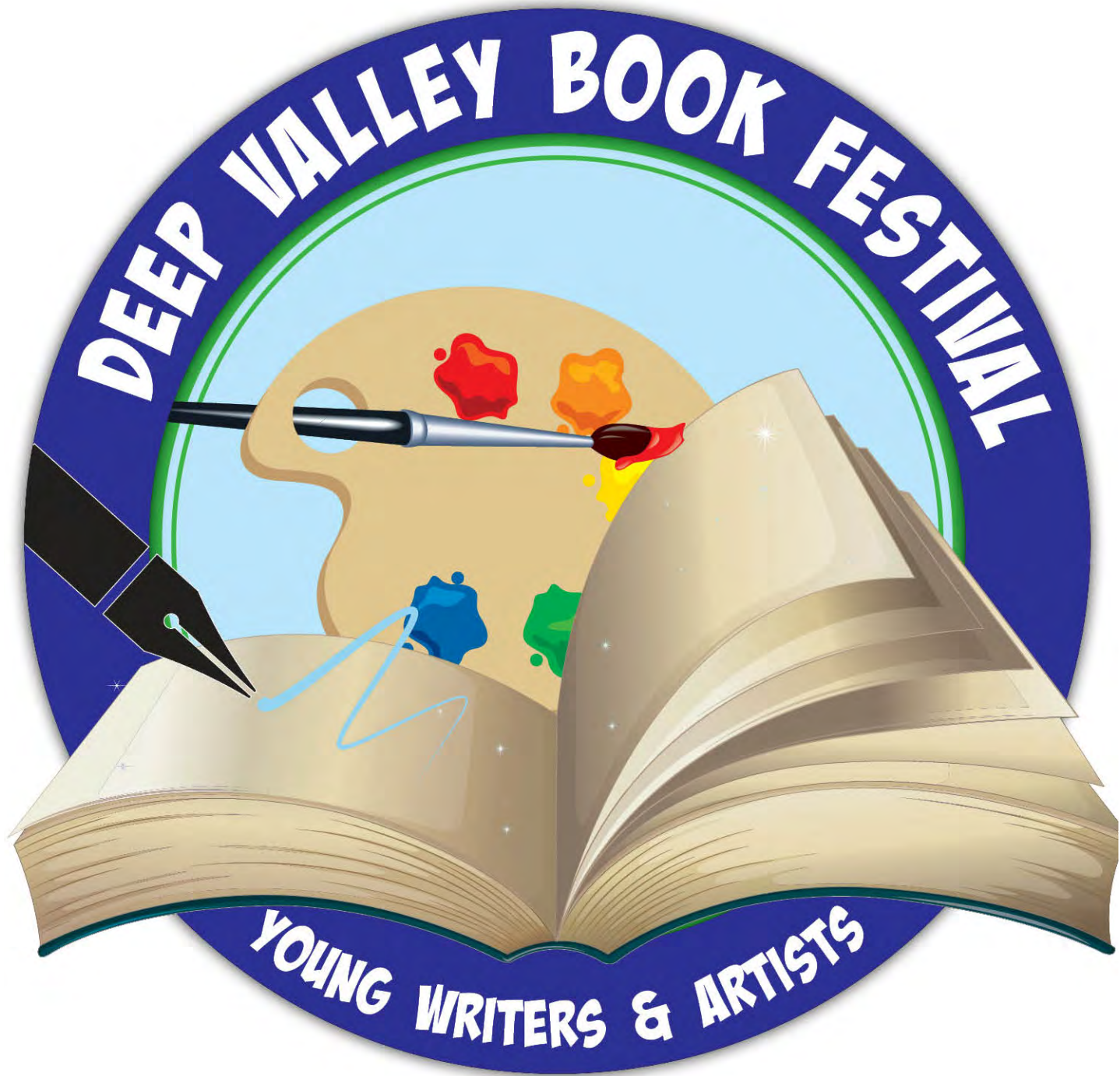


DEEP VALLEY BOOK FESTIVAL YOUNG WRITERS & ARTISTS COMPETITION



2022 ANTHOLOGY

The Deep Valley Book Festival (DVBF) is organized by an all-volunteer committee of writers, publishers, and book lovers! The festival gets its name from the setting of the beloved Betsy-Tacy children's books written by Mankato-born author Maud Hart Lovelace.

The DVBF seeks to encourage young people to express themselves through writing or art. An authentic audience is so powerful for students. The DVBF Young Writer and Artist Competition (YWAC) is an easy and inspiring way to give kids an authentic audience. The more a child writes or draws the more confidence they will have in their abilities. Not only are they writing or drawing for a real panel of professional judges, but there are awards to strive for!

The Rules of Entry for the 2022 YWAC were: Young writers (ages 7-18): Write a story in 1500 words or less using the theme "Cooperation." Young artists (ages 7-18): Create an original illustration of a scene from a favorite book and provide a quote from the book that describes your illustration.

Young Writer Judges:

Rachael Hanel

Author and associate professor of Creative Writing

Joy Riggs

Writer of nonfiction

Kirstin Cronn-Mills

Writes fiction and nonfiction for young adults

Young Artist Judge:

Ann Rosenquist Fee

Executive Director, Arts Center of St. Peter

YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS

AGE 7-8

1st: Caitlyn Ries
Pg. 4 - *The Cooperation Run*
2nd: Joy MacPherson
Pg. 10 - *The Lost Children*
3rd: Nityan Sharma
Pg. 12 - *Garden of Dreams*

AGE 9-10

1st: Athena Homb
Pg. 15 - *Rockville, The Most Successful Town in the World*
2nd: Lucia Huber
Pg. 17 - *Tom and Sophie and the Savannah Legends*
3rd: Brynley Mettler
Pg. 19 - *Star Power*

AGE 11-12

1st: Kiah Clauson
Pg. 21 - *My Life*
2nd: Artina Kazemi
Pg. 25 - *Sharing Season*
3rd: Roham Sharma
Pg. 29 - *No Man is an Island*
Honorable Mention:
Evalyn Altman
Pg. 34 - *Ahnya Vs. Cooperation*

Apollo Homb
Pg. 39 - *The Great Battle Between Laserbeam and Brutus*
Rishabh Jain
Pg. 41 - *The Impossible Maze*
Price MacPherson
Pg. 44 - *The Legend of the Ice Dragon*
Joshua Wang
Pg. 48 - *Snowcap*

AGE 13-14

1st: Kira Ulman
Pg. 50 - *Confusion*
2nd: Megan Lawver
Pg. 53 - *Percy & Petunia Help Marshmallow Out of a Very Sticky Situation*
3rd (tie): Elizabeth Engel
Pg. 56 - *Captured by Greed*
3rd (tie): Rose MacPherson
Pg. 61 - *A Story of Seven Siblings*

AGE 15-17

1st (tie): Maria Dembouski
Pg. 65 - *Prisoner 783*
1st (tie): Grace MacPherson
Pg. 69 - *The Phoenix Egg*
2nd: Lily Blaisdell
Pg. 72 - *(untitled)*
3rd: Bethany Hanson
Pg. 75 - *Choices and Conscience*

YOUNG ARTISTS AWARDS

AGE 7-8

1st: Madeline Mehlretter
Pg. 77 - *James and the Giant Peach*
2nd: Charlotte Haekenkamp
Pg. 78 - *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
3rd: Bearet Meerbeek
Pg. 79 - *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*

AGE 9-10

1st: Kamila A. Smith
Pg. 80 - *20 Fun Facts About Stingrays*
2nd: Athena Homb
Pg. 81 - *The Last of the Really Good Whangdoodles*
3rd: Macey Golombiecki
Pg. 82 - *Winter of the Wizard*

AGE 11-12

1st: Zoe Zhang
Pg. 83 - *The Nightingale*
2nd: Sophia Lobitz
Pg. 84 - *Dreams Come to Life*
3rd: Apollo Homb
Pg. 85 - *Charlotte's Web*

Honorable Mention
Maria Smook
Pg. 86 - *The Hundred Dresses*
Kenneth Zimmerman
Pg. 87 - *The Colossus Rises*
Athena Quinn
Pg. 88 - *My Side of the Mountain*

AGE 13-14

1st: Jadyann Meerbeek
Pg. 89 - *Creatures of the Flood*
2nd: Megan Lawver
Pg. 90 - *The Lab*
3rd: Rose MacPherson
Pg. 91 - *That Hideous Strength*

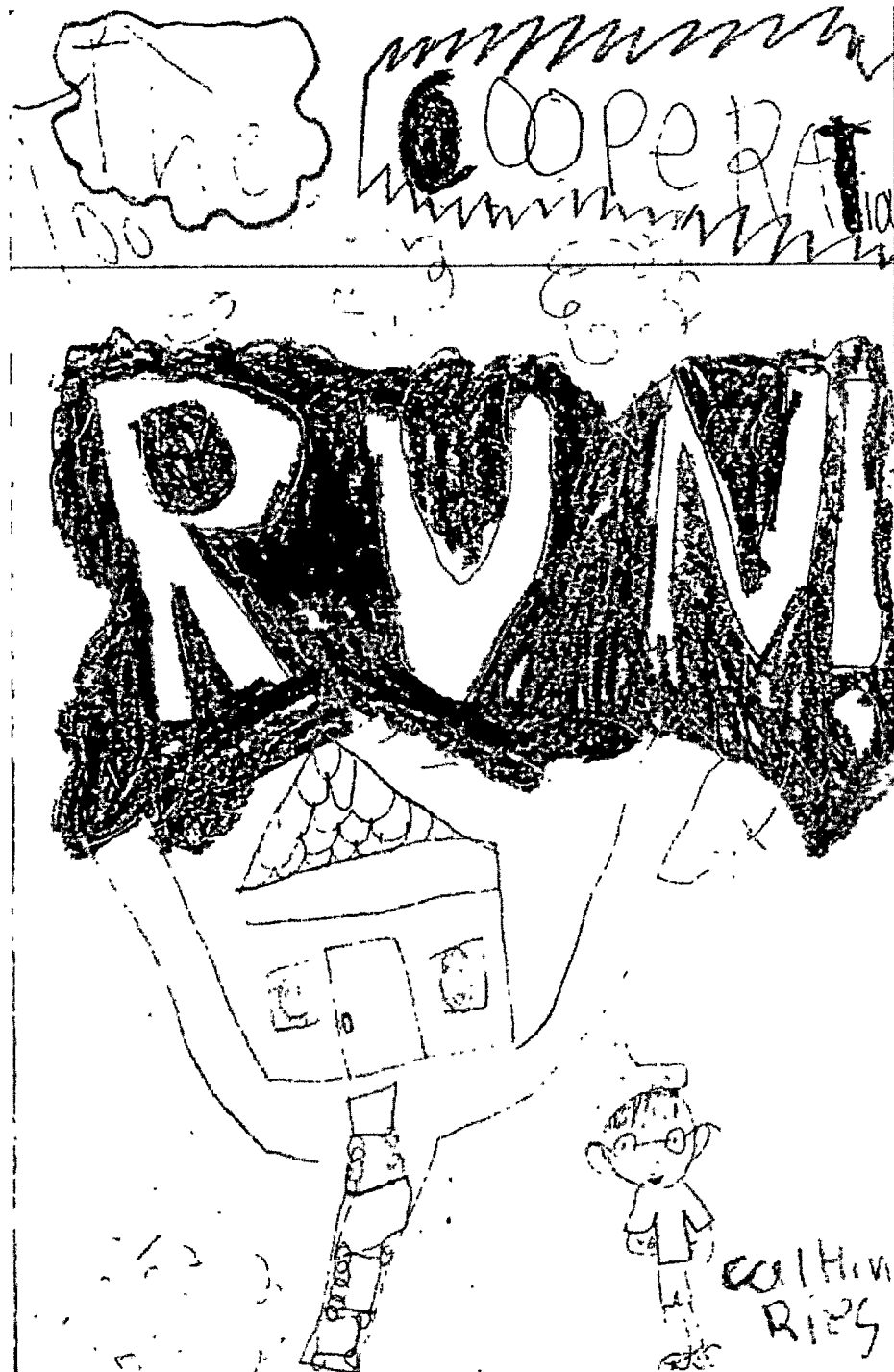
AGE 15-18

1st: Samantha Liebl
Pg. 92 - *Save the Date*
2nd: Grace MacPherson
Pg. 93 - *Five Children and It*

Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 3

Caitlin Ries
AGE: 7

The Cooperation Run



By: Caitlin Ries

There once was two boys, Tom and Jerry. They were bored.
“What should we do?” asked Tom. “Hmmm... Oh! Let’s build something!!” said Jerry. “What?” asked Tom.



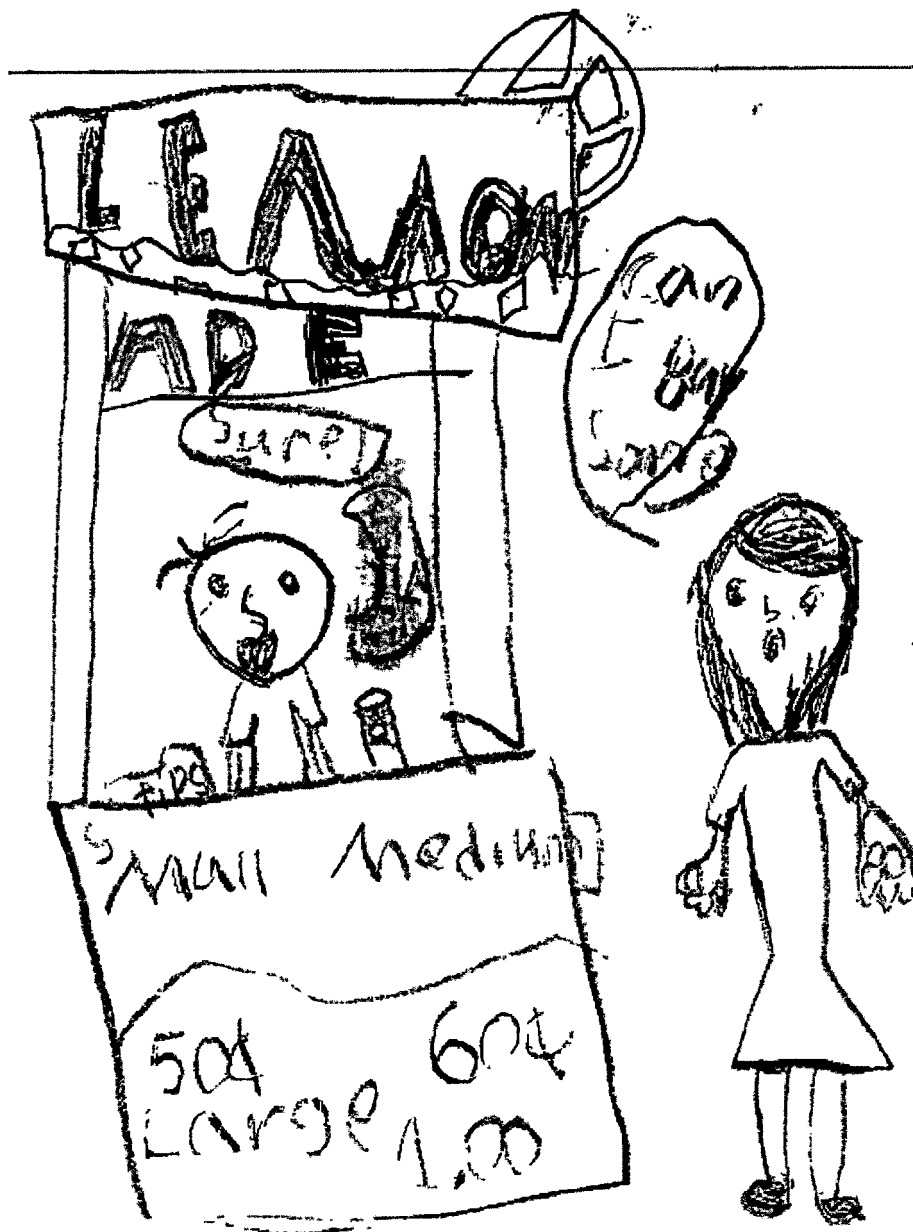
Caitlin Ries
AGE: 7

They thought and thought and thought. "Oh, let's build a soccer goal." Said Tom. It was too hard to tie the knots. "Let's build a slide." They didn't have the supplies. They were worried they had 1 hour until 9:00.



Caitlin Ries
AGE: 7

Then just like that Tom thought they could build a tree house. But Jerry said, "We don't have the supplies." They were going to trash it, but their father said, "no you could do it". "But how do we get the supplies?" questioned Tom. "Lemonade" said their dad. "What do you mean by lemonade?" "A lemonade stand," said their dad. Seriously. "Oh" said Tom. So, the lemonade stand started. It took them 1 month to get \$150.



So, they started building their tree house. Their tree house had windows, a ladder, a door, toys, and books inside. They even had lights! But before they started building their tree house the dad said be careful about one thing... guess."

"Splinters?" said Jerry.

"No" said their dad.

"Chainsaw?" said Tom.

"No" said their dad.

"Hammer?" said Jerry.

"No" said dad.

"JACK HAMMER?" said Tom.

"No" said dad.

"What?" asked Jerry.

"Cooperation" said their dad.

"Oh!" they both said.

So, they worked together and they built it safely and kindly.

