark Twain one year, I had long ago stopped offering him the chance of complete forgiveness to redeem himself as children will endlessly do for adults.

Early on the morning of our trip, Chuck pulled his green van into our gravel driveway. Chuck always felt a need to be ridiculously early to every event. The drive was fairly uneventful and quiet. I remember thinking of how distant the two of us were, even in the confines of a vehicle. The fair ground, in my opinion was over-rated and over-priced. I was unimpressed with the animals, the politicians, and the crafts. The bulk of the day was spent walking and sweating. It was one of those hot, humid days that are famous in an Illinois summer. Before the horse races started, Chuck took my brother and me to get It is easy to overlook the average member of society. What is there to attract attention? There is nothing but average: no long legs to get that second glance, no remarkable intelligence to impress the intellectuals, nothing of *anything* striking. She is that student who sits in the middle of the classroom, not the slacker in the back, nor the overachiever in the front. And he is the man who works that nine to five day along with the rest of the world. These average members of society suffer from middle child syndrome; they go unnoticed, being outdone by more notable people. But do they mind? Not at all. The average person is glad to just fit in. Finding the happy medium in life, average people have succeeded in making the best of what's around.

Average people are like a mullet: business in front, but a party in the back. All work and no play may make Jack a dull boy, and idle hands may be the devil's playground, but ordinary people have evaded both of these existences. With average people, both productivity and a level of fun exist. They know when something needs to be done, and when there is room for things to be enjoyed. There is no tight schedule due to the demand that comes a long with that "above average" status. Instead of attending the boss's party Friday night, an ordinary person could kick back at a bar with a couple of friends and make bets on how long it will take for Johnny Brownnoser to get fired due to his overbearing personality. The presence of the ordinary person won't be missed at the party; they are just average anyway. On the other hand, the average person is not the lazy one who doesn't contribute anything but an empty gut to a BYOB party. The "average Joe" won't throw a party, but he certainly won't neglect his duty as a guest. Average people mean business, but when the day is done do not doubt that there is a party up their sleeve just waiting to bust a move or two.

Average people are not concerned with being ahead of their obligations. They can take a nap on a Saturday afternoon. Christmas shopping doesn't need to be done in July. Their calendars are organized by pencil, not pen. The ordinary person lives a life stressed less on the value of a minute. With a schedule subject to change and always room for uns1 0 0 1 9(r).[sc)-3(hedu)9(l)-4(e)9(due)9(t)-4(o t)6(he de)-2(m)17(and

I dart up the ladder and perch myself on a branch. No problem. After gazing at the beauty of our front yard, I make a mistake. I look down. My big brothers now appear miniscule. They are miles away. My original pang of apprehension has evolved into extreme terror. Realizing that Adam and Andrew could be of no help to my current situation, I call for my daddy.

My shrill screeching is not enough to get his attention. His leaf blower overpowers my cries. It looks like I'll have to handle the problem myself.

Courage comes roaring back into my mind, and I am once again the invincible four-year-old. I start to descend--facing Adam, not the tree. Once I am two prongs down, something goes wrong. I'm not sure if the ladder buckles or if I try to fly. I am suddenly sailing head-first toward the ground...

Andrew approaches our dad first. Adam is only slightly behind, juggling the pressure of guilt on his shoulders. Either from the fear in their eyes or from the absence of their tag-along sister, our dad assumes the worst. He is certain that his little girl is in trouble.

It is just approaching noon on a Thursday in August. While contemplating what to buy my wife for our twenty-year anniversary, my secretary informs me that my assistance is needed. I choke down the remainder of my soggy turkey sandwich, take a swig of Diet Pepsi, and am on my way to save the world. I am the residing physician at Prompt Care.

I can see the dismay in the little girl's eyes. For a moment I feel guilty as I restrain her silent arms and legs. The still limbs may be innocent now, but I don't want any disruptions while sewing her chin back together. Six stitches and twenty minutes later, they are leaving; the girl looks up at me with her big blue eyes and utters, "Thank you."

As we exit through the gates at Magic Kingdom, my mom informs me that I have to get the stitches removed from my chin. I don't mind. How could any child not be carefree when she is in Disney World?

When the doctor is finished, she tells me that I am *almost* as good as new.

After being flooded with memories, I back away from the window and enter the bathroom. I shower, brush my teeth, and BT92 reW BTF2 Dn6h, 0 full fact) foc4)4hroom. BD4()

up and go to school today so you can make some memories to remember your friends by!" But, I realize now that it had been at least part of my motivation all along. It's part of everyone's motivation. Everyone wants to remember, and be remembered for their positive characteristics. For example, I would hate to be remembered because I always got picked on and beat up in junior high, but I would love to be remembered for being an all-around nice guy with a good sense of humor.

With this knowledge in mind I believe that life can be defined in very simple terms. It is nothing more than a process that involves the creation and storage of memories over an uncertain span of years. Notice that the key word in this definition is *uncertain*. No one knows how long he/she will have the capacity to go out and create new memories. In other words, get out and live life while you still can, because the clock never stops ticking. When I reach the age when my bones are so brittle that I can't move around too much without breaking something, then I want to be able to lie in a hammock in my backyard on sunny, summer afternoons and stare off into space. My only wish is that an occasional smile crosses my wrinkled, toothless features, as I reminisce over days long gone.

...It's hard giving up a part of yourself. It's so hard to let go and forget. Even though she's not an active part of my life anymore, I still think of her often. Something will happen, something amusing or fascinating that she would enjoy, and I will want to tell her, but I never do.

Sarah wasn't the only *friend* who left me. A few others couldn't handle my depression, and I couldn't stand their ignorance any more. I set off on my own and started anew. I used to look back on those old times and wonder what it was that got me through. I was completely alone and dependent on myself. I realize now that I can stand without Sarah.

Occasionally, I sink again into the dark abyss of my lonely pain, pain brought on by loss, by abuse, by neglect, and by hatred. Sometimes I am drawn again to those shattered bits of glass. I am drawn not to the pain they create, but rather to the false numbing peace they leave with me. I always stop, however, and picture Sarah's broken expression of betrayal. That's what I want to tell her most....

...She had experienced so much. She had