1st Place	**Brian Murphy**, Pekin Community High School	"Real Civil Rights"
2nd Place	**Kate McGowan**, Macomb High School	"Erin and Caledonia"
3rd Place	**Joscelyn Lockwood**, Pekin Community High School	"Balance"

Honorable Mention (in alphabetical order)

Josh Fairfield, Winchester High School	"What Is the Rhyme?"
Amy Neill, Southeastern High School	"Seasons Beauty"
Kourtney Parks, VIT High School	"Cowboy"
Hannah Robertson, VIT High School	"The Outsider"
Miriam Rutzen, West Central High School	"Spring is in the air"
Aubry Stapleton, Pekin Community High School	"Ice Queen"
Aubry Stapleton, Pekin Community High School	"Little Toy Soldier"
Heather Stevenson, Monmouth-Roseville High School	"Sweet Serenity"

1st Place	**Julia Lindeman**, Macomb High School	"Lords"
2nd Place	**Grant Benda**, Macomb High School	"The Humanoid"
3rd Place	**Sarah Tisinger**, Pleasant Valley High School	"Silent Angels"

Honorable Mention (in alphabetical order)

Kyle Glaser, Macomb High School	"Twilight"
Therese Anne Pircon, Macomb High School	"Table Talk"

Erin and Caledonia

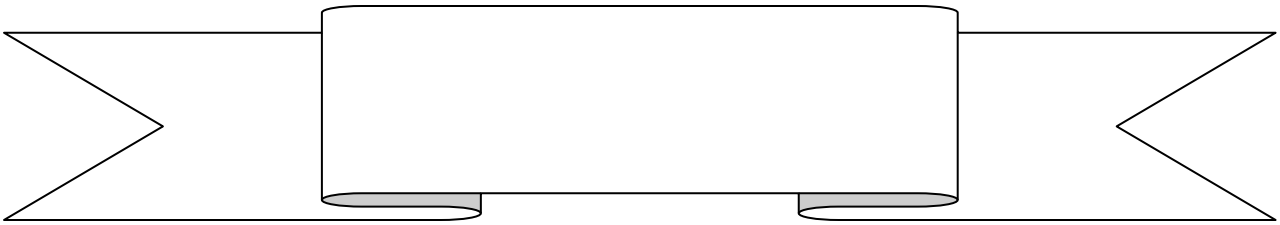
I

Seasons Beauty

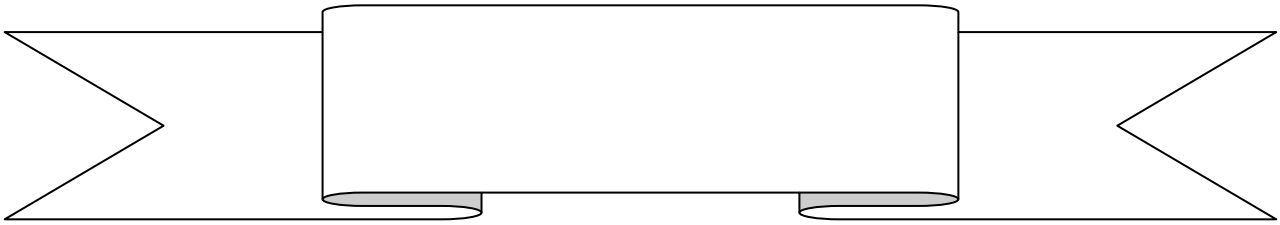
I like the sounds of crickets throughout the night,
The dancing fireflies giving out their light.
Who knew of such a beautiful sight?
I love this summer night.

The Outsider

Whispers.
Swarming busily surround her,
as she confidently walks to class.
Of course she hears them.
Impossible to escape the scorns.
She feels the wrae



Spring is in the air.
Beautiful sweet sugar,
I taste on my tongue.
I take a deep breath;
Cleansing, relaxing.
Tension runs high.
I gaze at the bar,
Levelly staring back at me.
In defiance, I shift back,
Balancing on my heel.
With the thrust of my arms,
I race toward my enemy.
Closer I approach,
Charging, like a bull.
And with the grace of a gazelle,
I lift off the ground,
Arching, arching, ever so high;
Twisting, spinning, flying;
Down, down; sweet relief.
Triumphant; I have won.



Ice Queen

Her beauty is unrenowned
Her malice
Unforgettable
She sits on a throne of ice
Cold unwavering
Her eyes
Piercing
She covers everything she sees
With a bed of frost
Her chill
Brings lovers together
And tears the world apart
Winter is a double-edged sword
Held by a queen
Of ice

Little Toy Soldier

Barbie sits on the shelf,
trapped in her plastic prison,
bound by twist ties,
and plastic tags,
a smile plastered on her face.
She stares ahead,
eyes never blinking.