Caitlin Ries
AGE: 7



THE END

Once upon a time, there were four kids playing in their front yard. They were siblings and they lived by the woods. The youngest was John who was 5 years old. Then there was Anna, who was 8. After that, Peter was 10 and finally, Marie was 12. They were playing tag. Anna was “it” and chased her siblings into the woods. The children knew some of the woods because they took walks in it sometimes, but they did go into the very deep of the woods, usually. However, this time, they ran very deep into the woods. Then, they realized that they were lost! The children felt worried and scared, but they were glad they had each other.

They were getting hungry and didn’t have food, but Marie held a rolled-up rope, since before playing tag, they were playing a game with the rope. Peter said they should look for berries in the bushes, but Marie thought the berries might be poisonous. Soon the children heard the sound of flowing water. John thought it might be a creek and started running toward it. The others followed and discovered that it was a waterfall!

They were all thirsty. Anna suggested that they could drink the water from the waterfall, so they squatted down to drink. The river was going by fast, and the sand under John’s feet slipped. He fell in and cried for help, as he floated downstream in the water. They would have to cooperate quickly to rescue John!

Marie handed her rope to Peter because he was closer to John. Peter tossed the rope to John in the water, but John’s hands ached from holding it tightly. Marie swam in and held John’s hand and helped to pull him out. Anna looked worried, but cheered for joy as Marie rescued John! Marie and John climbed out of the water, dripping wet. Peter asked if John was okay. John was breathing loudly, but said he was alright.

Joy MacPherson

Just then, all of the children turned as they heard their parents calling, who were looking for the children who had disappeared. Marie shouted back that they needed help. The parents heard their voices and came down to the river to help. John, Anna, Peter, and Marie raced toward their parents and hugged them. Then, the kids told their parents about the adventure they had. They walked home slowly, holding hands, and remembering to always cooperate and never again run into the woods without telling their parents.

Nityan Sharma
8 yrs

GARDEN OF DREAMS

I always wanted to have a garden in my house. When it was time for us to move into a new home from our townhouse, I so wanted there to be a yard where I could have a little garden and a little lawn, to grow flowers!

Finally we reached the house. All of us rushed into the house to explore. It took us ten minutes to see the basement, main floor and the top floor. Well, we had already selected our bedrooms after a lot of bickering. I selected the room from where I could see the rising sun from my window! We rushed down to the main floor and our parents and grandparents were still on the main floor inspecting the kitchen and appliances. Grownups get bogged down with small details!

I rushed out to see the yard. I hadn't seen this house before! I imagined it would be like my friend Ross's garden, but I was really stunned to see the stark backyard full of stones. No garden there other than a few weeds growing wildly! I went back to the house really disappointed. Everybody was chattering at the same time. I stood in a corner watching them. Dad saw me and asked why I was so quiet. I pointed out and with a tremble in my voice asked him about the garden. Dad kept quiet for some time and said that the previous owners didn't care for one, so they had this landscaping done, which didn't require much work.

Well, after this there was a flurry of activity involving shifting the house and getting adjusted in the new house. Before I realized summer was here. I stared at the rocks in the backyard. This was so different from what I had imagined and nothing like my friend Ross's garden.

My mother had noticed my disappointment. She said, "If you want to do something different with the yard, put in your effort and make it what you want it to be. If it is important to you, then it is worth putting your effort into it."

We took some pictures of our yard and the next weekend my mother and I went to the local garden center and met the owner there. She had some ideas and I had some of my own. After coming back home that day, I sat down to make a rough sketch of what I would like my garden to be. Well, actually I told my elder brother and he drew. My drawing looked like anything but a garden! His picture gave a better idea. My grandpa helped a bit too. My grandparents were living with us for the summers. My grandma is a gardening enthusiast too. Now came the

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Nityan Sharma
8 yrs

real question...money. Well, I put in what I had in my piggy bank, my brothers put in theirs too (I didn't expect it!). My parents gave most of it.

So the planning started. Grandma and I made some trips to the Library to get some books on gardening. We watched lots of YouTube videos. We went to the gardening center and the lady there was quite helpful in selecting the plants. When Mom and Dad left for work all of us sat down and planned the activities and responsibilities. We broke the whole schedule into small tasks and assigned time for each activity. We were just bubbling with excitement. We analyzed the existing garden space. We wrote down all we needed and wanted. Grandpa made some modifications to the design. We budgeted the money.

The next few days were exciting. We bought some equipment and were lent some by our most friendly neighbor! The real hard task was to remove the small river stones from the backyard and piling them in one corner where my brother was supposed to make a rock garden of sculptures, and planters for flowers. Grandma was in charge of making tasty snacks to keep us fed and my younger brother was supposed to keep supplying us with tons of lemonade. My friend came over to help! We were thirsty all the time and wanted more and more. My little brother and Grandma also helped in clearing the yard of small river stones. It was funny to see my younger brother carrying stones in a small basket and often half of it would fall down. I think he was the busiest of us all. When the sun set on the first day, we had cleared the backyard of all the stones and the little rock garden had started to take shape. We were really tired. After dinner Grandpa let us watch a movie but I think all of us slept off in no time.

Next day we started spreading the dirt into the fenced area for the kitchen garden to grow flowers and seasonal fruits. Grandpa designed the kitchen garden in beds which looked very organized and beautiful. My younger brother was helping in sorting the stones of the same size into different piles. Grandma and I fixed the raised beds and the chicken wire for the kitchen garden. It was so satisfying to see the garden taking shape in the evening.

Next day, we got up with great enthusiasm. It was the day to get the saplings. We wanted to grow tomatoes, zucchini, basil, capsicum, pumpkin, jalapeno, cucumbers, squash and spinach. Of course, there would also be strawberries, flowers, and herbs. My younger brother and grandpa were responsible for the herb garden. Grandma planted all the vegetables and fruit plants and I was running from our pickup truck to the backyard with the plants. At the end of the day it was so satisfying to see all the beds with vegetation in it.

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Nityan Sharma
8 yrs.

The next few days we worked to build the rock garden. One of our friends who loves to build with rocks came over to help. He had constructed a little fountain in his yard last summer! We wanted all the stones to be used. I had a bright idea to build a sundial in this rock garden. It was unplanned but all agreed that it was a good idea and we went back to the drawing board and worked hard.

The next day was supposed to be a rest and watering the plants day. We had decided to take a rest as we were now really tired. But the sundial idea filled us with a new enthusiasm. By evening it was ready. We watered the garden and called it a day.

After that we moved to the front lawn. Now it was easy. We bought roses, torania, pansies, daffodils, tulips and daisies along with many planters. It took us two days to organize the front lawn. By the tenth day the rock garden was finished. It looked exotic!

My mom and Dad had to go out of town for work for a few days, and when they returned they couldn't believe the transformation! One morning my younger brother burst out into the kitchen shouting "Jalapeno, Jalapeno!!!" He had seen a tiny one on the plant!.

I loved looking at our garden! My parents were very proud of us!

Our garden was soon the envy of the neighborhood. It was the fruit of our effort that not only saved money but also taught us patience, careful planning, and how to work hard and be thrifty.

Above all it taught us that cooperation is the real key to succeed in one's endeavors.

Rockville, the Most Successful Town in the World

By Athena Homb

Thirty-two years ago, in the town of Rockville, people were slowly getting hungry. Hi, I am Caler. I am eight and I am going to tell you the secret about how Rockville became the most successful town in the world.

"I'm hungry!" I said to my parents. Parents said, "I know Caler, we're hungry too."

The next day when I woke up, I heard really loud shouting. I looked out of the window and our neighboring were protesting "Give us more food!" and "We are starving to death slowly!" They looked much thinner than the last time when I saw them a month ago.

I looked at my clock, 6:37am. My parents usually were not up that early but I could tell they were awake by the running water. I got up, dressed and ran out the door. I said hi to my parents and went to the kitchen to get some food. There were only 1/10 of the loaf left for my family and I ate 1/3 but they were never full to begin with! It was the leftover from other families. Rockville is the poorest town in the whole state so we are always short of food. I sat there for ten minutes and then I heard a doorbell and ran to the door. It was Peter, my old friend that was almost twenty years old. He asked, "Can I speak to your parents?" and I said "Sure!"

"Mom, dad, Peter wants to talk to you." I said. "Okay, we'll be down in a minute." Mom said. When mom and dad came down, they started talking with peter. I didn't know what was happening because they were talking too fast. However, I heard the last few words, "We'll join." they mumbled and Peter said "Great!" and told them to follow him.

Then they met Groma, Peter's wife. Groma was really kind and told them that they were leaders of the protest. By the way they had never told anyone about that but us because she knew that maybe some people would turn against them and target them. They started walking and shouting. Peter stopped the protest at every door and soon everyone at the town was protesting for more food. I wondered where they were walking to. I soon found out. The mayor's house. I knew that the mayor was very kind so I refused to go in. But the crowd went into the house anyway. The mayor looked startled when she saw all the signs. She said something and the crowd stopped yelling, and I stepped in to hear what she had to say. They thought that she had called some bodyguard but she didn't.

She said, "By looking at your signs I know you're hungry and I have an idea." "What is it?" Someone in the crowd asked. The mayor laughed and said "Make a garden! Whoever doesn't want to work on the garden will not get the food from it. Raise your hand if you don't want to work on the garden." No one raised their hand. As a result, there is the garden right by the town square.

Everyone who was 6 or above got assigned plants and needed to take care of their own plant. They also had work hours for different plants. You had 6 hours to take care of your plant. Everyone got lunch breaks and snack breaks.

When your plant was ready to pick, you would have ten plants because you would have ten seeds to plant and you had a list of ten things you are going to do with those plants. There were eighty-seven people in town including the mayor, so everyone got a job! They also worked

together because if they needed help they just called someone with the same food type to tell them how to do that.

When everything was ready, they set up a HUGE table that could fit eighty-seven people. And everyone was sharing their food. They grew plants with everyone and they got paid by food. They still do it today and now no one is starving or getting hungry there. I'm grown up now and now I have to work at the garden. A new mayor has been chosen and she has been chosen because she respects the idea of a garden.

Everyone starved just because they were missing something, collaboration. That is why Rockville is the now most successful town in the world. If your town is starving, try this and see if it works! 😊

Tom and Sophie the Savannah Legends

You probably think ostriches and zebras are a weird combo. I would disagree because with the nose of an ostrich and the eyes of a zebra you have an unstoppable animal. Once there was an ostrich named Tom and a zebra named Sophie. It was a normal day in the savannah. Sophie is protecting her baby Jade and her older son Kai while on the lookout with Tom. Tom smells something weird.

Tom says "Do you see anything Sophie?"

Sophie replies with "No." "Do you smell something?"

"Yes I smell something I don't recognize." Tom says.

"Oh, I'll keep watch." Sophie says snuggling closer to her baby Jade and keeping a close eye on Kai. After a little while Sophie spots something. It is a crocodile. Sophie is smart and gets her herd while Tom gets his flock. Sophie grabs a few of the zebras, Tom does the same and grabs a few ostriches. Sophie leaves Jade with her older brother Kai. She meets up with Tom and his few birds and heads toward the lake where they saw the croc. Tom and Sophie have the idea to outsmart the croc and use the body of a wild pig that they found by the lake, and put it so the croc would pounce on that, not them. The croc does what they expected and comes out of the water. Sophie steps up and jumps on the croc, the croc walks further from the water. Tom freaks out and does not know what to do so he lays down flat on the ground. Sophie and the other zebras protect the rest of the herd and flock as the croc gets closer and closer. Sophie starts calling, "Help! Tom, we need help!"

Tom gets up, runs over and starts kicking the croc. The zebras end up stomping on and kicking the croc. But a crocodile is no easy fight. The croc snaps at them. He also does some death

rolls. It's pretty amazing not one zebra or ostrich died. But after a lot of fighting the fight stopped. The croc was not snapping anymore or anything, it had died.

After the fight, Sophie and Tom have been through so much that it's no surprise they are still friends. In the end everything went back to normal. Sophie was back with her children and her herd while Tom rejoined his flock.

Star Power

Grace and Lew have been best friends since the 3rd grade, when Grace moved to New York. Her family moved there so her mom could start her new job as a scientist. One day, Grace and Lew were watching T.V. when a news anchor shared, "Breaking News: Dr. White discovered there is a parallel universe. Both ours and theirs, is powered by a mega star. The star is getting weaker and Dr. White says he has a plan.." "Wow! Did you hear that?!", said Grace. That means there is another, sassy, ME! "I know! That is so weird," said Lew. "But what does she mean by, "he has a plan..."?" asked Lew. "I'm not sure, but he works with my mom now AND he lives in our apartment building. I don't trust him. I have to get going. Bye Lew," said Grace. Grace headed home to bed, but all she could think about was the news.

The next morning, Grace was sitting on her bed, when she heard a knock on the door. She answered the door and Dr. White said, "Can I ask you something?" "All ears," said Grace. "Ok, well you know there is a parallel universe. I need a partner. Is your mom home? I was hoping to talk to her about it." stated Dr. White. "No, sorry," Grace said. "Well, are you up for the job?" asked Dr. White. "Well, I mean, is money involved?" asked Grace. "I can make an exception," said Dr. White. "Actually, I have basketball, so I'm pretty busy," said Grace. "Alright then. If you change your mind, let me know," said Dr. White. "Ok, Bye," said Grace.

"Lew! Guess what?!" Grace said. Dr. White asked me to be a part of his secret plan. "Really?! We need to do something about this," Lew said. Do you think this plan could be something bad? "I know what to do. I'll go back for Dr. White's plan and we can figure it out," Grace said. "Perfect," said Lew.

The following week, Grace heard all about Dr. White's plan. "Lew, Thanksgiving is in a couple of days and that's when his plan takes place," said Grace. "Is the plan bad?" asked Lew. "Oh, ya. Yes, it's bad. He thinks the star is getting weaker because the other universe is pulling it towards them. He wants to get rid of their universe! We have to do something!" explained Grace. He said he needs as many people to get together at the Macy's Day parade as possible, so his charm is stronger," said Grace. "He wants to get rid of the other universe and hog the star himself?" Lew said. "Yes. Lets make a plan," said Grace.

At the Macy's Day parade, Lew and Grace were waiting and watching. As they watched, they saw Dr. White on his own float! After looking closely, they saw him chanting his spell! "We have to do something!" Grace yelled. "We have to mess up his spell," said Lew. "OK, follow my lead," said Grace. They ran in front of his float and started to yell at Dr. White. "Dr. White! Please stop the spell!" hollered Lew. "No, I'm halfway through," said Dr. White. "Just listen! You need to stop!" Grace said. "Why would you want that?" said Dr. White. "Because, would you like it if their universe thought the same thing and tried to do this to us?" explained Grace. "I can't. It's already started and there's no going back," said Dr. White. "Well, can you change it?" asked Lew. "We can find another way to help the star get stronger for both of the universes,"

2. Brynley Mettler, 10

Grace said. "Well, we can try. In order to stop the spell, three people need to say the spell backwards," said Dr. White. Grace and Lew nodded. "We can do that with you," they both said.

So they reversed the spell and no one was harmed. They figured out a way to stop the star from getting any weaker and both the universes could live in peace.

The End

I like to be alone. Like **REALLY** like to be alone. Sometimes I think of there being a people-battery in me. When the people-battery is at 100%, I can be VERY social. On the other hand, when the people-battery is at 0% I'm locked up in my room alone. I love to do things independently. Oftentimes when I need help I decline it because I would rather be alone. When I looked around and saw everyone else being around people 24/7, I wondered "Does their people-battery ever need charging?"

There was a time when I felt so alone that I felt I needed to reach out to someone. That someone was my sister. She was like my first "therapist"! I could talk to her about everything and she'd always come up with a solution to make me feel better. There was one problem that she nor anybody else could fix at the time. That problem was something I didn't even know I was carrying around-my mental illnesses. I was diagnosed with Depression, Anxiety, ADHD and ADD. In reality, someone could help me. I just didn't want to cooperate. I feel like I had dug myself into such a deep hole that I couldn't get myself out. I was meant to be alone.

That's where Rebecca came in. Rebecca was my first real therapist. She helped me find out who I was and how to control my mental illnesses. I worked closely with her for about a year. Even though I didn't know her for very long, we were very close. Rebecca worked with a mental health facility called Prairie Care. Working with Rebecca changed my life. She really pushed me to be a better "cooperater"!

After Rebecca, I had another therapist named Nikki. Nikki IS AWESOME!! Nikki helped me take cooperating to a new level by helping me talk with my family and express my emotions. With Nikki, I also did something with her called Cognitive Brain Therapy. This therapy focuses on challenging thoughts, beliefs and attitudes. During this therapy I would sit in a chair and a video would play (think Pac-Man). Then you would have to relax. If you weren't relaxed, the Pac-Man game would stop. This helped me so much, with relaxing my body when it was tense, and helped see that I can control my anxiety. She was my last and my most recent therapist. I remember feeling so sad when I had to leave

her, but I just didn't need a therapist anymore, which is good in the long run. Maybe I did like to work with people?

Enter another person into my mental health story! Coner is my Nurse Practitioner/Psychiatrist. He is the person that makes changes with my medicine. Conor is the one who officially diagnosed me with ADD and ADHD, and helped me find all the right medicines to fit my body. I really have to cooperate with him because he knows what will work best for me and if I lie or don't tell him how I really feel he can not help me. We have been working together for three years now and will continue to work together for many more.

Mental Health is something that is constantly changing! Now I know what my body feels like and looks like while I'm experiencing these emotions. With depression, I feel like all hope is lost and I can't do anything about it. With anxiety, I feel like the world's weight is on my shoulders. With ADHD, I feel like I have so much energy but I can't get it out no matter what I do. With ADD, I feel like I can't stop hearing one thing. Like in a classroom, some people like to smack their lips or breathe loudly and I try my best to not pop. With all of these I can feel a little bit overwhelmed at times but most of the time I'm good!