One day a young girl
comes and buys Barbie.
She takes her home,
carefully cuts the tags,
untwists the ties,
tenderly removes Barbie
from her cardboard cell, s(n he)4(r [(cpun)-0 G4(d ski)-2(rt)] TJETQq0.00000912 0 612 972 reW* nBT/F5
poofs her rumpled skirt
and brushes her flattened hair.

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She sets Barbie on her shelf,
setting her precariously
on a plastic stand
next to other Barbies,
all stamped
with the same vacant expressions
and hollow plastic heads.

Every day Barbie watches
as the girl stares up at her
in adoration and says,
“I want to be just like you.”
Barbie never says anything,
never acknowledges the young girl.

As the girl gets older,
Barbie watches
as she pops pills,
smokes cigare 122.9536d 0 539 12 TfETQ EMC /P /MCID 4

Sweet Serenity

Coiled within me lays a serpent of fear
Penetrating fangs with my each bloody tear
He awaits
To strike
To release
His deadly bite
But he holds back and slithers through my veins
Til I’m cutting at my ğ غ ʻ mmъ mъ
Til I’m cutting

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Louis

My big brother Louis told me that the ghosts of a million peanut butter and jelly sandwiches were absorbed into the blacktop of our school after they were eaten, and that was why even the playground smelled like the inside of a lunchbox. When the teacher's aide threw open the doors for lunch recess, the scent wafted in and pulled us outside, each of us hopping in the randomly placed light green tiles of the dark green hallway floor.

That day, even before I saw a couple of the big boys gathering halfway across the playground, kids waiting for a swing were shifting almost imperceptibly into hunched-over, "Someone's-going-to-be-crucified-today-and-it-better-not-be-me" expressions, preparing for a kick they knew was coming. We all felt it descending.

We all went to watch anyway, feet pounding on the blacktop, elbowing our way through a small but growing circle of kids, craning to see the unfortunate one in the center.

Someone jeered, "He got hit in the stomach and he's *crying!*"

I laughed nervously and looked down through the tangle of blaring colored t-shirts.

Louis crouched on the ground, beet-red, clenching his teeth and wiping away tears that kept on dripping.

I stepped back through the crowd, once, twice, then turned and ran for the safety of the swings, pumping myself upward, losing myself in a perfectly smooth sky.

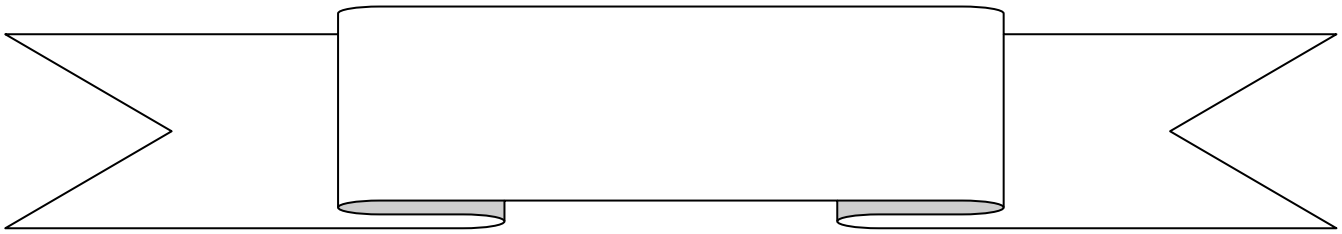
* * *

At three o'clock, though, I remembered. I dragged my feet down the pavement to the bicycle

He found the stairs, and slowly began to climb them. His feet were big and clumsy, but then again, walking had not been intended to be his forte. The old staircase ascended directly into the very kitchen where they had built him. Oddly enough, it was only now that he wondered where they were, or why the house was in such shambles. The kitchen, like the basement, was unlit. On the ceiling, there was an old fake chandelier with light bulbs in the shape of flames. He turned the dial that was placed on the wall a short distance away from the stairwell. About three of the eight lights began to glow warmly. This would be enough. Examining the kitchen, he walked around and felt things. Feeling things helped him understand his surroundings more clearly. The room seemed to have died in a way. Perhaps it was the light that was being cast by the few bulbs that made it seem unnatural. This was a very peculiar thought for him since he as unnatural himself. On the cracked wall, there hung a crooked picture of him with his creators. This brought back more memories.

They had hesitated to call him a robot, seeing as he didn't really fit the description very well. Eventually, they granted him the title of "humanoid." They gave him a name too. They wanted something simple, something that they could relate to. Together, they decided that the humanoid would

lifelike. They found him much more intimidating than they would have found an actual “robot,” since he had these human feelings. But in fact, he could go either way. In some ways, yes he was



Silent Angels

"Sunni! Wake up, everyone's outside waiting." Her Aunt Jen gently shook Sunni's shoulder. Sunni's dreams vanished–gone were her parents laughing and joking, her mother turning the radio stations and her father singing with the old tunes from their college days. Gone were their smiles in the rear view mirror, and gone were the pair of bright lights searing through the darkness.

"Sunni," her aunt paused, "you could stay here if you don't want to go. No one expects you to." Jen headed slowly toward the door; books and magazines about horses lay scattered on the floor and clothes next to that. *This is no place for this poor girl*, Jen thought, *how can I be a mother to her…*

"No, I'm fine. I'll get ready and meet you down there." Sunni sat up and pushed the calico cat that had been licking her face.

As Jen left the room, Sunni pushed the covers off and scrambled for her clothes–a light blue t-shirt displaying a horse head and *Angel Stables* on the back, coupled with her faded blue jeans and dusty brown boots.

"Well hello, sunshine. Ready to go?" Bryce, the stable man, jangled the keys to his truck. Auction day brought hopes of finding a few prospective horses. Garret, the elusive teenager who trains the horses at Angel Stables, finished hooking the trailer to the truck.

Through everything, her parents' death, leaving her home, school, and friends, moving in with an aunt she'd met only a handful of times, Sunni had the need to feel useful. So Sunni climbed into Bryce's truck with Garret on the other side and headed toward the vast unknown–a horse auction.

For the first hour, people traveled aimlessly past pens of horses, ponies, and half-horses. Most of the horses seemed drugged and listless, eyes sunken, heads hanging low, and eyes covered in flies with their ears half-heartedly flapping in a failed attempt to discourage the pesky bugs. When Sunni stepped close to the pens, she was dismayed to see that most hooves looked overgrown, and other horses had scars upon their legs.

Something triggered in Sunni that had probably been there her entire life. She had never before known the state of total helplessness, being without hope and cooped inside a pen with no escape. And now here she stood, face to face with her demons, now she witnessed a creature that looked on the outside how she felt inside.

For the next hour, high strung ex-racehorses pranced into an arena surrounded by people looking for a good deal. She stood in line for the concessions trailer that looked as ancient as some of the horses. She understood it was used for shows and then boarded up, shut away, and rolled to a new place, with

new faces and new horses. She might feel useful in this life where everything was always

After dinner, the ranch hands had gone home, except for Garret. Sunni sat at the window. Garret stood at the door looking at her, wondering how he could treat someone he adored as cruelly as he had in the past month. After all, he knew how it felt to lose your parents.

"Why do you hate me so much?" Sunni faced Garret now, with a pained expression. He felt torn up inside.

"I don't. I never did. I'm sorry if anything I have said brought you to think that, but it's just so hard. You coming here wasn't only hard on you. It's horrible what happened to your parents. I remember when you first moved here you didn't seem open to new friends and I was the same way. It was inevitable that we wouldn't get along at first." He tried to explain, but he figured he was confusing himself as well as her.

"I couldn't talk to anyone. I never hated you either. You put your heart

Twilight

-F. Scott Fitzgerald, <u>The Great Gatsby</u>

It was just past sundown. I felt great. My favorite place in the world. When you come into my town from the north, that's where it was. It's hilly there, and when you come over the final slope, just before you enter the city limits, you can see the university campus in all its summer evening glory. I looked at Sommerset Hall sitting up on a hill in the distance, a single spire lit up against the stars like Jupiter or Venus. The high-rise dorms to its right shone like fat Christmas trees against a black canvas. I drove past the golf course where my dad had urged me to "be patient" on the putting green and past the baseball field where I would go to watch my brother play ball in the evenings and, more importantly, to see girls. Beyond it was the swimming pool; as a kid I had spent so many summer days racing across the hot pavement, listening to pop music hum out of the boom box by the pretty lifeguard. To my right was the Cineplex next to the old-fashioned Pizza Place that some friends and I had been tossed out of after a junior high dance. It was all beautiful.