There are times that I am not fine. For a long period of time I was struggling with suicidal thoughts. It was around 3rd-4th grade and I felt so alone. Getting through that time was very hard for me, but here I am today! I am very grateful for all of the people that helped me, especially my parents. My parents help me with my mental health in various ways. I can always talk to them, and just like my sister, they always help me come calm down or brainstorm solutions. They also encourage me to do my best. This helps me remember, I am not alone!

My friends also helped me with my mental health. I do have one friend who has helped me the most. She always encourages me and makes me smile. Her name is Kaia (ironic that we have the same name, right?) and I won't ever be able to repay her for how much she's helped me. Kaia is one of the most empathetic people I know. I really don't know what I'd do without her. She helps me see that there is always hope.

A person who also helped my journey is my teacher, Ms Ferris. See, I guess people are not SO bad! Ms Ferris, is my current teacher and by far my favorite. She has helped me so much with my mental health, especially at school. I love how we have such a strong relationship even outside of school. Now keep in mind I'm a 5th grader, so it's going to be really hard to leave her next year. She is very kind, responsible, and super supportive. Ms Ferris helps me also cooperate better with other people. Like I said in the beginning, I have a people-battery and Ms Ferris helps me recognize when I'm at 0%. Ever since I joined her class I feel like I've become a lot more open and able to express emotions. Sometimes we even have a little "therapy session" in the morning before school.

As I learned how to express more emotions, I found out that I wasn't the only one having this on and off battle going on inside their head. One side of the battle was like, "Don't care about anyone!" and "Just dont talk to them." While the other side was like, "You need to make sure everyones ok before you check in with yourself, which won't happen." Most of the time I would give into the battle and choose a side. Which most of the time was the second side. Not very healthy!

Now this might sound weird but I think the thing that helped me the most getting through these hard times was my dog. My dog, AKA Willow, is my best friend. Sorry Kaia. Willow doesn't realize it but she is a life saver, both literally and figuratively! She helped me so much with calming down and re-grouping myself. Recently my great grandma passed away. With this comes the big wave of sadness and also a feeling I can't describe. With all of this happening, I found myself feeling so overwhelmed. Willow is there to listen, lick my tears and to distract me from my own sadness. She does appear to be sassy sometimes while trying to support me but I am sure I would be that way too trying to help someone like me.

I've dealt with a lot of pain and anger in my short life. Like many, I thought I could handle everything alone. I feel like having ups and downs is a natural thing that we humans go through. But, if I would not have had others to help me I do not know if I would be here to share my story with

Kiah Clauson, Age11

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others. We all need to work together to support each other's Mental Health. This is my story and I'm not afraid to share it. What's yours?

Sharing Season

One day, on a golden afternoon in the Robinsons' house, sitting in the foyer, was a dog and a cat, side by side, staring at the grand prize ahead.

In front of them stood the armchair, placed at the right angle so that it was just touched by the mellow rays of light. Fashioned with elegant red velvet and adorned with a soft cushion and fuzzy blanket, the comfortable piece of furniture stood waiting, beckoning the animals to climb onto it and settle down. The armchair was the best object in the house—according to the pets. But there was one catch: the creatures were strictly forbidden to use the furniture of the house.

The cat glanced at the dog, its narrow eyes getting even narrower. The dog, unaware of the cat's stare, looked up with wide pupils and his tongue hanging out of his mouth, panting. The feline glanced around. No humans in sight. Although it was risky, he knew he needed to take his chances. And he just couldn't stand the thought of the dog getting the chair.

After one last quick glance, the cat sprung his slinky body up on top of the armchair. There, he spun around in a circle a few times, his head held high, then finally settled down on the blanket.

The cat looked back down at the dog, a sly smile across his face, hoping to see the dog's crushed dreams reflected in his eyes. Instead, the puppy just twitched his head to the side and stared up at the cat. The feline took immediate surprise in this, as he had been expecting the dog to be outraged. Suddenly, the sweet feeling the cat had been feeling, that adrenaline rushing through his veins, like a king perched on top of his throne looking down at his loyal subjects, was gone.

The cat got up and walked in a circle a few more times, trying to boast about his newfound wealth. The feline sat back down, stretching his scrawny orange arms and legs as far as they would go, then licking his paws, all the while keeping his stare on the dog. It was a strange sensation, what the cat was feeling. It was as if all his joy, his pride and his victory, did not depend on the accomplishment itself, but rather the feeling of superiority he got from holding more authority than others, namely the dog. And right at that moment, the cat was not feeling very proud.

“How does it feel,” the feline flaunted, “to know that you are on the lower end of the spectrum?”

The dog kept that oblivious look on his face, the one that was driving the cat absolutely mad. “How do you mean?” the puppy asked.

“I mean,” the cat gloated, “I am now on the armchair, and you are not.”

The dog twitched his head again. And then, as if it had finally dawned on him, he frowned. “You aren’t supposed to be up there,” he snarled.

The cat smiled smugly. It hadn’t been quite the reaction he had anticipated, but it was close enough. “Well, I am. And no one is going to know.”

The cat rolled around on the furniture, trying his best to make the dog feel jealous. He realized his mistake only when it was too late.

“Wait, no I meant—” he tried, but there was no point. Because the dog had also caught onto the cat’s slip-up.

At first, the sound started as a low rumble. Then it began to build up, the vibrations slowly getting faster, louder, stronger. The rumbles turned into growls, the growls turned into woofs, and the woofs turned into full-on barks, until the dog was nearly howling his head off. The entire process only lasted a few seconds, but it was enough.

The humans had been alerted.

The cat knew that he didn’t have much time. He could already hear the sound of footsteps pounding up over his head. He needed to act fast.

“Hey,” he whisper-hissed to the dog, “do you want the armchair?”

The puppy nodded.

The cat hesitated for a second. “Then you can go ahead and have it.” The feline jumped off the chair and onto the ground next to the dog, hoping he sounded convincing enough.

There was a moment of silence, a moment of stress, before the dog wagged his tail happily, and, jumping up on the sofa next to the chair, he leapt on the armrest and climbed into the seat.

The cat let out the breath he was holding. *Phew*. That had been a close one.

As the dog settled down and wagged his tail happily, yet another sly smirk spread across the cat’s lips. *Purrrrrfect*. The brilliant plan was all set, and the dog had fallen for it without the slightest suspicion. Now all that was left was to sit and watch.

The cat waited, perched at the foot of the armchair, as the sound of footsteps grew louder and the face of the eldest Robinson daughter appeared.

“Mooooooooooom!” she yelled.

The cat’s smile grew wider.

“What is it?” Mrs. Robinson asked.

The girl pointed to the living room. “The dog got on the armchair.”

“Did he now?” Mrs. Robinson glanced over at the puppy, her brows furrowed.

Great, the cat thought. *Everything is going according to plan.*

“Hmm. Well, it’s fine. Let him stay there,” responded the mother.

“Really?” the daughter asked.

“Sure,” the woman of the house replied. “I just can’t resist those adorable puppy eyes.

Plus, he looks so cute curled up like that.”

And they both walked away.

The cat stood there, in complete and utter shock.

What. Just. Happened.

“What the—I mean, th—there’s no way, n-no, n-n-n-never...” he stuttered, unable to process the event that had just occurred, unwilling to accept his defeat.

The dog just barked happily and wagged his tail.

The cat narrowed his eyes so that they were only tiny little slivers. “You knew this would happen,” he hissed.

But alas, there was no point in arguing with the dog. Because the cat had lost this battle, and he knew that no creature in their right mind would ever give up a chance to break a rule.

Defeated, the feline slunk away into a dark corner of the foyer, his back forming an arc. He lay on the cold, hard ground, the ragged carpet as rough and emotionless as a rock. As the dog sat on the armchair, his head resting between his paws blissfully, the cat thought of his brief, but heavenly, moment on the furniture. Oh, how he wished to lie on something soft, which was the exact opposite of the hard floor he was currently on, jagged and flat, its rough edges unwilling to adapt to his body shape.

The dog looked around merrily from his view on top of the armchair. It was an entirely new experience for him, as he had never before been on any of the furniture in the living room. And now he knew that the cat had been right, for the armchair was the best thing in the entire

house after all! The puppy trotted around gleefully, enjoying his cozy little space. As he glanced around, out of the corner of his eye, he saw two green slits staring at him from a blanket of darkness.

The cat.

The dog didn't quite understand why the feline had become so sulky all of a sudden. It had been *his* idea to give the dog his seat, so it wasn't like the dog had stolen it from him. But as he stared into those depressed emerald eyes, he couldn't help but feel a pang of sorrow. And although he was sure that there was no way the cat would ever do what he was about to, the dog knew, deep in his heart, that it was the right thing to do.

And so, he whispered to the cat, "Hey, come over here."

Two tabby orange paws emerged from the darkness. "What is it?" the cat hissed, "Come to gloat?"

The dog rolled his eyes. "No. I called you over here because I have an idea."

About ten minutes later, one of the two Robinson twins wandered downstairs to get an apple juice from the fridge. When he glanced at the armchair, his eyes instantly grew.

"Mooooom! Daaaaaad! Come downstairs!" he called.

A moment later, Mr. Robinson appeared with a newspaper and a cup of coffee in his hands, with Mrs. Robinson trailing behind him.

"Look," said the kid, and both his parents followed his gaze.

Mrs. Robinson's eyebrows shot up, and Mr. Robinson whistled and murmured, "Well, I'll be."

Lying on the armchair, curled up tight, were the dog and the cat, slightly leaning on each other, enjoying each other's warmth.

The dog squirmed around, half-asleep, saying dreamily, "This is nice, isn't it?"

And although he would have denied it if anyone asked him, the cat grinned blithely and replied, "It sure is."

Rohan Sharma
12 yrs

No man is an island.

"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much."

A nice little quote, to put in a scrapbook and never think about again. But as a Ukrainian in 2022, my cooperation skills were about to be put to test. I remember it clearly. Our country had been preparing for war against the Russians for quite a while. Every day, on the news, it was all they ever talked about. "Russians practicing military drills along our border. So, Aleksandr, when do you think it's going to happen?" Of course, these talk shows were usually a worst-case scenario sort-of thing, and while many people thought it was a show of strength, just as many were evacuating the country, not wanting to be caught in the possible crossfire. Most were planning one month-long trips, with scheduled return flights, while others thought that we were safe. I lived in Kharkiv, a town on the edge of the Russia-Ukraine border, and many of my neighbors had already left. My family had too, but I stayed behind to complete my semester in college. Maybe 40% of the population remained, and we thought we were safe.

February 24th proved us all wrong.

I was in the kitchen, making myself a sandwich when something caught my eye! I glanced outside but it was completely deserted. The sidewalk, once filled with busy commuters, was now completely empty.

"Ahh!" I had cut myself with my knife. Dang it! I wouldn't even be able to bandage it since my parents had put all of our medical supplies into an emergency bag. I grimaced and walked over to the bathroom. Cold water poured onto my hands, but the sound of the running water became increasingly distant, and I felt a cold grip on my head. I looked harder. I couldn't see straight.

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Rohan Sharma
12 yrs

I would later learn that I was out for two hours, and had been carried to a high school turned medical facility. A missile had hit my house dead on and knocked out the ceiling. The ceiling fell on my head. That's what I had felt. The school was bustling. Soldiers, doctors, and patients flooded through the hallways. My immediate thought was to find a computer to tell my family I was okay.

I went around the corner and ran straight into someone who looked about my age. My head again exploded with pain.

"Oh! I'm sorry. Are you okay?" He said.

"I-Ah. One second."

He helped me up.

"Thanks, I said."

"You should be good, for the time being." He glanced around. "I'm not sure this place will hold up much longer."

I smiled. "You're not the only one. Actually, can you fill me in on what happened? I spent most of my time out cold."

"I guess," he began. "My name's Raymond, but you can call me Ray. I'm a foreign exchange student, at the *worst* possible time, apparently. What is your name?"

"Ivan."

"Well, Ivan, The Russians are shelling the whole country, and they're entering Ukraine. Everyone 18 and above is being drafted. Speaking of which, how old are you?"

I couldn't believe my luck. "My eighteenth birthday is tomorrow!"

Ray's eyes widened. "Seriously?"

"Yep!"

He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. For a moment, everything was still, then I heard the staccato sound of gunfire emanating from the doorway. A primal instinct in me forced my legs to run, with Ray on my heels. All of a sudden, an alarm blared,

Rohan Sharm
12 yrs

and I knew what was going to happen. I grabbed a supply pack, and ran with Ray just as the missile hit.

We must have run for what seemed like an hour. I turned around, and used a pair of binoculars to see the school. It was producing so much smoke you could have mistaken it for a factory. The whole second floor of the school had been blown up by a missile. I highly doubted there were any survivors.

"Well, now what?" I said.

Ray was lying on the ground, probably still reeling from the blast. We were maybe a couple of miles from the school, which was good.

Ray suddenly stood up. "I originally came here to attend Flight School, and I know how to pilot a helicopter. The helicopter at my flight school can get us out of here. The only problem is, that we will have to find and then enter the airport."

"Well, it's our best shot right now. We should probably get to the Polish border. Do you think it'll have enough gas?"

"Maybe

"Well, we should get going."

He nodded. And so we set off.

Five days after the missile attack, we started getting accustomed to the wilderness. We stayed away from open fields, avoided civilization unless absolutely necessary and lived off the land. Ray had lots of supplies in his pack, and we rationed those. With no GPS and just a map to guide us, a distance of about 10 miles separated us from the airport. We trudged on, hoped against hope and prayed that the Russians or our own army had not commandeered it.

I crept through the bushes, prepared for the worse and saw the Russian flag fluttering above the airport. I turned around with my hopes crushed. I cannot describe what happened next. Perhaps a sixth sense that I'd developed during my travels, a divine intervention or a blessing from my ancestors- something told me to get down. And

Rohan Sharma
12 yrs

I obeyed. This split-second decision saved my life. A Russian sniper had spotted us and opened fire. The gunfire went on for two more minutes.

Where was Ray?

I didn't think that he would attract too much attention, seeing as when I saw him last, he was asleep. Hopefully, in the dark, they would miss. I made my way to the perimeter of the airport.

A full scale assault was in play. My army was attacking the Russians with all the firepower they had.

Suddenly, I felt a hand on my back. I spun around and almost punched Ray in the face. He was grinning ear to ear. "I found a backdoor to the helipad, they haven't locked it yet!"

I was about to follow him, when that sixth sense kicked in again. I tackled him to the ground just as a bullet hole appeared in the tree where he had been.

"Thanks," he gasped.

"Run!" I yelled.

We sprinted to the helipad and kicked the door open. Inside were a couple and a baby!

"Who are you?" asked the man.

"We are students," I responded.

"Do you know how to fly it?" He nodded at the helicopter.

Ray answered. "Yes, and it has just enough gas to get us to the Polish border. I checked."

Outside, a battle cry went up. The assault on the airport was in full swing.

"We need to go right now." I said.

Hopefully with the battle ongoing, the Russians wouldn't notice a small helicopter. We all piled in, and I gave my headphones to the baby, who was peacefully sleeping for now.

We lifted up, and immediately came under fire.

-4-

Rohan Sharma
12 yrs

"This is not a military aircraft, so we should be safe!" Ray yelled, over the din of the rotors. My window spiderwebbed and I was mortally afraid. The radio crackled to life. "You are ordered to identify yourself. There will be no more warning shots. I am Major Nikolai Melnyk of the Armed Forces of Ukraine."

"We are a civilian aircraft, please do not shoot!" Pleaded Ray.

"Can you give evidence of your being civilians?"

"No, but we have a mother and father on board, along with a child! Please!"

A brief pause. "What is the father's name?"

"What?"

"You heard me. What is the father's name?"

The father suddenly spoke. "Corporal Melnyk, I am agent Fedir Olmyk with the FIS. I was sent to report on Russian military movements. You can verify this with your superior. My countersign is 10 AM Martian."

Me and Ray stared. Agent Olmyk gave us a wry smile. I was dumbfounded.

Then the "mother" spoke. "Didn't expect that, I suppose?"

Ray found his voice first. "What about . . ." He pointed at the baby.

"Not real." Olmyk responded.

"Ok, one thing at a time." I said. "Can you get us across the border?"

His smile melted. "Hopefully, if they don't blow us out of the sky first. In my experience, they can be a little . . . triggerhappy."

We were in the sky for the two longest minutes of my life.

Finally, the go-ahead was given, and we left. The trip took two hours, and when we came in sight of the border, I let loose a sigh.

Alone, none of us would have survived. Together, we came out victorious.

This was a moment that would shape my future and I vowed to return.

- 5 -

Ahnya vs. Cooperation

By: Evalyn Altmann

Ahnya. That's me.

7:55 AM 3/7/16

"Ahnya! AHNYA!"

I wake up to my sister, Lola, shaking me awake. It stings as she digs her nails into my back. I jerk up, look at my clock - 7:55! School starts in 5 minutes! I change, scarf down a piece of toast, and walk outside to see the bus drive away without me. WITHOUT ME! And my sister, of course, but she can catch a ride with Mom since she goes to Reinhart Elementary School. But since I go to Dahms Middle School I have to walk 0.7 miles to get to school if I miss the bus! Well, better start walking then.

8:01 AM 3/7/16

I walk into Mr. Laray's class right as Ruby throws a paper airplane at the chalkboard.