My hometown was nothing special. You can be sure of that. We did have a university, which I suppose added to our feelings of superiority over anyone from the surrounding "hick" towns, but it was

For a second I was terrified. What was she talking about? What do I say? That was when James burst out laughing. My face burned like I'd been smacked by a hot frying pay.

"I'm sorry, John. That was mean," she said, with a sympathetic smile still lingering on her face. "I'm here for the Heritage Festival, for reasons I can't explain."

"Yeah, us too," James replied.

"I come every year, drop my life's savings on rides and crap prizes that I'll never use, and swear never to return, yet here I am," she sighed.

"I know the feeling. Oh, John, there are the rest of the guys. I'll go get 'em, you two stay put," James said, looking over to a park bench, where I recognized Freddy and Sammy and the others, eating something, likely an onion blossom.

James turned to go, but not before sending an obvious wink in my direction. How helpful.

"So how's your summer going?" she inquired.

I knew where this was headed.

"Oh…fine. Yours?"

"The same. A little boring I guess."

"Yeah…yeah."

Oh, god, think of something! I bellowed to myself. How was everyone else so smooth?

"So I really enjoyed getting to know you this past year, John," she said, breaking the silence that must have lasted for about three seconds, but felt closer to three minutes.

"Really, cause I was so happy to spend time with you. I mean, we never really talked before…you know."

"Yeah, it's too bad we didn't spend more time together in high school."

I nodded slowly, my eyes intently examining the stitching on the tops of my shoes.

"So, did you have a good time at prom?" she asked.

"Ummm…it was okay."

I had so badly wanted to ask her. But we had different friends, different lives. I went to parties and sat on the couch and wondered what she was doing at that exact moment. I played football, and

Space, Emily's dog. Though Space wasn't human, the dog found ways to ease the adolescent's pain. He was the only company she had had in years.

"Well, Curly Q, I was just about to make some soup," said Mrs. Grey as she walked to the kitchen. The earth splattered teenager followed to help her mother prepare the meal.

"What kind are we having?" questioned Emily.

"Umm, chicken noodle. Yes, I'm in the mood for some chicken noodle soup tonight, aren't you?" Emily didn't respond. She calmly walked over to the cabinet to retrieve the proper ingredients for their supper. At that moment, Space came trotting in. He circled around the table once and then settled into his favorite bean cushion.

"Hmm, I remember when Space first entered our lives," said Mrs. Grey. "Mark was the one who got him for you, right? Or was that Paul? No, no, I'm sure it was Mark."

"It was Dad. Right before he died." She hated it when her mother forgot her biological father like that. It was as if he never existed to her mother. Like he didn't matter. However, Emily made no gesture of her hurt feelings and started to prepare the soup.

"Oh, yes. Bill. Oh, and don't forget the bacon bits for the broccoli and cheese soup." Emily looked up in bewilderment from her pot of liquid gold. "But you said you were in the mood for chicken noodle soup."

"Yeah, but now I have a craving for some broccoli and cheese soup. Doesn't that sound delicious, Darling?" Earlier in the day, Emily had noticed their kitchen sink had a slight leak. While she was silently pouring out their aborted batch of chicken soup, Emily saw that the drip was now moving a little faster and the droplets were becoming bigger.

"Mmm, I haven't had broccoli and cheese soup in a long time," chirped Mrs. Grey.

"Mom," said Emily in a soft voice.

"Yes, Baby?" replied Mrs. Grey as she plunked some chopped up broccoli bits into the pot. Emily shuffled her feet before looking up into her mother's face.

"Why don't you ever ask me what I think about your relationships? Why don't you ever care about how I feel in these situations?" The droplets were now beating as loud and fast as a machine gun.

"What are you talking about? I've always asked you how you've felt about all of my…I don't want to talk about this, Emily."

"You never

sleeping in my bedroom while I slept wherever I could find a space, and yet I still had heard no more than a few basic words from her. When she did speak she was always hesitant, reserved, as if her lips were the dam trying to hold back a river of information. Of course, it could be said that I, too, had not made any

image of Colin was that of a boy constantly gnawing away at several different plates of food at once. He came to represent the greedy, overeating, stereotypical American she had heard about in France. I laughed with her.

As we both rolled the chocolate filling and set the truffles upon the cookie sheet, our talk became more frequent and it even evolved. It was no longer the formal, reserved speech of all our previous conversations, sounding like a second-rate lecture out of an elementary language book. Our confidence grew as we both discovered that in the past weeks we had observed enough to be able now to understand each other's basic motives and ideas. The words acted as the confirmation, the clarification of the picture that we had been painting. I had seen her reading books for her literature classes, but only now was I able to ask her how she felt about the classes, what she learned. We both abandoned the consciousness of our imperfections in the language, shedding our insecurities in order to become light enough to scale the great mid-Atlantic barrier.

Camille laughed at something I said, releasing a spastic giggle that climaxed into a snort, which only served to launch us both into another eruption of laughter. It was the first time I had heard her truly laugh, and it made me see her fully as a human being close to me. She was no longer "Camille, a French girl," as I had introduced her previously to my friends. She became "Camilla, my French sister."

While standing in my kitchen, with Camille explaining to me some of the finer points of crêpe making, that I still have yet to master, a thought started to play within my head. The words had always been there. Whether they were in her muddled English or my miserable French, or whether simply unsaid altogether, perhaps nothing we said at that moment had failed to be summed up in feelings and actions. Just in a subtle twitch at the corner of her mouth or the gleam in her eyes, I was able to tell as much as when she confirmed it with words.

I believe our relationship was able to grow so strongly in the two weeks because its heart was at the unifying level of emotions and experience. Rather than talking about how we felt, we lived it, felt it, knew it before any words could even begin to form. The framework of our friendship was built upon these shared feelings, and the language merely created the defining contours to the walls.

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if Camilla and I had missed meeting as we did while making truffles. I assume that we would have either broken down to each other at some later point, or we would have just continued living parallel, unrelated lives in the same house.

When I now look back upon our sculpting the chocolate truffles, I see it as the door that led me into a whole new line of thinking. Before I met Camille, I was relatively secure in my established lifestyle. Then when I drove up to meet her at the airport, I began to realize that my routines would be placed upside down for the next four weeks. At first, the experience was like a foreign place to me, since I never had had any sisters or a foreign guest stay so long at my house. While Camille was struggling to figure out how to function in an American home, I was lost as to how to live with her. Without even

trying, she taught me how to loosen up and open myself to a whole new culture through her actions and the friendship that took shape while we finished the truffles. With perhaps the same effortlessness, I hope I was able to let her experience America in a full way.

Yet

Fewer than three out of every ten patients whose cancer has spread to other organs or tissue remain alive five years after their diagnosis.

Lauter's life started to change Christmas of 2004, a very busy time for her family. Lauter's grandmother had been taken ill and passed away, so all of her family was busy praying for her grandmother and settling her estate. During this time Lauter noticed a lump on her right thigh. Her family did not think much of the lump because no one in the family had a history of cancer or any genetic disorders. Soon after her grandmother's funeral, Lauter's nephew was born and no one really paid attention to her growing bump. In February of the next year she visited a doctor. Everyone thought that the lump was from an accident in seventh grade when a car had hit Lauter. But then the pain in her leg became unbearable. Lauter again went to a doctor and within a week and a half she had three biopsies.

Her mother didn't tell her at first.

"She didn't know how," Lauter says. "After she told me, I was in shock. I cried."

Lauter slowly realized she had cancer. She began receiving all of her treatments at St. John's Carol Jo Vecchie Center: chemotherapy, physical therapy, and radiation. Every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday she takes Bactrim in the morning to prevent infection. She does her normal routine of getting up, eating breakfast, dressing and going to school. After school she does her homework and goes to bed around 10:00 p.m. after taking Diflucan, a medicine to prevent the growth of fungus caused by chemotherapy, and more Bactrim. Usually she stays up until around 11:00 p.m. talking to her older sister Paris. She now has to sleep more because of her low white blood cell count.

"I have to spread things out," Lauter says. "I have to save my energy. I used to be hyper and have so much energy at the end of the day. Not anymore."

The rest of the week's schedule is about the same, except that she doesn't take her Bactrim. Whenever she feels nauseated she takes Zofran.

"It doesn't work," she says. "I've thrown up so many times that I can predict within two minutes when I'm going to get sick. You get used to it."

Lauter's mother is very protective of her. However, her family didn't seek a second opinion after Lauter was diagnosed. They were free to do so but they decided against it.

"Dr. Brandt is one of the best oncologists," Lauter says. "We didn't need to."

She isn't allowed to spend the night at friends' houses, even on the weekend. Other things are different as well. She doesn't know how anyone can say things like "my life sucks" or "I hate my parents." Teenage angst seem so trivial when compared to what she is going through. She also can't stand it when people make fun of others with disease. She realizes how good she had it–how good everyone without disease has it.

“One day during German [class] a boy was making fun of people with cancer. I walked right up to him and told him how I have cancer. He stopped what he was doing and said he was sorry. I told him he should be. Sometimes I want to say ‘I have cancer so I win,’” she says, “but I can’t.”