"You better start cooperating, Ruby, or I'll send you to the principal's office!" Mr. Laray says, clearly annoyed by her decisions.

"You're in trou-ble, Ruby!" snickers Xaiver.

"Shut up!" Ruby snaps as she whips her head back to look at Xaiver.

"That's it! Both of you to the principal's office. Now!" Mr. Laray shouts at the bickering children.

Ruby bows her head as she walks out of the classroom but I could tell that it was just an act. We continue our science lesson but I notice everyone is eager to find out what happens to Ruby and Xaiver. At the end of class, everyone hurried out of the room whispering what they thought had happened. Then there was an announcement for everyone to go into the auditorium right away. I dragged myself into the auditorium, expecting it to

just be Mrs. Marci telling us how awesome we were doing but apparently, it's World Cooperation Day! No wonder Mr. Laray said to cooperate. Also, Mrs. Marci explained that cooperating means "to help someone and listen to what they say." (She got that from Google). But I just think it means don't do what you're not supposed to and work together.

After that, we got dismissed to go to lunch. Thank goodness! I was starving! During lunch, Ruby walked into the cafeteria and over to our table.

"Mrs. Marci just told me to cooperate-

"I know what that means!" shouted a girl from across the table. We all glared at her and she looked down at her lunch.

"As I was saying," Ruby continued, "Mrs. Marci told me to cooperate and that she doesn't want to see me in her office again. As for Xaiver..."

Ruby nodded her head at where Xaiver was sitting and we heard him say,

"She told me to cooperate!" Xavier howled at Mrs. Marci's choice of words.

Later, during recess when my friends and I were mocking Xaiver, the recess supervisor told us to cooperate. All of us (including the supervisor) giggled at that.

2:37 PM 3/7/16

Once I got off the bus and made it inside, I finished my chores, did what my parents told me to do (unlike Lola), and skipped up the steps into my room. I was pulling out my homework when my parents knocked on the door. When I opened the door, all I saw was a box. Strange. Maybe it's an early birthday gift? My birthday *is* next month. I pick up the box and slowly take off the wrapping paper to reveal... a puppy??? Is it real?

"Woof!" the little dog barks at me.

Definitely real! I call my mom and dad into the room to ask what this is all about and why they got me a new puppy. Did Lola get one, too?

"Well, since it's World Cooperation Day and you have been so cooperative we thought you might enjoy a little treat." states Mom.

I try to act as calm as possible but I am screaming inside! I can't believe Mom and Dad got me a puppy! And for cooperating? It must also be World Kindness Day! I pick up the puppy, set him next to me, and doze off.

7:59 AM 3/8/16

I walk into class the next day and see Ruby misbehaving again!

"You can't tell me to cooperate, Mr. Laray, since it isn't World Cooperation Day!" Ruby snickers.

"I can still tell you to cooperate, Ruby! And I will! So cooperate and don't distract your peers!" Mr. Laray snaps.

And that's how it went almost every day for the rest of the year. And at the end of the school year, we had a pizza party!

Part 2

2:05 AM 7/2/16

I hop on Ahnya, my owner, and tell her it's time for food.

"We can't play right now, Tater Tot." she squints at her alarm clock, trying to figure out what time it is.

"2:05!" she exclaims.

"You need to start cooperating, or I'll send you back to the pound!" she whisper-yells.

Cooperating is a word I've heard very many times. I think that it means listening to the person telling you what to do. I should probably start 'cooperating', whatever that means.

9:52 AM 7/2/16

Later, my parents put me in a cage and bring me into the car. Are we going to get treats? I hope so! Treats are so yummy! Oh. We've stopped. It looks like we are at *Puppy Academia*? What's this? They bring me into the odd building and release me with other puppies. Is this a new playground? It looks like all the other puppies are sad. I walk over to one of them and try to figure out what's wrong.

"You don't want to be here." the miserable puppy states.

Before I can respond, children about Ahnya's age come and divide us up. I read the girl's name tag. Ruby, it says. I wonder what Ruby is going to do to us.

"Today we will be learning about cooperation! Listening to your owner is our main focus. I learned from my mistakes that cooperation is more important than it sounds." Ruby says.

We start jumping through a hoop. But there is a squirrel there, too. Every time one of us goes after the squirrel, they tell us to leave the squirrel alone and to cooperate.

11:32 AM 8/6/16

That puppy was right. I don't want to be here. It's so stressful. They set very high goals for us that no one can reach. But I do feel like I'm improving. I haven't heard the word cooperation from my owners in a while. I think that's good.

9:02 AM 8/27/16

We make it to *Puppy Academia*, and the area seems a little bit more cheery today! Maybe we get extra treats! Instead, the owners stay and we are put in outfits and given little scrolls. Maybe it has coupons for more treats! I don't know what we're doing, but when they call my name, I strut onto the stage.

Ahnya

9:57 AM 8/27/16

Tater Tot graduated! He finally cooperates! Now, we just have to make Lola cooperate! Like that will ever happen, though. I think I might end my journal here! I'm going on a vacation and want to make the best of it!

THE END

The Great Battle Between Laserbeam and Brutus: How A Group of Scientists Helped Win the War

By: Apollo Homb

On September 3, 1973, Laserbeam's army marched in a perfect line toward the wall that separates the Laserbeam nation and the Brutus nation. In the Brutus nation, the flowers are blooming and the beautiful snow on top of the Brutus mountains is viewable far away. Laserbeam, the king of the Laserbeam nation, had been lifelong enemy with Brutus and he wanted to expand his territory. Laserbeam's army had been preparing for this attack for months. Laserbeam gave the order to fire. They loaded a gun and fired a huge shell at the wall. Suddenly, a blazing column of fire emerged from the wall. The battle has begun.

It was August 31, 1973, three days before the attack. In the late hours of the Brutus nation, Johnny, the Zebra, is walking to work. The city of Brutusius is the capital of the Brutus nation. The city is fairly busy and there are many architecturally beautiful buildings. His job is a scientist at the international institute of science, a very sophisticated lab. At the top of the lab there is a magnificent dome made out of pure gold. For many Brutus citizens, today was just a normal day. But at the lab, today wasn't just any regular day. This day, Johnny and his group of scientists had found a way to make a powerful weapon that no one had seen before. Two days ago, Brutus, the king of the Brutus nation said that Laserbeam, Brutus's main enemy, might attack them. Brutus told the scientists that they needed to make something to hold back Laserbeam's army. Suddenly Johnny knew what to do, but he needed materials for his experiments. Marty, another scientist, argued that he had a better design and that he needed materials. Who got more materials came down to the director, Chloe, the other zebra. She decided that each of them got half the materials. Half the scientists went to work with Johnny while the other half went to work with Marty.

At Laserbeam's nation, Laserbeam gives the order to start marching towards the Brutus nation. Hundreds of soldiers start marching. Noah, a monkey, is one of the elite force. The elite force contained the most experienced and highly trained soldiers. Before that Noah was already a sergeant in Laserbeam's army. Noah packed all his supplies, which include a tent, his specially modified gun, ammo, grenades, food and water. The march was seventy-three miles which would take roughly about two days. The soldiers would then attack the city at lightning speed.

At the top-secret laboratory, where Johnny, Marty and the other scientists were working, Johnny and Marty were arguing. "I have a more developed design than you have. If I had more materials, I would have enough to get the right formula for the weapon." said Marty. "My design takes less materials and less time to construct." said Johnny. What they didn't know was that the more they argued, the closer Laserbeam's army got to the Brutus nation.

Noah had just hiked seventy-one miles. He was now only two miles away from the wall. As Noah looked around, he saw hundreds of soldiers. King Laserbeam gave the order to march the remaining two miles and get in position to attack. About thirty minutes later they were ready. The guard that patrolled the Brutus wall had fallen asleep. "Load the big gun," said Laserbeam. The troops loaded the gun. "Fire!" yelled Laserbeam. An explosion rocked the night shattering the silence. Then a blazing column of fire erupted from the wall. The guard suddenly woke up and rang the alarm. This was the beginning of the first battle.

At the lab, Johnny and Marty were given an alert that Laserbeam's army had breached the walls. Johnny and Marty knew they just didn't have enough supplies and time. They could

even hear Laserbeam's army outside. Then, they suddenly realized what they needed to do - work together. Time had already been wasted, and it was time to collaborate! Johnny and Marty got together and worked out a new design. Johnny was keeping secrets of his prototype and so was Marty. But now they are sharing everything! The new design is much faster and produces much more zebratic formulatix power! How the secret weapon worked was that when the zebratic formulatix was jammed into a ball, a machine would then electrify it which would then be shot out in a beam. In other words, it is a laser machine!

At the Walls, Laserbeam's troops were swarming into the Brutus nation. The Brutus troops resisted. King Laserbeam met King Brutus in the middle of the field. "King Brutus, surrender your nation now or I will crush you with my mighty fist!" yelled Laserbeam shaking his fist. King Brutus rolled his eyes and said, "You are much weaker than you think you are. You are underestimating my troops. You will get crushed because of your arrogance." "Ha! We'll see about that." said Laserbeam malevolently. "Laserbeam is such a brat!" said Brutus to his troop. "We will kick his butt!" The troops cheered and both sides charged at each other.

At the Lab, Johnny, Marty and their team of scientists had made progress. They found out how to electrify the zebratic formulatix. All they had to do was to put the zebratic formulatix to the machine that shot it out and they would be ready.

Meanwhile, Laserbeam's troops were moving forward. Noah was under heavy fire. He had knocked out a few Brutus soldiers. Suddenly, he got a call from Laserbeam. "I need you to destroy the machine gun bunker." said Laserbeam. "Yes sir." said Noah. He sprinted to the location of the bunker as bullets were whizzing past him. Noah ran to a tree to hide behind. Then he saw a little hole in the ground. He peeked in and saw more than thirty Brutus soldiers killing many troops with machine guns. Noah had to stop them. He unclipped a huge bag of grenades and prepped all of them. He threw the grenades down the hole and sprinted as fast as he could. A huge towering flame of fire suddenly erupted from the hole. Pieces of dirt and rocks flew up. Noah could feel the immense heat wave. All that was left of the bunker was a flaming and smoking crater.

Despite all the efforts of the Brutus nation, they were losing. The scientists hauled the zebratic formulatix device onto the machine. It was ready. All the scientists could do was pray that the device worked. Noah suddenly saw a tanklike machine with a turret rolling towards him. Suddenly a blinding light came from the turret. The scientists held their breath. Flames erupted from the ground. Laserbeam's troops screamed and ran for their lives. Laserbeam stared in disbelief at the chaos and screamed, "Impossible!" A helicopter came and Laserbeam jumped into it. "I will not fail next time!" shouted Laserbeam with utter rage before flew away. Laserbeam's troops retreated and were too weak to make a comeback anytime soon.

Three days later, the fires were put out and the land was restored back to its natural beauty with cultivated fields and lush green grass. King Brutus hosted a dinner to honor the brave troops and most importantly, Johnny, Marty and their group of scientists. That night they held a huge feast and at exactly midnight, the honor ceremonies began. "I would like to give a huge thanks to all the troops that fought. But we couldn't have done it without these scientists," said Brutus. "We couldn't have done it if Marty and I didn't work together," said Johnny. Nodding, Marty said, "I would like all the other scientists to be credited as well. Their work was one of the keys to making the device. It is a team effort." Brutus stood up and hung the highest medals to each of the scientists. Fireworks busted in the night sky with colorful rings. They had beaten Laserbeam. This is a start to a new era.

THE IMPOSSIBLE MAZE

By Rishabh Jain

Have you ever heard the word “cooperation”? The word officially means “to work together”, but sometimes the real meaning is to work together *and succeed*. Cooperation enables people to set aside their differences and arrive at a mutual solution for achieving a common goal. In today’s society, progress in any field is not possible without cooperation. To elaborate my explanation about cooperation, let me narrate to you a story of how I joined “Explorer UN”.

A year ago, I walked into “Warrior Square”, to try my luck at the annual Impossible Maze event. “The Impossible Maze”, created by the United Nations, was designed to recruit new members for Explorer UN, a school which explored the world and showed students the splendor of Mother Earth. The maze tested our physical strength and courage by having us climb impossibly tall ice walls, jump from platform to platform high above the ground, and more. It also tested our intelligence by having us attempt to find our way out of an “escape room” and solve complex puzzles. To be honest, I didn’t want to participate. I just wanted to join “Education UN” where the maximum amount of physical exertion was teaching kids.

In the hall, there were a huge number of kids from all over the world. They were chatting, laughing, and mingling with each other. However, I had no friends here. They had all gone to join different sectors of the UN. In front of the hall, there was a massive, rectangular quartz platform with a marble podium. A microphone sat on the podium, and the platform was surrounded by flags. A hush fell over the crowd as a Canadian man in a gray suit stepped to the microphone.

Hello! and welcome to the recruiting challenge popularly known as the Impossible Maze. My name is Gavin Jacobson, and I will guide you in the early stages of this event. You are all here because you are smart, strong and the best. But none of these matters now. You must cooperate with each other and work as a team. Remember, teamwork makes the dream work. He stepped away from the microphone and all the kids clapped. But it was evident that everyone was nervous. All the kids were quickly divided into teams. I was placed with a group from Minnesota, my native state.

The race will begin in 3...2...1...GO! My team and I rushed into the maze. Our first obstacle was a 10-foot-tall ice wall. Ben, the oldest kid in our group, told me: “Grant, since you’re the shortest, we will boost you up first. My five other teammates made a pyramid that I climbed to reach the top of the wall. From there, it was easy to help pull up the rest of my teammates. As more of us reached the top, the easier it became to pull up the next person. We all cheered when Samuel, the last of our group, clambered to the top, but then quickly moved on to the next challenge. In this competition, there was no time to celebrate!

We then found ourselves in a small room. On one side, there was a large metal door with a keypad attached. Lucy tried opening the door, but it was locked. "I think we need to find clues to open this door," she declared. "Perhaps then we can find the password."

We searched the room high and low. Then Mike found something. "Look!" he declared proudly. I think I found the code! We all rushed over to see what he found. Mike was holding a strip of paper that showed some kind of riddle. If A=1, B=2, and C=3, what is the hidden code behind the word "Alexander"?

"Hmm..." we all thought. Ok, so we know that every letter equals the corresponding number, right? So, we just devised this word. Jackson suggested nervously.

So, it's... 1 12 5 24 1 14 4 5 18. Samuel punched that number and it worked! The door opened with a click. We proceeded to the next challenge. These challenges were hard. We had to struggle to pass to the next level. We had to climb rope bridges and decode codes like it was used in the American Revolution. Every time we thought we hit the toughest level, we hit a tougher one.

But we didn't give up. We worked hard together, each of us creating the bridge for the rest. Even though we heard the groans and moans and complaints of teams giving up around us, we **didn't give up**. Nothing could stop our unbreakable spirit and teamwork. But we were just about to face our toughest challenge yet...

We could tell we had reached the final round because trumpets started making *dun – da - da* sounds. Some confetti pelted our sweaty, tired heads. We looked around to see who we had to face. There was a Japanese team, a Dutch team, a British team and a French team.

"Wow." Samuel breathed. Do you really think we can beat them all? Of course, grinned a confident Lucy. They have to sweat their heads off to beat us, right, guys? YEAH! We all cheered.

Then Mr. Jacobson walked up to the stage again. Welcome back, my friends. I hope you took a rest break while you were all running the course, because this is your hardest challenge yet. He gestured to our challenge and said "You will have to climb this 300-foot-high hill and correctly place yourself in the exact position you need to be, in order to jump into the 15-foot pool below. Any error and you will miss the pool. Any questions?"

Why is it called a maze if we're just going through an obstacle course? I asked. Mr. Jacobson smiled. It's because there are several paths a team can take during any challenge, like a maze, he explained. That made sense. Mazes required cooperation to work. You need teamwork to do anything, in fact. Our challenge sounded like something

you would do yourself. But Mr. Jacobson did not mention one thing: there were *more* obstacles along the way.

We soon began our trip up the hill. We were about 96 feet up when the earth began to shake. "GAHH! What's happening?" cried Mike. "EARTHQUAKE!!" yelled a Dutch kid. I had lived in California and I knew how dangerous earthquakes can be. I downloaded an application on my watch to measure the intensity of the earthquake, akin to a Richter scale. Currently my watch says: 5.6 magnitude earthquake. The ground shook and cracked. Fake trees and rocks crumpled to the ground. Suddenly a strange gray blur of rock and debris started to crumble down the hill.

"Landslide!" Mike yelled. We desperately scrambled out of the way of the landslide. All of us were just out of the way when Ben tripped over some rock. "HELP!" he cried. I looked back, terrified. The massive, ever-growing landslide grew closer and closer by the moment.

Leave Ben! Jack yelled. That pile of plastic won't kill him. Cooperation involves sacrifice, right? The others frantically nodded. But I won't leave him! I declared. Ben is one of our teammates. We must keep him and all of ourselves alive.

But I doubted my words. I could either leave Ben to his fate or get crushed myself. I chose the second option. I grabbed Ben's arm and dragged him to a cave on the side. The thunderous landslide roared past us. Even though the earthquake had stopped minutes ago, the landslide still kept on roaring down. We waited for it to stop, and then reached the top to join the rest of our team. I saw all but the Japanese team. We quickly found the correct jump point by calculating the average jump speed and a bunch of other things.

We then began our descent into the pool. The wind whistled around me as I fell to the ground. I screamed in pure joy as I fell to the ground. I screamed for the thrill, I yelled for the joy of finishing, and I yelled for the tiredness inside me. *KER-SPALSH!* I hit the cold, icy water. I swam to shore. I looked around. The other teams had hit the trampolines around the pool. We were the only ones to land in the pool successfully!

Then we heard a cry. We looked up and saw Lucy hanging on a tree branch, calling. We looked towards the shore. We could either claim our prize or save Lucy. It was Reward vs Cooperation. And you can guess what we chose. We managed to snag Lucy down with a piece of wood *and* claim the reward. Because a celebration isn't complete without our entire team. So that's what cooperation means to me. If you cooperate during the journey, you will reach your destination a happier person.

Cooperation is the key, always!

THE LEGEND OF THE ICE DRAGON

IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT....

A young boy of thirteen lay beside a crackling fire in a small thatched hut, while the icy wind threatened to penetrate through the fir branch wall.

Suddenly, the door to the hut was unlatched and thrust open. The boy looked up to see a huge, muscular figure standing in the doorway.

The tall man spoke simply: "Come, Sigurd, my son. It is time."

The boy Sigurd gathered his bow and quiver, grabbed a spear and a sword, and felt for the two knives he always wore at his waist and the one on his chest. Sufficiently armed, as he seemed to think he was, he stepped forward and followed his father out the door.

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It was still dark when the two arrived at the village hall. The great room was full with many armed men. Sigmund, father of Sigurd, and village chief, addressed the group.

"Men! We have gathered together to fight against the Ice Dragon, the feared oppressor of our village. As you know full well, we cannot afford another attack from the Ice Dragon, and that is why today is the day we fight back! But heed my words! The Dragon is a great foe, and no one man can stand against him. It will take the work of the entire town in order to defeat him. We must stand together, and cannot weaken and turn back, or we shall perish! Do you hear me? Will we stand our ground together against our enemy?"

"AYE – WE SHALL – WE ARE ONE!" came shouts from across the room, including from Sigurd, regardless of the weak spirit inside him that he was trying to ignore. They could – they *would* do this together. They had to. And as he left the hall and watched the sun rise into the skies and its golden rays pierce through the icy blizzard, he felt a greater, courageous, spirit arise in him, overpowering the first, and he knew he was ready.



A bitter, icy wind blew across the snowy countryside as the troop marched defiantly and determinedly forward without falter.

Until....

The Forbidden Forest drew near them on the right side. Ghastly, eerie shrieks rang out from its dark interior. Mesmerizing calls drew them nearer to the place they would never return from if they entered. It took every single man's willpower, but with the help of each other, the group managed to stumble away from the woods and back onto the right path.

Having overcome the Forest, nothing lay between them and the Mountains Malicious-save the Grey Swamp.

A great pile of mud, perhaps a hundred yards in diameter, bubbled and frothed just ahead of them. Sigmund led them to the left of the Swamp, planning to circumnavigate it. But meanwhile, the mud's motion became more rapid and insistent, and dark waves of it flew into the air. The splashing muck formed into rope-like structures which curled around the men's limbs like snakes, pulling them into the Swamp. The mere's strange, sticky substance was more like quicksand, realized Sigurd, horrified, and it was swallowing the men. That was right before he felt something grab at his own ankles.

Panicking, he cried out, but it was too late. The snake-like mire was pulling him in, and his fighting came to no avail. He was going to be eaten by the Swamp. Then, he felt strong arms around him, pulling him back to shore. He looked up and recognized the faces of his uncle, Tyr, and Jens, his cousin. Sigurd thanked them, and together, they rescued two other men who were almost submerged in the murky pool. Once everyone was out of the Grey Swamp, the troop cautiously stepped back from the mud and safely continued their journey.

They'd now survived the two more feared confrontations in the land: The Forbidden Forest and the Grey Swamp. But in the Mountains Malicious, the most dreaded lay: the Stiff Crag, home to the Ice Dragon.



The entrance to the Stiff Crag was hard to find. A thin door was camouflaged deep between tall, sharp spires of rock. After the men had searched thoroughly in one section of the mountain for around an hour, they decided to divide into pairs, so as to have the entire

area searched more quickly, yet still thoroughly. This technique seemed to work much better than the first, for the entrance was found within ten minutes, by Sigurd himself and his father. Sigmund called the other men to join him. They cautiously peered through the narrow opening. It was a mystery how the Ice Dragon fit through. Perhaps he flew.

After continuing to trek along a dark tunnel for sometime, there was suddenly opened unto them a vast hall, the floors and walls made of ice. At the heart of the hall slept a white dragon. Its scales, talons, and horns shimmered like ice, reminiscent of its frozen heart.

The men walked out onto the slippery floor. As they stumbled, one man brushed a boulder. The rock quaked and tilted, and then tumbled onto the freezing ground. The ice split and sent a tremor around the whole cave, and the calm, steady breathing of the dragon instantly ceased. Sigurd's gaze turned from the boulder to the beast and watched with increasing horror as an eyelid flickered open.

The Ice Dragon had awoken.

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As adrenaline rushed through Sigurd, he tried to concentrate, furious at his cowardliness. He was snapped out of his thoughts by Sigmund, who was pulling him under the cover of the rocks that surrounded the icy hall.

"On my mark," Sigmund was saying quietly to the men. "Not too soon, but be ready. Remember, dragons have a superb sense of smell, so even though he might not be able to hear us, he'll sniff us out in no time – and then he'll note the threat we make and try to kill us. We'll stand united no matter, though. Aye?"

"Aye," came the whispered chorus.

"Divided, we *will* fall. *Do not give into your fears.*" Sigmund spoke these last words with a mighty intensity and severity that made Sigurd prouder than ever to have him as his father, and a new courage now burned in the boy's heart.

That was before the rocks around them came crashing down in an avalanche with a sweep of the Ice Dragon's spiked tail.

"Too late," Sigurd whispered to himself. But it was then that his father cried, "NOW!"

A roar shook the cavern and stalactites crumbled to the ice as the dragon attacked, swinging his claws to and fro, baring his fangs and gushing a stream of pale blue fire from his

mouth. Sigurd gasped in terror. For a moment, he thought everyone would forget themselves and run for it, but it was not so. He watched as a volley of arrows flew toward the dragon's hide. Running forward to the line of archers, and narrowly dodging a current of fire meanwhile, Sigurd nocked an arrow in his own bow and prepared to shoot. On Sigmund's mark, he took aim and fired once- twice- thrice. The Ice Dragon let out a horrible shriek in agony as the arrows pierced his seemingly invincible skin. Yet though struck, the beast grew stronger in ferocity and wrath.

Bullets of fire shot across the hall toward the warriors. Over dragon's roaring, Sigmund yelled to the men to form a shield wall. The feat would not have been possible and the men most likely would have been killed had they not stood strong as one.

Furious, the Ice Dragon swung his spiked tail at the shield wall. There was a terrible clanging, but the wall held. Then the men lowered their spears through the cracks between the shields and penetrated the dragon's scales once more.

A more desperate and despairing shriek escaped the dragon's lips this time- before another jet of pale blue fire streamed the air. But this time, Sigurd saw as he peered through the crack where he held his spear, the fire flickered into green, then yellow, then orange, then red. The dragon was losing its strength and inner heat.

Taking this as an opportunity, Sigmund gave his men leave to break the shield wall and attack. Swords flashed out of scabbards in a flurry and swept upon the dragon at once. The cavern shook and rocks flew everywhere as the Ice Dragon groaned and shrieked, but the creature's strength was ebbing away at an enormous rate, and soon it fell limp upon the ice.

The Ice Dragon was dead.

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Sigmund, Sigurd, and the other warriors arrived back in town to hear the welcoming shouts of the women and children as they saw the approaching men as well as the screams as the townsfolk noticed the dragon head being carried upon Sigmund's shoulders.

The men had fulfilled their task, done their duty, and renewed their honor. The Ice Dragon was no more.

But they wouldn't have survived without their cooperation.

Snowcap

By Joshua Wang

The mountains of Colorado. They look as if a soft, white blanket was laid down on them from the heavens. Even in the summer, their stunning snow-capped peaks stand out no matter where you are. A duo, Beckett Wilson and his copilot and friend Elija Smith, were sent to capture the beautiful scenery for a handsome reward. Both had been flying together for years and had seen landscape after landscape. The mountains were unlike anything they'd seen before. Their work was done mostly hovering over cities, capturing the shimmering lights in the cool, crisp night. As they flew over the mountains capturing photos, they noticed how big the mountains were. A human standing on the tip would look like an ant to them.

"Place sure is gorgeous. Wonder why no one's here," said Beckett. He had never thought things through, unlike his friend. Elija was always a calm and collected person. He would always schedule everything, sometimes right up until the next year.

"That's because we're way up here in the air. You think we'd be able to see a human amidst all this snow?"

"Yeah, you're right."

The duo was silent for a while.

As they flew over the mountains, they heard a sputtering sound coming from somewhere in the helicopter. Both of them looked around, trying to find what it was. Suddenly, the blades on top of the helicopter stopped. They heard the sound of metal screeching as they plummeted down into the snow. *It must be the cold*, Elija thought, while Beckett was shrieking. Both of them held onto their seats. They made contact with the ground, and Elija felt them boring into the snow. He looked out the broken glass that had once made up their windows, now scattered throughout the helicopter. He looked and saw that they were completely buried in snow.

Beckett had realized the same. "Elija, we should both dig out of here as fast as we can in the same direction," said Beckett, trying to control the situation.

"What? That'll just guarantee we die in the snow. We could just call with our phones or something," Elija responded.

"Our phones are missing. I checked. And the snow buried basically everything. If we even make a single move, the entire helicopter will fill up with snow anyways," Beckett replied.

Elija agreed, knowing that the situation was hopeless anyways. Together they dug up through the snow and made it out. The helicopter had slid into the snow rather than falling straight down, which made it easier to climb out. Finally, they had escaped.

Even though they escaped being buried in snow, they still had no way to call for help or to contact anyone. "We should hide in a cave for now. Wait until someone comes for us," Elija suggested.

"Yeah. The only problem is that the nearest cave is over there," Beckett said, pointing at a small mountain with a cave near the base. The mountain was one of the smaller ones, but still big enough to provide a challenge. They trudged through the snow toward the mountain. After they reached the base, they needed to climb up.

"We can climb," Elija said. Knowing that if they stayed out in the cold any longer they would die, they climbed up the mountain. They crawled up, sticking their hands and feet into the snow for a better grip. But if they didn't reach the mountain soon, they would freeze to death.

Hours passed. Their fingers had gotten so cold they couldn't feel them anymore. Beckett felt a small rumbling in the snow. "Hey, can you feel that?" Beckett asked.

"I thought it was just me," Elija responded. Beckett looked up at the mountain. It looked like a fog was coming down the mountain. He realized that it was an avalanche, and both of them climbed to the side. Elija's foot and fingers were badly frozen. He couldn't make it in time. "Help! I can't make it!" Elija shouted.

Beckett reached to grab his hand but then stopped. They couldn't both die on this mountain. "Sorry, Elija," he said softly. The snow carried Elija away until he couldn't see him anymore.

After a while, Beckett finally reached the cave. His hands and feet felt like ice. He remembered he had a lighter. He reached in his pocket but felt nothing. He frantically searched his clothes but felt nothing. He must have given it to Elija sometime on the helicopter. Now he would die for his selfish deeds. *If only I had saved Elija...* he thought as his eyelids closed.

Confession

Kira Umar
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I'm Kira and this is my true story on how I cooperated with my emotions to understand grief.

It all started just when I was just five years old. I had the picture perfect family. A hard working dad, kind mom, brother who played football, me the first daughter, and my sister the youngest but the most important part is the dog and my dad's dream dog. He was a Great Dane. I was going to a private school, along with my brother. We were going there because my grandma wanted us to grow up in a school that could give us the best education possible. My dad listened because he was a mama's boy. My dad was very close with my grandma, every Thursday when he dropped my brother off at his mom's house (he is my half brother) . My dad would pick me up and take me to her house. It was March 28th when my grandma called the whole family down to her house so we could all meet up. I wonder why she would do it around this time, since my dad was on a business trip. I was excited to see all my cousins. I haven't seen them in a long time since they live far away. We were the last to get there; I thought it was weird since we were always the first people there. The second we pulled into the driveway, I opened that door and ran to see what everyone was doing. I run in the bright green grass and feel the wind in my hair. I couldn't open that door any faster than I did. I walked into a busy room, people were talking but they didn't sound happy. I was so blinded by my happiness that I just thought they were tired from the long car rides they all took. Everyone was upstairs, the adults were in the kitchen, my grandma and grandpa's bedroom door was closed, when it's never closed. I thought my grandma was changing and I thought all the kids would be downstairs, but everyone one was upstairs. I walked through the adults talking in their groups, slipping through unnoticed. I make it to the living room, I do a quick scan of the room and see one of my cousins was missing. He's around my age, some months older than me. I ask "Where is zach?" Autumn, my other cousin, looks at me and says "Ahh, I think he went to the bathroom." "but the bathroom door is open-." My mom cuts in and says "I think he is in the kitchen and you didn't see him." My mom walks me to the kitchen and I see Zach, his mom is hugging him and I see his eyes are all red. Before I

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can call out to him my mom comes to my side and says " grandma I want to talk to you." She takes me to my grande's room. The first thing I see is my grandma sitting on the bed, tears coming out of her eyes,her eyes as red as a tomato, face all wet.She has a tissue in her left hand holding on to it like she never wants to let it go. She wasn't dressed yet she was still in her nightgown, her bed which was always made was never made and her hair was everywhere. The window was open and I could feel the light breeze coming in through the window. When I walked in it looked like she started crying even more, she turned her head to look out the window to try and wipe the tears away. My grandma was a sensitive person but didn't want to cry in front of us. She thought it would make us cry. My mom sat me down on the bed next to grandma. I could see the tears forming in her eyes. Everyone is about to cry. I can stop my moms. Her lips turn in and her eyes get watery, when she speaks her voice goes up high. I'm in between grown women crying, there not telling me anything for the first 30 seconds though 30 seconds felt like years waiting to hear what they were crying over. My grandma opens her mouth and says "Kira." I can hear the sadness and desperation in her voice. I begin to know it's more serious than I thought, and I quickly turn to my mom with a worried face, she still has her crying face on and me looking at her set that off and she started to cry. Only the tears came out and she made no sound. "Kira, we have.... Some bad news." says my grandma I turn my attention back to her. My grandma and mom look at each other behind me. They look at each other for 10 seconds. I think they were trying to pick who would tell me. " Kira, you know how your dad went on that Business trip." Said my grandma "yeah." I replied "well...." She started crying and blew her nose in her Kleenex. My mom took over " Kira,sweetie while your dad was passing the street he was hit by a car." I can tell she was trying to tell me as fast as she could so she could rip the band aid off. She brings me in for a hug, crying more than I've ever seen her cry in my life. I cry into her shirt. I don't remember how I felt after I heard that. It was too much to process. I was five, worrying if I could get a unicorn shirt from Justice. A while after my mom hugged me my grandma joined. I don't remember how long we were there, what my mom said after that, I don't remember anything after my mom told me that. I was in shock, I don't know how to feel. I've never lost a loved one before. I just

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Kira Ulman
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cry not knowing what to feel or how to feel. Once mom was done crying or should I say let out everything that could be let out. We went out to join everyone else. My younger cousins were all still in the living room. The ones that were closer to my age went downstairs. I walk through the living room to get to the stairs. I don't know if they told anyone else or if I was the last one. I still didn't know how to feel still, I just felt numb. I get down stairs and all they do is talk and make jokes. I sit on the chair and just join in, covering up my numbness. I don't know how long we were down there, when we got called to tell us that lunch was ready. As it is again I can't remember what we had but I do remember that it was weird. Everyone tried to talk about something else and my grandma was still in her bedroom. My mom, sister, and I all went home afterwards. I sit in my bed cuddling with my dog. I still don't know what to feel or how I should feel this, I don't know anyone who has lost a loved one. I sat there for a long time trying to figure out what I was supposed to do, after I did more thinking I came to the conclusion that I was feeling two feelings and don't know which one to pick to feel should I feel mad at the person that hit him or sad that I lost my father. I felt my feelings won't cooperate with me. So since they won't work with me I would have to work with them. First I was mad at the person that hit him, then when I was done with that I went into a cry, I got tired from crying and fell asleep. This wasn't the first time my emotions did not cooperate with me. The other times were like when we couldn't take care of my dog anymore so we had to give him up. I didn't know if I should be mad at my mom or sad because the last thing I can remember my dad giving me was taken away from me. When my mom told me my dad really killed himself due to a brain injury. This brought me back to a similar dilemma I had when I was 5 but it had more layers to it. Should I feel mad at the person who hit him, mad at him, forgive him, mad at my family. when my grandma passed away. In all these situations my emotions did not cooperate with me. I feel like my emotions are a math problem adding on to one another. Cumbing some together. That's how I learned what grief was a roller coaster of emotions and. Cooperation is different for everyone, for me its feelings.

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Megan Lawver, 14 years old, Page 1

Percy and Petunia Help Marshmallow Out of a Very Sticky Situation

Percy and Petunia Parakeet lived together in a little silver house made of wire. Their next-door neighbor, Marshmallow, was a fluffy, white hamster.

One morning, Percy and Petunia awoke as usual and looked over to greet their neighbor, but this morning was different. When they looked over, they did not see Marshmallow.

"Oh dear me," said Petunia.

"Percy go over and check on him."

"Yes, dear," was Percy's reply.