On the especially hard days she talks to her sister Paris or her friends Deanna and Maddalena. She doesn’t like talking to her mom about her cancer because she is afraid to make her sad or make her worry.

“Most days I keep things to myself,” Lauter says.

People started acting differently around Lauter after her diagnosis. They watched what they said and how they said it. Some people want to be friends more now than before. Some people don’t know what to say, so they don’t say anything at all. Even her friends started acting weird, but Lauter doesn’t mind. She’s used to it.

“My real friends stayed close,” she says. “Dee and Maddalena cried, but at least they stayed in touch. My pretty close friends acted overly sympathetic.”

Lauter’s family has been incredibly supportive of her.

“My family definitely understands me the best,” she explains.

Lauter has changed too. Ninety percent of Lauter’s nerve was removed from her leg during her five surgeries. She can’t run. Before her cancer she did not participate in most sports in school but was still very active.

“I kicked ass in gym,” she says.

Even through all of the changes in her life, Lauter is still active in her community. She is in Key Club (a volunteering club that benefits the community) and was in Beta Club (another community service group) during eighth grade. Although she has missed a large number of school days for treatment and surgeries, she has managed to keep her A average. Her deep interest in world history has Lauter considering the job of an archaeologist or helping people by joining the Peace Corps. She won’t let her cancer make her angry or stop her from accomplishing her dreams.

“I can’t be angry,” she explains. “I don’t know what to be angry at. I used to ask ‘why did God let me have cancer?’ I still don't know the answer. But it doesn’t seem to matter. I’m usually too tired to think about it.”

Lauter has learned so much from this experience, not just about cancer, but also about life itself.

“This experience has made my family stronger,” she says, “and it has given me a new outlook on life. I now know about life’s possibilities and all it has to offer.”

Lauter’s cancer has made her understand how wonderful everyone without disease has it–how good she had it. But she keeps on fighting. Recently Lauter finished her treatments and will visit her doctor for check ups every three months for the first year, every four months for the second year, and every six months for the third year.

"My doctor told me that it is a safe bet after the second year of being cancer free that it will not come back," she explains.

Just after Lauter finished her treatments she went to a relative's graduation ceremony. This occasion was a doubly festive event for Lauter's family. Everyone was so proud of her. She cried when her aunt told her that Lauter redefines the word "hero."

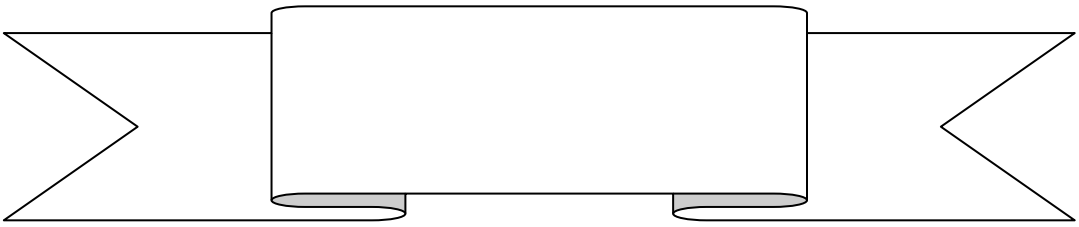
On the surface, Lauter Owens seems to be a regular fourteen-year-old girl. But underneath she is so much more. She is an example of strength and courage to everyone, no matter their age, sex, race, or disease. She has shown the world that even though life may bring despair and disease, hope, love and faith can and will triumph over anything.

Lauter Owens is not like everyone else.

She is unique.

She is strong.

She is a hero.



What Luck

I have always lived on a farm; I have grown up with calves and apple trees as my playmate companions. Together with my younger brother and dogs, I have explored the hills, alfalfa pastures, feedlots, woods, and creeks of my home. I understand the excitement of seeing new phenomena in nature, the complete rapture of watching a baby animal be born, the hollowness of seeing an animal die naturally, or the stoicism of watching an animal be killed. There is a certain adventure in searching for that next glimpse of something breathtakingly simple, like the noise of a woodpecker, a swimming snake, or the awe of a bird's nest and wanting so badly to reach out and touch those three perfect turquoise orbs but knowing I cannot for fear the mother might abandon her unhatched chicks. There are so many times that I have been left wide-eyed with my mouth open in awed reverence at something spectacular I had just been a part of. There is a holy mystery about all things in nature. It seems as if every time I am surprised by a natural occurrence, it is because I feel my place in the world is so perfect at that moment to be able to witness something so unique.