Percy used his small beak to open the latch on his door. He fluttered out of his cage over to Marshmallow's door to open it, but Percy was shocked to find Marshmallow's door was already open. He stepped inside and started searching through the wood chips and shredded newspaper for his friend. He went through the maze of tubes. He even checked the wheel, but Marshmallow was nowhere to be found.

He stepped outside of Marshmallow's cage and hollered, "Petunia, he's not here! What should I do?"

Petunia was calm and collected so she said, "Come back over here because the little girl is coming soon to feed us, and we don't want her to know that we can get out of our cage."

Percy said "That's quite a smart idea dear," so he returned, just as the girl was coming to feed them, and shut the door.

"Good morning Percy and Petunia," said the little girl as she gave them pellets and hay.

"Marshmallow is not in his cage," yelled Percy.

"You need to find him right now," stammered Petunia.

Megan Lawver, 14 years old, Page 2

"Wow! You guys are loud this morning," said the little girl, not being able to understand them.

She then walked over to Marshmallow's cage, "Good morning Marshmallow."

She did not see the little hamster, so she started looking around, but he was nowhere to be found.

"Where did he go?" She started freaking out and ran to get her mom.

While the little girl was gone, Percy and Petunia started hearing a small squeak coming from the kitchen. It sounded like Marshmallow. Percy opened the cage door and went to investigate the sound. He was shocked to find that Marshmallow was stuck somewhere inside the closed cabinet.

"How could he have gotten in there?" Percy thought to himself.

"I'm stuck!" cried Marshmallow.

"Don't worry I'm going to help you," yelled back Percy. He went back to his cage to tell Petunia. "He's stuck somewhere in the cabinet," said Percy.

"I need your help to open the door." Petunia followed Percy to the cabinet. They both wrapped their toes around the handle and tugged at it. It pulled free, and the cabinet popped open! They pushed the door enough to get inside. Then they saw that in the back there was a bag of marshmallows and sitting inside was a wailing hamster.

"Now how did you get in there?" scolded Petunia.

"Well," sniffed Marshmallow. "I was hungry last night and you know how much I like marshmallows. I'm even named after them. My door wasn't shut all the way, so I snuck out. I started eating them but they got stuck in my fur. Then the Mom came and shut me in here. I called for help, but they can't hear my squeaks."

Percy and Petunia started to try to snip him out with their beaks, but the marshmallow was too sticky. They flew back to their cage and made a plan.

Megan Lawver, 14 years old, Page 3

Carefully they cut letters from the newspaper lining their cage and spelled out a sentence. "Hamster in cabinet near marshmallows," it read. They put it at the front of their cage just as the little girl was returning with her mother.

"He is gone," wailed the girl. She gazed at her mother sadly.

Her mother looked over at the parakeets to make sure they had not vanished too. When she looked over she saw the newspaper clippings. "Hamster in cabinet near marshmallows," she read out loud.

"What?" replied the little girl.

She ran to the kitchen and threw open the cabinet door. There she saw a little hamster stuck in a bag of marshmallows.

"You little rascal," she sighed. "I found him," she called to her mother.

Grabbing the terrified hamster, she gently pulled him out of the bag of marshmallows. "You need a bath."

She put him in the sink and started washing the marshmallow off. Once she was done, she dried him with a towel and put him in his cage. Marshmallow let out a sigh of relief.

"Thanks for coming together to help me," he said to Percy and Petunia.

"You're welcome," they replied in unison. "That's what friends are for."

Captured by Greed

Idaye Zalteersh sat across from her mother, the elven Queen Akashee Zalteersh, at the long table in the meeting room. At the end of the table sat her father, the elven King Belvelar Zalteersh. The royal meeting was with the king of Penuberg, King Aldous Kazamir. Penuberg was the human kingdom who shared a border with Secidale, the elven kingdom. As the elven crowned princess, Idaye was now expected to sit at these endless royal meetings.

Despite being uninterested and her mind roaming through other thoughts, she tried very hard to pay attention to the matter at hand.

“Your men have been trespassing on my land and stealing our resources,” King Belvelar said firmly.

“I was not aware of this. I told my men to simply watch the border closely,” said King Aldous trying to hide a mocking tone. He sat there with his chin higher than it should’ve been. King Aldous wore a black tunic and trousers with glimmering silver armor on top. As he always did, he had his red cape lined with fur and sewn with gold thread atop his shoulders; his crown matched.

“Why would you need the border closely watched? We have been on good terms for months.” King Belvelar questioned with a hint of challenge. He wore a dark, formal, navy tunic and black breeches. His shiny black boots almost met his knees. His crown, made with elven gold, rested on his fluffy, dark brunette hair. His elf ears poked through.

King Aldous scowled in response. Queen Akashee chimed in coldly, “Since you’ve no response, King Aldous, I assume you to be dishonest, no?”. She always wore white and silver, she loved it. Currently she had on a snug, floor length, white dress with rhinestones on the front. She had a

sharp jawline and cheekbones. Her thin blonde hair complemented her dark eyebrows. Despite her cold looks, her kingdom knew her as sweet and warm, though her looks accurately portrayed her to outsiders. “N-no, I-,” King Aldous stuttered angrily, “I have an idea.” The queen glared at him coldly, knowing what happened next wasn’t going to be good.

“Ah, don’t look at me like that, your Majesty! No need for such icy eyes!” King Aldous said, trying to sweet talk. “Now what’s this ‘idea’ you have?” King Belverlar said, clearly annoyed. King Aldous grinned mischievously.

“Well if I had the land there this so-called ‘resource stealing’ problem wouldn’t happen.”

“I think not, King Aldous.”

“But I thought you wanted the problem solved?”

“Giving my land to solve a problem *you* made? Absolutely not.”

Then King Aldous became irate (he was known to have anger issues but wouldn’t admit it because he thought much too highly of himself). “If you just cooperated with me,” He was almost shouting, “this wouldn’t be a problem!” His face was then bright red and he stood up and banged his fists on the table, it echoed throughout the room. “This is rubbish and this will solve no problems! Cooperate with me!” the angry king bellowed across the table. Raising his voice, King Belverlar announced “King Aldous, you have three days to leave my kingdom! If you do not leave in those three days, there will be consequences for your kingdom. I am sending two guards with you to ensure your departure.”

Princess Idaye was relieved the meeting was finally over, though she learned a lot, like how to give an equal response or what questions are suitable to ask. She then curiously asked “Father, what kind of consequences would we give King Aldous?” “Weapons Darling, we would show him our weapons.” King Belverlar said with a far away look in his eyes.

Idaye was in her room reading. She wore a floor length dress that was forest green, her favorite color. She loved wearing gold with it. She had gold armlets her mother got her for her birthday. They were made of elven gold, the strongest material known. She had her mother's eyebrows and hair color but her hair was thicker like her fathers. Her eyes were an exquisite forest green.

I wonder why humans are so greedy and full of themselves, she thought, *and why they must always show off.* She heard a knock on her bedroom door.

"Come in!" she said, setting the book down. It was her mother, Queen Akashee. "Hello Mother!" said Idaye, smiling. "Hello Darling!" Queen Akashee said, smiling back at her. "You look very fetching today, Idaye," her mother said, "the color of your dress matches your eyes perfectly." "Thank you Mother, you look very appealing yourself." Idaye complemented. The queen then hugged her daughter and told her to get a good rest as there would be much planning the next day surrounding the eventful meeting.

Idaye slipped into her silky, white, knee length nightgown, leaving her armlets on. She brushed her hair until it was as silky as her nightgown and hummed while she did so. She could hear the sounds of night coming from her balcony doors that led to the royal pond. Then her pointed elf ears heard a faint tapping. She listened. Then she heard it again. She glided on graceful feet over to her balcony. "Psst, it's me! One of the royal guards!" She pushed the balcony door open and it creaked. Being an elf, she had sufficiently good night vision. Then she saw him. King Aldous. The last thing she remembered was hearing "It's her! Quick, knock her out!", the flash of the livid human king's silver armor, and the hilt of a sword colliding with her head.

When Idaye woke up her vision was a bit blurry and her head had an unending hammering pain. She slowly sat up, confused. She was on the

old, dirty, stone floor of a prisoner cell. It clearly hadn't been used in years and was most certainly not taken care of, as the metal used for the bar door was weak and the walls made of stone were starting to crumble. She could tell it was very distant from the rest of the castle.

They put me here specifically so that I won't be heard or found. Then she heard a steady *thump, thump, thump*. Then she thought, *Someone is coming, probably that greedy arrogant king.* "So, so, so, Princess," King Aldous hissed, then spat on the floor next to him. "How do you like your luxury room?" he snickered mockingly. "Why? What was the point, you disgusting bastard?" Idaye replied angrily. "Now, now, you are in *my* kingdom and I demand respect from you, and you know why," King Aldous said as he lifted his chin a hair higher and snickered, "and what are *you* going to do about it?" Idaye started "I will-", "Ah-, No speaking! I'm not done," the king cut her off Idaye rolled her eyes as he continued, "if your father would have cooperated with me, this would not be a problem!" Idaye kicked dirt from her cell at him and he glared at her as he turned around and left.

After sitting in the cell for hours, she finally came up with a plan. There was a void of emptiness in her stomach as the king only allowed her meals to consist of thin crackers and a single cup of water. It was just enough to keep her from completely starving. Her plan was to pick the lock of the prison cell door. She had very little materials, small stones in the dirt, a wooden tray from her last 'meal', and a little bit of stale, old, straw to sleep on. *Perhaps if I break off a thin part of the tray, it will work in the lock,* she thought. She hummed while she worked, breaking off a piece and rubbing it to a sharp point on the stone walls. She tried it in the lock, however it didn't work. She kicked one of the walls out of anger and it crumbled some. Then she tried the same thing with stone, though it also failed. *Wait, I still have my armlets on! If I can bend the metal just right, I could pick the lock!* Trying to bend the metal was difficult as it was elven gold but she miraculously succeeded. *Yes! Now if I put pressure in the right*

spot, she thought hopefully, *I could pop open the lock!* As she was trying, she heard a small *click* that echoed throughout the empty space of the abandoned dungeon. She gently pushed the old cell door and it creaked open. She slipped her armlet back on, bent metal and all.

Before she left, she picked up the piece of broken stone she used earlier and, using the sharp edge she made, she etched onto the back wall of the cell “Do not be greedy, cooperate with others before you expect others to cooperate with you.”

A Story of Seven Siblings

By Rose MacPherson, age 14

These seven siblings didn't get along. Emily was bossy. Mary always worried. Next came boastful Charles. Jim was a know-it-all. Anne was too talkative. Theo perpetually whined. Baby Louisa was perfect and sweet.

Their parents announced they would travel to Europe. Their grandpa, whom they hadn't seen in years, would babysit.

"Why must you *go*?" whined Theo.

"Will I ever go to Europe? If I—" began Anne.

"Be quiet, Anne," commanded Emily.

"If I flew, I would sit *atop* the airplane," boasted Charles.

"That's not safe," Mary worried. "You'd fall and die."

"Actually," remarked Jim, "you would die from lack of oxygen first."

Louisa smiled and cooed.

When it was time for them to leave, Grandpa hadn't arrived.

"We must go," said Mom nervously. "Grandpa will come shortly. Goodbye, dearies." She patted them on their heads.

"What if something happens?" worried Mary.

"When will you come home next week? Go or you'll be late!" said Anne.

"Don't boss people. Leave that to *me*," scolded Emily.

"You'll have to travel at 64.3 mph starting... now," Jim warned.

"I could run that fast!" boasted Charles.

"We'd better go!" said Dad.

After their departure, Louisa awoke from her nap. Once Emily got her up, Grandpa arrived.

"You're here!" shouted Anne, but when she saw him she stopped. His big bushy beard was gone, and he peered at them through thick glasses.

He chuckled. "You must be surprised, seeing me beardless. Now I have glasses."

After lunch, Theo and Louisa napped.

"What should we do now?" Anne asked nobody in particular. "I wish we were going to Europe! I'm bored!"

"Actually, Anne," contradicted Jim, "statistics prove that people who say they're bored actually have an average of thirteen things to do."

"I bet I have fourteen!" Charles interrupted.

"Let's go for a walk!" Grandpa suggested.

"Get ready to go! Get your boots and jackets on," said Emily.

"I won't need one," replied Charles. "I will be fine without."

"But you'll get hypothermia! It'll be a *casatropai*!" worried Mary.

"I believe you mean '*catastrophe*,'" corrected Jim.

"Well, kids," said Grandpa, "let's go."

Their backyard was a forest, and they often enjoyed long hikes. "What a nice day! Oh, look, a rabbit!" Anne chattered.

"That's a hare," corrected Jim.

Grandpa fell and bumped his head on a tree. "My leg!" he shouted. "It's broken!"

The children gathered around. "It's a *casatropai*!" said Mary.

"Catastrophe," Jim said once more.

"Don't worry," commanded Grandpa. "You kids stay here while I go for help."

"No, Grandpa. *You* stay here while *we* go for help. You have a broken leg, remember?" reminded Emily.

"Oh, yes, that's right. I sure do. You kids go right along, now."

"But we can't! We always argue!" they said.

"You'll learn to cooperate," he replied. "Emily's bossy, Mary's a worrier, Charles boasts, and Jim's a know-it-all. Anne's too talkative and Theo's whiny. Use your strengths, not your weaknesses, and you *can* succeed."

They hurried back to the house, where Emily called 911. "They'll be along shortly," she told the others. Then the cell-phone rang. Dad had texted them. It said:

OUR PLANE WAS CAPTURED. YOU'RE OUR ONLY HOPE.

Everyone was nervous, but Emily took charge.

"Remember what Grandpa said? We'll work together. I'll be the leader and make plans. Mary will critique them for safety measures, and Charles' courage will carry them out. Jim will make all the calculations for us. As for Anne and Theo? We'll have to see," Emily said.

They walked to the airport, which was two blocks away. Theo rode pig-a-back on Charles and Mary carried Louisa.

A sign read, PLANES FOR RENT.

Jim took a key; everyone jumped into a plane. "DON'T WORRY!" Jim shouted. "WE'LL PAY LATER!"

"Okay," said Emily, buckling the youngest ones, "here's the plan. We track Mom and Dad with the GPS on their cell-phones. We'll rescue them, then fly back home in time for dinner. Questions, anyone?"

"What if we get caught?" asked Mary.

"We'll divide into three groups. If some get caught, the others carry out the plan. I'll take Theo, Charles can go with Jim, and Mary can be with Anne and Louisa. Anything else?"

"What about me? What about Theo and Louisa? What should we do?" Anne asked.

"We'll think of something. Don't worry," replied Emily.

"Everybody buckled?" called Jim from the pilot's seat. They soon took off.

"Charles," said Jim, "can you get the GPS going? I can't reach it from here."

Charles couldn't reach it, either, but he was brave enough to unbuckle.

"If we fly the plane at this velocity," said Jim, "their captors won't see us, nor know we're following them."

Jim's calculations proved to be correct; they came to a cement building surrounded by trees.

"Alright, listen up!" said Emily when they landed behind the shelter of some bushes. "Charles and Jim's team goes first. Find out where our parents are; report back within six minutes. If you don't, we'll send the next group in. Understand?"

The others nodded their heads yes.

The boys disappeared inside the building.

Six minutes later, they hadn't returned. "Mary," she said, "I'll go in with Theo. You others follow at a distance."

Mary watched as they entered the fortress. Then she and her sisters went in.

It was damp inside. The only light was from the windows. They tiptoed down the hallway. Mary peered around the corner. She saw Emily and Theo. A guard was there, but he didn't notice the children. Emily whispered, "Distract him. I'll get the keys."

Theo and Anne stepped out from their hiding places. "Who's there?" called the guard, shining his flashlight.

Theo whined at the bright light. Anne was a good distracter; Emily obtained the key. Carrying Louisa, Mary followed Emily down the hallway to where their parents were. Charles and Jim were trying to pick the lock with wire.

Emily handed them the key. This worked much better, though Charles said afterwards that the wire would've worked in another couple seconds anyway.

They went back down the hallway to escape. But when they came back to the place where the guard was, they stopped.

Someone was standing in the doorway, blocking their way.

It was Grandpa.

"Grandpa?" said Anne. "What happened to your broken leg?"

He grinned wickedly and erupted into a terrible laugh. "Ha! I'm not your grandpa! I'm the villain George Jonston! I only pretended to have a broken leg!" Guards surrounded the family. "This is your real grandpa!" A guard brought him in. "You will never escape!" George shouted. "I told you you must work together, but I was joking. You will never learn to cooperate. Ha!

"I captured your grandfather. I pretended to be him, your babysitter. My henchmen flew your parents here, and here they will stay. Because they are 'missing' and 'no one knows where they are,' I am your legal guardian, and I will keep your MONEY! Ha!" But George never got a chance, because three policemen rushed in.

"You're under arrest!" said one.

"Me?" asked George.

"Yes, you."

"But... why?" he said, pretending to be confused.

"For kidnapping and attempted theft," said the even tougher looking police man.

"You've got it all wrong. These are my grandkids! This guy here" – he gestured to Grandpa – "is the one who kidnapped them, pretending to be me. But I showed up and –"

Mom scowled. "You're a liar!"

The police handcuffed the impostor's hands and led him out. "We've been after you for ten years!" they said.

"Won't you have pity on an old man with a broken leg?"

"Perhaps we would, if there *were* an old man with a broken leg," replied the first police.

"But I didn't try to kidnap them!"

"Be quiet!" commanded the police, handcuffing the henchmen.