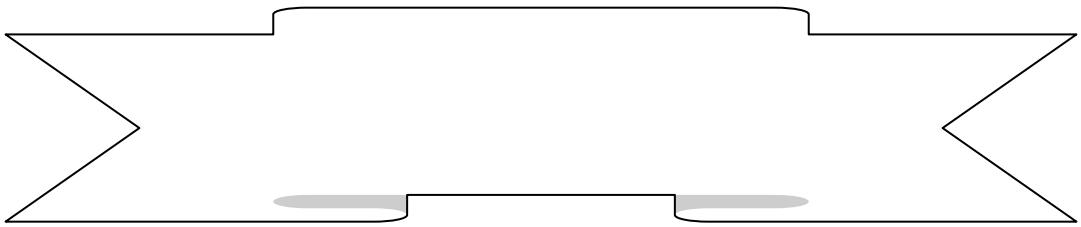
There was a time when I was standing upon the hot concrete of a small bridge that ran over a creek near my house; I was facing west. It was late summer, and the sun was setting far off behind the

trees. Everything glowed with the dull light fading into the horizon; there were no shadows and yet everything was cloaked in matted light. The huge steel beams which made up the framework and railing of the bridge were just beginning to cool, and I leaned against them, angling my body towards the water, my bare feet pushing dusty pebbles into the creek (my reward was the gratifying, hollow "***pluank!***" sound they made). Suddenly, in a single second or less there was a great *whoosh* of wings and a great gust of air on my face as some creature came from seemingly beneath me and soared above; the shock of the moment sent me backwards and I barely caught myself from falling smack on my behind. What had just happened? My first thought was that a pterodactyl had just flown from its roost. A bit too creative, but close. I looked up from my stupor just in time to see a large gray crane rising above me, chasing the sun, flying west. Oh the wonder, oh the magic! Had it touched me? Suddenly the feeling of soft feathers on my arms seemed a likely occurrence; I walked home reliving the experience partly from memory and partly from imagination. Later, when I told my father, he said that once when he was a young boy, something very similar had happened to him. My father assured me that no, I was not foolish for immediately picturing a pterodactyl, for he confided that in his young innocence, he had imagined the same thing.

Animals frequently amaze me. I am fascinated by imagining their thoughts, trying to decipher why they behave the way they do. I was never more intrigued, however, than the day I found a different sort of creation.

It tasted like a mix between cat food, cucumbers, and a green tomato. It wasn't even pink on the inside…rather orange, really. I couldn't figure out what I had done wrong. In frustration, I cut open all the miniature melons. They were all the same. Sure, I was disappointed, but the satisfaction of watching something grow slowly day by day, and the pride I had felt in watching that melon vine grow was greater than any satisfaction I could have ever had in tasting it.

I haven't really grown anything since that summer of the melon vine, but the inspiration those deformed little watermelons gave me is not vague to me. I still marvel at the tiniest natural occurrences. If it's warm enough, I will sit down at the creek or stream near our house, feeling completely at home in an alien world. I feel blessed to have my home where it is, and sometimes wonder if my peers have ever been so lucky as I to have witnessed all this beauty around me. Annie Dillard writes that it is not particularly hard to witness such sights, "…beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is to be there." Perhaps. Or maybe, just maybe, it is no coincidence we are able to witness the things we do…perhaps someone or something is letting us in on a secret. Perhaps, we are unwrapping a gift.



The Road

I've walked down this road many times before, but something is very different this time. There seems to be a different mood about it. It's much more solemn and quiet. As if everything around me, the old trees and fields, are thinking. They're concentrating hard on something and this had made me think also. I'd always only stared at my feet before, not really experiencing anything on the long walk home, just creating a mental list of everything that needed to be done. But today something compelled me to look up, something made me want to study the earth, the trees, the sky, and most importantly this old road, this old decrepit road.

The sky is a beautiful blue with clouds that seemed to have exploded from a single point in the sky and are still drifting slowly from that point. They look so peaceful but so full of energy. They seem to be spreading out in an attempt to cover this whole landscape, like a mother holding her children. Children who have spent the whole day running around and playing and now are tired and only want to be held by their mother.

The trees and earth look bitter and lifeless, as they often do just after summer and right before it becomes too cold to wal

My 9/11

Everyone has a time in their life when they have to deal with a great loss. Whether a family member, friend, or even a pet, losing someone or something close to you is never easy. It causes stress and usually makes a person realize what they take for granted. Friday, March 3, 2006. This day will forever stick in my mind as the day I experienced one of the biggest losses I have ever had to endure.