"It was nice to see you again!" said Grandpa. Then he left.

"How did you get here?" asked Dad.

"Jim flew us here!" explained Anne. "He'll fly us back, too!"

"WHAT?!"

"Don't worry, Mom," Jim said.

It was fine until the very end. (His safe first landing was lucky.)

Everyone screamed as the plane swooped down. They hit the ground with a *bump*. No one was hurt, but Jim had dented their van.

They buckled into their half-broken van, heading home.

Emily said, "Buckle up!"

"I don't need to!" Charles contradicted.

"Yes, you do," argued Mary.

"Stop it! Don't fight! Be quiet!" demanded Anne.

"Charles, you *must* buckle," Jim insisted.

"I can't!" whined Theo.

"Kids," said Mom, "you worked together to rescue us. You should cooperate *all* the time."

Every time there was a bump in the road, everybody expected the wheels to fall off. However, Dad pulled safely into the driveway. Suddenly the front left wheel deflated. They laughed, thankful they had made it home.

Prisoner 783

The chains rattled. It was slow and methodical before gaining in volume as the iron links tumbled over themselves in an amplified chase. The corridors were rank with the permeating scent of sweat and urine.

"Prisoner 783."

A grin tickled the lips of the man bound in layers of chains. "That's my name," he peered at the orderly's own identification tag, "and yours would be Adam, would it not?"

The orderly's jaw clenched as he reached for something tied to his side. A notepad came into view and Adam frantically began to scribble on its crisp, new pages.

783's blackout glasses were not on his face.

"Did they tell you not to talk to me?" 783 asked innocently, angling his head to peer under the brim of Adam's *Yankees* baseball cap. The poor orderly was trying so desperately to avoid eye contact. 783 had struggled hard to get his glasses off on the walk from his room. He was eager for his fruitful labor to pay off.

"Think they can go all the way this year?"

Adam gave no response except for the hard swallow and bob of his adam's apple.

783 rolled back on his heels, attempting to stretch but the chains were too heavy to raise his arms in a comfortable strain. "Blast."

Adam's eyes flicked up before immediately dropping back to the notepad.

"Ahh," 783 breathed in realization, "they told you not to *look* at me."

Adam continued his furious scribbling.

"You know, that really hurts my feelings, Adam. What are you writing in that notebook? More things to degrade me? You're better than that, Adam."

"Prisoner 783, you have been ordered to attend a meeting with the Special Consultant. He has some questions about your case."

"Always questions. Doesn't anyone ever have *answers* for me?" 783 let out an over exaggerated sigh.

Adam's scribbling slowed but didn't stop.

783 smiled.

"Do you have any opinions of me? How about my haircut? Isn't it nice? I wouldn't know. They don't allow me to have mirrors. Can you tell me how it looks?"

"I'm sorry but I can't." Adam bowed his head lower, eyes locked on the notepad as he continued his writing. His fingers were white with the intensity of the grip he possessed over the pen.

"It's kind of sad, you know? I never get to see anyone, including myself. I'm all alone. Are you all alone, Adam?"

"No, I have a fam-" Adam cut off abruptly, gasping. A page was violently flipped. The ink continued to drain onto the paper.

There. How foolish to send a family man!

"A family? Is that what you were trying to say? How wonderful! Who's in this family of yours?" 783's shoulders were beginning to ache from the weight of the chains. He almost had him. Just a little bit more.

"I - that's not important."

"Your family's not important? I would've thought you were a better man than that. How would your daughter feel if she heard that?"

Adam flinched and stopped his writing for a moment.

The guess paid off. Adam was no longer shielded. 783's knife was in. All he had to do was twist.

"She loves you so much. Your wife too. The lovely blond-haired beauty."

Adam's breathing became heavier. Glistening beads of sweat trickled down his face.

Another successful gamble.

"Your family would weep at the knowledge that they aren't important to you. They'll feel isolated and alone. They'll end up leaving and forgetting *all* about you until you eventually go mad and get locked up in a padded cage, like me. We aren't so different, Adam. At least we won't be."

Adam's eyes were pools of rage as they locked on 783 in a maddened fury. "I will never be like you!" he shouted defiantly.

783 smirked.

Adam's jaw dropped as the realization of his foolish mistake dawned on him.

"Dearest Adam, hand me your notebook would you?"

Adam's mouth continued to hang open like a zombie as he obeyed. His eyes had become bloodshot, focusing intently on 783's own peculiar shaded orbs.

"Now what did they tell you would help?" 783 began to flip through the notebook, mouth cracking up into a crooked smirk as he read the pages, "*keep writing, keep writing, keep writing. He gets into your head. Keep writing, keep writing. Don't look into his eyes. Don't engage, don't look, don't engage, don't look, DON'T -*"

The last word was particularly embedded into the notebook, tearing through the remainder of the ink-soaked pages.

783 tsked. "So close, Adam. So very close. You lasted longer than Bruce. There's always next time."

Adam's gaze hadn't left 783 although 783 had already looked away. It didn't matter. He had a hold on the orderly's brain. Adam was no longer a man but an overcompensated puppet.

"It's not your fault. They should know better by now. Your bosses are stupid. In fact, you should tell them that."

"My bosses are stupid. I'll tell them that." Adam repeated, drool beginning to pool down the side of his mouth.

783 giggled like a small child. "Excellent. Now Adam, why don't you get these chains off of me?"

Adam complied, digging a key from the side of his belt lanyard and inserting it into the many locks bedazzling the ends of the chains along 783's tall frame.

Adam struggled to lift them off so like any gentleman, 783 helped remove his substantial restraints. "Heavy aren't they, Adam?"

Adam nodded, a string of drool falling out of his mouth at the movement.

"Can you take me to the door now, Adam?"

Adam turned and began to walk, keys clinking tinnily at his side. 783 followed, finally stretching his aching limbs.

They rounded a corner. 783 slid against the wall, holding Adam's shoulder to keep him in place and sight of the front guard.

"Adam!" A cheerful voice called. "How's the family? Elizabeth still working at the office?"

783 scoffed. Elizabeth. Such a basic name for a blond. "Shh," he ordered the orderly.

Adam didn't respond.

"Adam?"

No answer.

Footsteps sounded as the guard approached. "Are you alright?"

The guard came into view and his eyes widened as he saw 783. "No!" He shouted, reaching for his gun.

Too late.

His eyes locked onto 783's own.

"Hello . . ." 783 paused to peer at the guard's name tag " . . . Sam. How are you this wonderful morning?"

Sam's mouth hung open as his eyes rolled up into his head, revealing the palest whites of his eyes. "Good. Shift ends in an hour."

"Why don't you go home early today? It's a lovely day for a stroll is it not?"

"Yes, lovely." Sam and Adam replied simultaneously.

"Then it's decided. Sam, could you open the door for us?"

Sam inserted his own key into the massive lock on the door leading outside. He swung open the creaking, iron slab.

783 breathed in the fresh scents of flowers and wetness. It had recently rained and the earth's deep aroma lay nestled in the air currents that flooded gently into the building.

"Lovely," he took a few steps outside before closing his eyes and tilting his head up to the sky. "Why don't you both leave early today? Your families are missing you."

Adam and Sam nodded and followed 783 as he took a few steps before pausing. He turned back to look at the two unconsciously conscious men, drunken-like smiles plastered to their faces as they gazed at him.

"Thank you for your cooperation, gentlemen. Have a wonderful day."

"You too," they replied.

"Such a nice man," Adam slurred an additional sentence.

783 smiled. "That's what they all say," he responded before turning towards the horizon and stepping into its glorious light.

Special Consultant Zimmer leaned languidly against the two-way window, watching Prisoner 783 stroll through the grounds in a bout of joyous freedom below.

"And there you are, gentlemen," he puffed out around a Cuban cigar.

The room burst into a series of rapid applause.

General Hauge slapped Zimmer on the shoulder. "Remarkable! Truly remarkable! We'll take him!"

The room's cheers had yet to cease as the men talked in heightened anticipation.

Maria Dembouski Age: 18

4

Zimmer smiled, taking a long drag from the cigar before turning back to watch the jubilant escapee.

“Thank you for *your* cooperation, 783.”

The Phoenix Egg

“Melody!”

I froze when I heard his voice. What was he doing here after the last two days? Didn’t he know...

But no. I wouldn’t think about that. I wiped my hands on my jeans and turned to face him. Covered in dust, he was scrambling up the cluster of rocks that led to the shallow plateau on which I stood, silent as the sun-baked stones. He stopped a few paces away, looking genuinely embarrassed.

“Uh—Melody. Hi.”

“Joel.”

He looked down, scuffing his foot on the ground. “Yeah. I... I couldn’t find you.”

I would’ve slapped him, but he was too far away. “You mean, not after you told our worst enemy where our camp was so he could ambush us....”

He winced at my sarcasm, but I didn’t regret it. “Hey—Melody—I’m sorry.”

“I’ll bet you are. But this time...” I turned to stare at the sun slipping slowly towards the sand. Why was the sun so red in the desert? “This time, sorry isn’t enough.”

He flinched again. “Look, Melody, I was wrong. I know I was wrong.”

“Do you know *how* wrong?” My voice cracked, and I took a deep breath before continuing. “The three of us were a team. You, Neil, and me. That’s why we came all this way. Because we were a team, and we were going to find the phoenix egg before Trent can. But you betrayed us. Neil is dead now—because of you.”

Joel stumbled back a step. “I—they—”

“No, they didn’t tell you that part, did they? Joel—why? Why did you think you could trust them? We trusted you, but you didn’t trust us. Why?”

He stared at the ground. “It wasn’t that I didn’t trust you.... I didn’t tell you this before, but... my older brother is helping Trent find the egg. You’re an only child, you don’t understand what it’s like... I just wanted.... My brother contacted me. He wanted to know where we were going... and I... went and told him.... But, Melody... I’m here to help you now. I’m on your side. Really. What Trent is doing is wrong, I see that now.”

“Right. Like I can believe that after...” My eyes unfocused, drifting back towards the blazing sun.

“Melody?” His voice was hesitant, soft enough I could pretend I hadn’t heard. But he said again, “Melody?”

“*What*, Joel?”

He winced under my glare. “Can I... uh... come with you? You know, to find the phoenix egg?”

Grace MacPherson, page 1

I stared at him, and my mind rocketed back to a conversation that hadn't been that long ago—when Neil told me he was setting out to find the legendary phoenix egg, hidden in the Blue Labyrinth deep within the Amaranth Desert.

I need you, he had told me. I'm going to find the phoenix egg before Trent does. If he finds it, he won't share its healing powers. He'll keep it for himself because he thinks he can discover the secret of eternal life from it. With his wealth and prestige, all he wants is to be able to enjoy life forever. My great-uncle hid the egg generations ago because he was afraid of this—that someone would take the egg for selfish reasons. And I need your help to get it before Trent can take it.

Me? Why?

To open the crypt that holds the egg. The door doesn't have a key. It can only be opened by two human hands—two right hands. The door has two indents for them—the panels there can sense the rhythms of the heartbeats in the hands. That's what opens the door. But it takes two people to do it—and that's why I need you. I know you won't back out of this like a lot of people would. One more thing—the door needs two people to open it, but the panels can sense guilt in the rhythm of a heartbeat, and it won't open to anyone with a guilty conscience. I guess my great-uncle thought that would stop anyone evil from opening it, but Trent doesn't feel any guilt for what he's doing. Will you help me? I can't do this alone.

A few days after that conversation, Joel had told Neil he had overheard us talking and wanted to join us on our journey. Neil had refused at first, but relented when Joel pointed out that he would be able to help us—he had more wilderness survival skills than Neil and me put together. But we had never really wanted him along, had we? I certainly didn't want him now.

I looked again at Joel, and down to the map in my hand. I needed someone as much as Neil had needed me. But I didn't want that someone to be Joel. Was this why Neil's great-uncle had created the door so that it needed two people to open it? Did he know that no two people would ever make it through the maze he created to protect it—and that if they did, they would never work together? Or was this his way of protecting the phoenix egg from the hands of selfish men who only wanted it for their own gain? Did he intend that it could only be obtained by someone who would use it for good?

Didn't I want it for good—to share its healing power?

Wasn't that why Neil had wanted it?

And why I needed, more than anything else, to obtain it—even if it meant letting Joel help me?

Joel. The reason Neil was dead now. The reason I had spent the last two nights huddled awake in a cave. There was no way I was letting this quest end here, not after we had come so far already. Wasn't that why I went on after Neil's death?

But in that moment, Joel was the last person on earth I wanted to see. I had trusted him—Neil had trusted him—and he betrayed us. Left us to our enemies. Left Neil to die.

Grace MacPherson, page 2

The words were already on my lips. *No, Joel. Not in a thousand years. You've done enough already. Go home.* But I didn't speak them. How could I, when the fate of the world was dangling by a thread? This was bigger than me. Bigger than Neil. Bigger even than Joel's betrayal. This was the cause Neil had fought for—died for. How could I give it up now?

"Fine." My voice was shaking. "Fine. You can come. Just—don't expect me to talk to you or anything. Not after what you did to Neil. Now come on."

So we went. We entered the Blue Labyrinth as the sun bade the world goodnight, and I led the way with the trembling flame of a torch. The Blue Labyrinth was brutally complex—and made that way for a reason—so that no idle treasure-hunters would dare to enter—only those who were so desperate that they would sacrifice anything for what lay deep within. More than once, we narrowly escaped a wrong turn or a tumbling boulder or a half-invisible wire stretched across the floor.

But we made it. Shaken, sweaty, and exhausted but wide awake, we made it to the crypt. We stood for a moment, staring at the door—seamless stone, to all appearances, but we knew better. The two hand prints wavered invitingly in the torchlight. I looked at Joel, then drew in a deep breath.

"Well—I guess this is it."

He pressed his lips together and nodded. "Yes, I guess it is."

I stepped towards the door and he followed suit. I raised my hand to the stone, but he hesitated.

"You just... touch the hand print?"

"Yes."

"Well. That's not so hard, then."

Maybe not—but it was hard for me to let him. I reached for the door, but stopped. Guilt. No one who felt guilt could open the door. I took a deep breath. I needed to do something more, no matter how distasteful it was. "Joel? I... I forgive you for... what you did."

Relief shone in his eyes, and I found myself returning his smile. My heart suddenly felt much lighter. Flooded with new confidence, I turned back to the door. Joel and I pressed our hands to the door, and the stone began to creak. The massive doors swung slowly open, revealing a narrow room within. I couldn't resist a small smile. The worst was over. I could see it—the squat metal box containing the phoenix egg, sitting only a few yards away.

Joel looked at the floor, shuffling back from the open doorway. "I guess... I can go now."

I looked from him to the doorway, the glow of victory fading, and I realized something unexpected. I didn't need him anymore... but I wanted him there. "Wait, Joel."

He stopped. I held out my hand.

"Let's do this together."

I love the sun. I love the sun so much. I love the feeling of the beams of sun on my skin. On the hottest days I absolutely adore the intense heat and basking in it. I love the feeling of getting sunburns. I know that's a little odd, but it's comforting. Well, I *loved* that burning sensation. One mid July day, I was sleeping in my house, in my comfy warm bed, quiet birds chirping outside. Then disaster struck. My house burned down, with me in it.

The sun was my safe space, the *heat* was my safe space. Then, the accident happened. That horrible, horrible man set my house on fire. I was the only one home. My mom was out on a date and my sisters were at a party. I was asleep at the time. I smelled the smoke and thought it was my mom trying to cook. Then, I felt the burning heat. My bed had caught a flame. I finally woke up and could hear the smoke alarms blaring. I was burning. I was physically burning. It wasn't like the sunburns, no because this time I think I could actually feel my bones burning. I knew from that moment what was happening.

I leapt out of my bed rolling on the floor, trying to put myself out. I noticed, it was only making it worse. My flame was growing with more flames from the floor. I scramble to my feet trying to stay calm, but I couldn't. I ran down the stairs to the front door. As I ran the flames were only growing, being fed by the oxygen. I finally got outside where the fire was no more. It was then I dropped down and started frantically rolling on the ground. Thank God my neighbors had seen the house engulfed in flames and called 911. By the time I was able to put out my fire covered body, I was rushed into an ambulance.

After about a week in the hospital, my mom let my sisters visit me. "Oh my God Cecelia, are you okay?" Leah asked worriedly, "How did the fire start?" she continued.

"Leah leave her alone, she's probably still in shock," my other sister, Amelia, chirped. Still in shock? I have bandages wrapped around my entire body, and all she is worried about is if I'm in shock?

"Amelia, I was on fire for a solid 10 minutes or so. It's been a week. Our house was burned down and I had to suffer because you guys didn't want your little sister to embarrass you at that party!" I shouted. "And all you're worried about is shock? I have bandages on every inch of my body. I lost all of my hair and it will never grow back," I went on.

"I had no idea what was going to happen! I'm not a goddamned psychic Cece!" her eyes filled with tears. "Besides you're not the only one who lost things because of that fire!" no she was right, it's not like I lost all of my hair, a majority of my skin, and possibly my entire future.

"Amelia Christine Calahan! Get out of here right now! You do not get to compare your losses to Cece's!" My mom screamed at her. Amelia stormed out almost as upset as if she was the one in the hospital bed. "Sweet Pea I am so sorry about Amelia, she is still having a hard time with all of this. She doesn't like that we had to move in with your father," she went on and on and on about how Amelia was feeling. Yeah I understood that moving back in with dad had to be hell, but that's no excuse for her to be a massive bitch about everything.