Upon awakening that morning, everything seemed to be normal. I got up with the same monotony that I do every morning, and then took my two little sisters to school. I didn't really want to go to school that day, because it was a Friday and the weather was pretty nice. When I got to school, I went straight to the band room and began practicing for Solo and Ensemble, a musical competition that I was to be attending the next morning. The only class I was really looking forward to was Chemistry. Mr. Kerr had told us that we would be makin

verge of tears. When we looked back to the school, the smoke was pouring out. At that point, I thought it best to call my mother. I knew that if she happened to be watching television, she would probably hear about it and want to make sure we were okay. I tried to call her, but she wouldn't answer. About that time, we were shepherded to the baseball field. It was then that we got our first glimpse at how bad the fire really was.

When I saw the flames bursting from the top of the building, I began to get dizzy. When I got to the field, I met up with my group of friends again. It was then that the tears came. Here was my life, my future, and it was being taken away from me before my eyes. I began to cry, and Tera started to cry with me. We stood there, our heads down, tears in our eyes, only periodically looking up at the monster that was demolishing our home. My heart broke in two. I felt like I was losing a member of my own family, and there wasn't anything I could do besides stand helplessly and watch.

The next couple of hours were a blur for me. I tried to call my mom a couple more times before I finally got her. We were bussed over to the Community Building, where the Red Cross met us. They brought food for the younger kids that had been deprived of lunch. My mom came to pick us up a little while later. I was smiling, but it wasn't a happy smile. Everything felt so surreal to me, and still does. I was still in a huge amount of shock. It was one of those events in life that I thought could never happen to me. We finally got word of what we were going to do and by Wednesday of the next week, we were back to school and hard at work.

When my high school burned down, I realized how lucky we really are. The amounts of help we received and the support we gave to each other made me realize that we live in a great community. For some of us, the school was our life, our home away from home. And it was gone. It was like my own individual 9/11. But now that we have all gone through it, we have bonded. We survived, and as individuals and as a community, we will forever be stronger.

The Hazel Gaze

His eyes would always glitter. Happy, Angry, Disappointed. They would always glitter. Hazel eyes that sometimes changed to brown but unlike mine they would never turn blue. He gave me his eyes. He showed me all of his tricks. How to make them sparkle when he was happy or how to make them

become so dark they were almost black when he was raging mad. I have nothing else from him, but I did inherit these. They are my prize possession and one of the few things that can't be changed.

When he would look at me sometimes my pulse would quicken because I knew that in just a few minutes I would be in very big trouble. Or maybe he had a treat for me. He could never really hide those things but when he wanted to he could veil his eyes with a fine mist that no one could penetrate. That way he kept the many secrets he had safe from harm and questioning, and he kept the light from shining. When he did that I knew to shut up and do it quick because the look he had would scare me.

Unfortunately I never got to learn this trick from him and I'm sometimes afraid that no matter what I do I'll never really be as good at it as he turned out to be. I can hide small things from him and I can even hide big things from so many other people, but no matter how hard I try to keep things away from him all he has to do is look. His stare is one that no one, and I mean no on, can hide from; all he has to do is look at you.

When I was young I was afraid of his eyes, and yet I knew that those eyes could scare away the monsters that I had hiding under my bed. As I grew older I found comfort in that unfaltering gaze and I knew that he would always be there. Now that I am almost grown I see those eyes in a different light. They give me hope.

I may not see them too much anymore but I do know that when I need them all I have to do is remember. He used to tell me, "Princess, make sure you see my eyes when you live your life. Think of what you're doing before you do it and remember that no matter what, I'm always watching you. Don't be afraid but do make sure you're careful." Unfortunately I'm no longer his princess. He doesn't make me laugh or cry; he doesn't look at me with one of his ever-changing stares. His light still shines, I'll not deny that, but it doesn't shine on me.

I remember this the most: his hair would always be in his eyes. It was dark brown and he kept it long so it was difficult to see him clearly but if or when he would brush his hair out of his eyes you knew that something special was about to happen. You might have been terrified by it because you knew that you had done something wrong and he looked as if he was the last person on earth you wanted to cross but you were also in complete awe of him because at that moment you knew that you were the only person in his sight. Whether you were good or bad, small or big, plain or ostentatious you always knew that he would make you feel what you deserved to feel. You didn't dare cross him for fear of him but you would try to please him as hard as you could just to get one of his rare hazel-eyed gazes.