After a few months, I was living almost as normal, except for the fact that I was bald at 16. I got closer with my dad after a while, he was always there for me. It was almost as if he was trying to make up for those years of being a deadbeat. We had finally found out what started the fire. Someone had thrown a poor man's grenade through my bedroom window. We didn't know who it was. Leah and Amelia now wouldn't leave the house without asking me if I wanted to go. It was a no every time. Everywhere was always so sunny. The one thing I used to love, I now hate. That stupid ball of fire! How could someone do this to me? What was the reason? I had done nothing to deserve this! You took my entire life away from me! I can't even go outside, because the sun just reminds me of that night! God, what did I do to deserve this?

My mom often tried to get me outside. She wanted me to enjoy the thing I once loved.

"Come on Cece, the sun is hidden behind the clouds today. It's only like 50 degrees outside," she begged and pleaded for this. "Cece, my baby please you haven't been yourself since the fire. Please baby, please," I could see the tears forming in her eyes "Sweetheart, you're not going to feel any better unless you cooperate,"

"Lorelei, can I talk to you for a minute," My dad called to my mom. They walked into the other room, so I couldn't hear anything. After a few minutes my parents come out and my dad comes to talk to me. "Angel, all you have to do is get in the car. You'll be outside for a total of 10 seconds. If you want

Lily Blaisdell

you can sit in the back and we can put blankets over the windows. Please honey, you just need to get out of this house,” I could see the tears of desperation forming in his eyes. I could see how much this meant to them. I knew what I needed to do.

I look out the window in my living room. It's cloudy, no sun. I looked at my dad and nodded my head. I went to open the door, but I hesitated. I took a deep breath, grabbed the door knob and ran outside. I bolted to the car, opened the door and jumped in the passenger seat. I did it! I went outside!

“Mom! Dad! I did it!” I shouted out of the rolled down window. My dad rushed to the car and jumped in the driver seat.

“Where do you want to go?” He excitedly asked.

“Anywhere but here,” I sighed with relief. I finally left my house. Oh my God, I left my house! I finally did it! The pride in my father's eyes was better than anything I could ever feel. We never figured out who burned my house down, but at least my family is back together.

Bethany Hanson, age 16
"Choices and Conscience"

Germany, 1940s

She paces back and forth, her shoes making a rhythmic tap against the old floorboards. Even if she avoids the creaky one, it still voices its opinion, as if a phantom walks alongside her. A singular candle lights the room, burned nearly to a stump. It takes an hour to burn each one, and one has fallen to that fate already. He should have been home an hour ago.

The waning candle casts strange shadows against the walls, but it's not them she fears. They aren't the reason she continually glances at the door, counting the seconds.

Finally, there's the gentle padding of footsteps outside, and the door slowly creaks open. She breathes a sigh of relief but doesn't rush forward. Instead, she waits. Waits as her husband slowly enters, head sagging. He sets a bag aside, shoulders slumped, and strips off his coat. It too is quietly tossed aside. He moves forward to the kitchen table and takes a seat. His arms stretch out before him; his eyes look straight ahead.

Voice hoarse from an hour of silence, she asks, "Well?"

Every ounce of strength seems drained from the man. "It is official. We are ordered to turn in any Jews we find."

The woman mutters something rude followed by "Nazis". The name hangs like a nail in the air, sealing their fate. They are both silent for a moment.

Eventually, her husband speaks. "I cannot do it, Emma."

She stares at him, as if he is speaking a different language. "What do you mean?"

"I cannot do it anymore. For years, I have done everything my government has asked me. I have been a good citizen; a good German. Maybe that was a mistake. For years, I have cooperated and complied. The taking of innocent lives—the turning in of my friends and neighbors—this, I cannot do."

Emma sputters. "What option do we have?"

"We resist. We refuse."

"And if it costs us our lives?" Her voice is raised into a shrill tone, and he puts a finger to his lips to quiet her.

He closes his eyes. "Then it will have been better to die for righteous men than to live under cruel and evil ones."

"But—Wilhelm—the police coming—knocking on our door—"

"I will take the blame."

She shook her head furiously. "And leave me here? Alone? You cannot wish that horror on me!"

Bethany Hanson, age 16
"Choices and Conscience"

For the first time, Wilhelm looks up at her. Then he stands and beckons her closer. Reluctantly she takes his hand. "You must be strong for both of us. You are the strongest woman I know. You must remain, to protect the children."

The desperation that had just faded from her eyes quickly returned "And then? If something should happen to me? Our children, Wilhelm—what would happen to them?"

He turns away from her and retakes his seat, head in hands.

"We cannot let them fall to that fate!" Emma implores. Images she'd been trying to ignore push their way into her head.

"What good is keeping them alive," Wilhelm begins, his voice choked, "if they have nothing to live for? If we do not stand up now, they will never believe us when we tell them good is worth fighting for. If they have no reason to stand, why should they not do exactly what they're told and believe exactly what the government tells them? To fall in with the lies of evil is a fate far worse than any those Nazis can conceive."

He puts his face back into his hands and sits slumped over the table. Emma stands for a moment, watching him, before sliding gently into the seat beside him.

"You are right." Her voice, so passionate before, relaxes into a softer tone. "Of course you are—innocent lives are always worth the pain. I was too afraid to agree with you, but I will be brave. I am your wife. I will be at your side whatever may come."

Slowly the hands fall from his face, and he wraps an arm around her. "Thank you, Emma."

They sit there, for a moment, in silence. A clock in some distant church chimes, betraying how late the hour has become. The only other sounds are the gentle rustling of the breeze and the snoring of sleeping children on the floor above. The candle that had sustained them for so long finally goes out, leaving them in darkness. Neither stands to get a new one.

"It won't be easy," her husband says slowly. "Nothing right ever is."

"And we are alone. All alone."

"No, not alone. They are good people out there, fighting. I may not agree with everything the underground says, but we can still work together in these dark times. And some day, whether in our lives or our children's, there will be peace."



Madeline Mehlretter • Age 7
Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 77

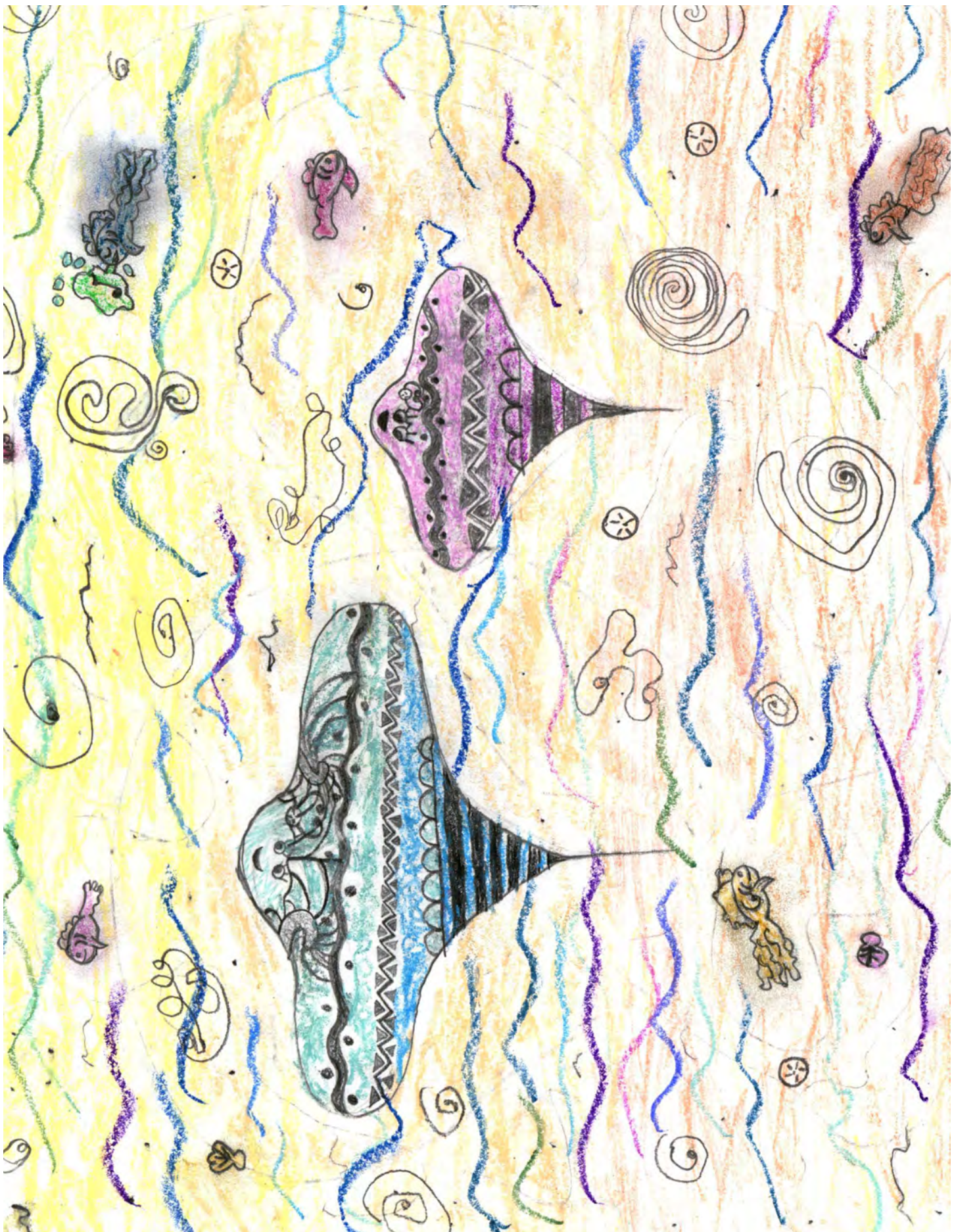


Charlotte Haekenkamp • Age 8

78 * Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022

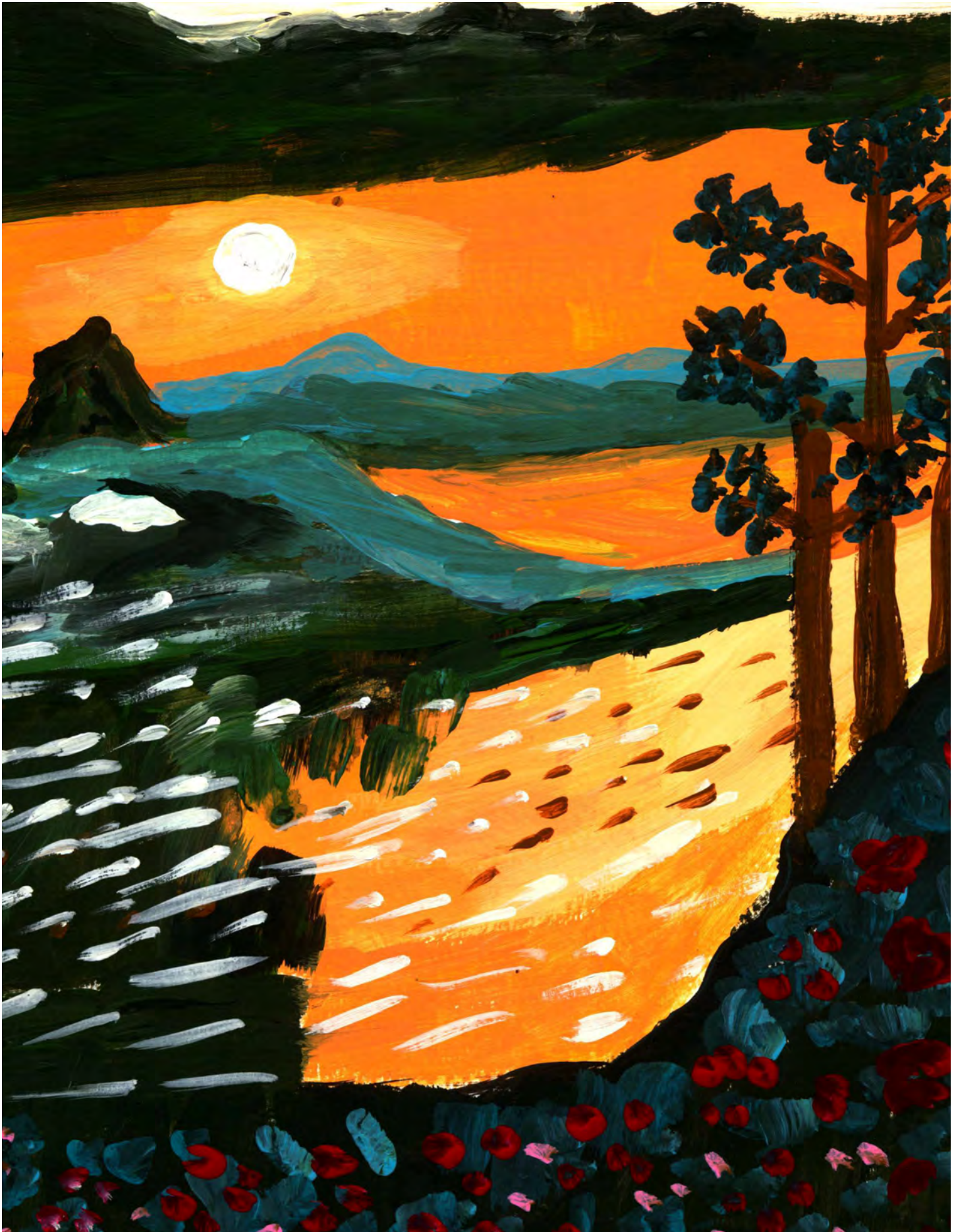


Bearet Meerbeek • Age 8
Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 79



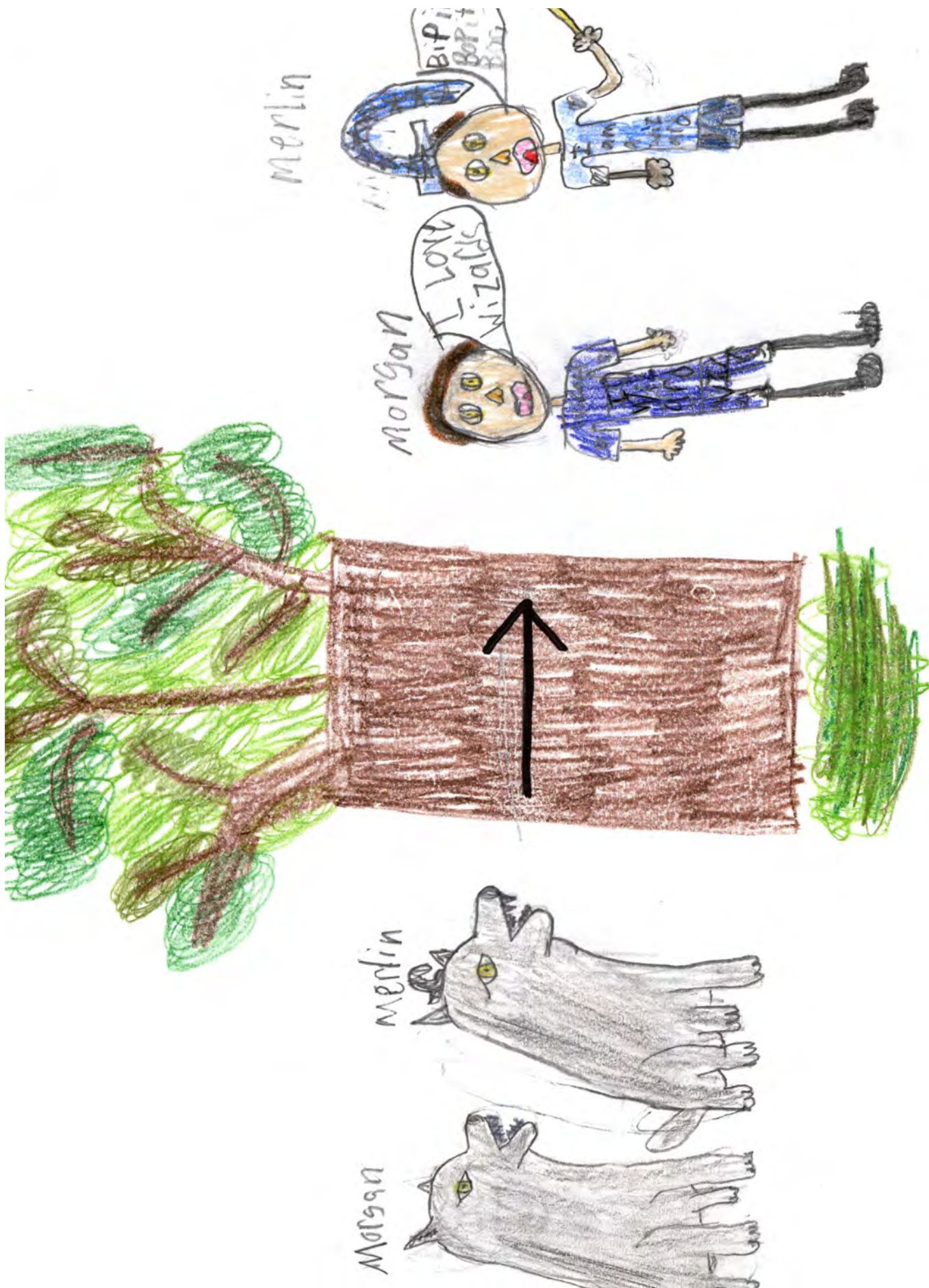
Kamila A. Smith • Age 9

80 * Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022



Athena Homb • Age 9

Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 81



Macey Golombiecki • Age 9



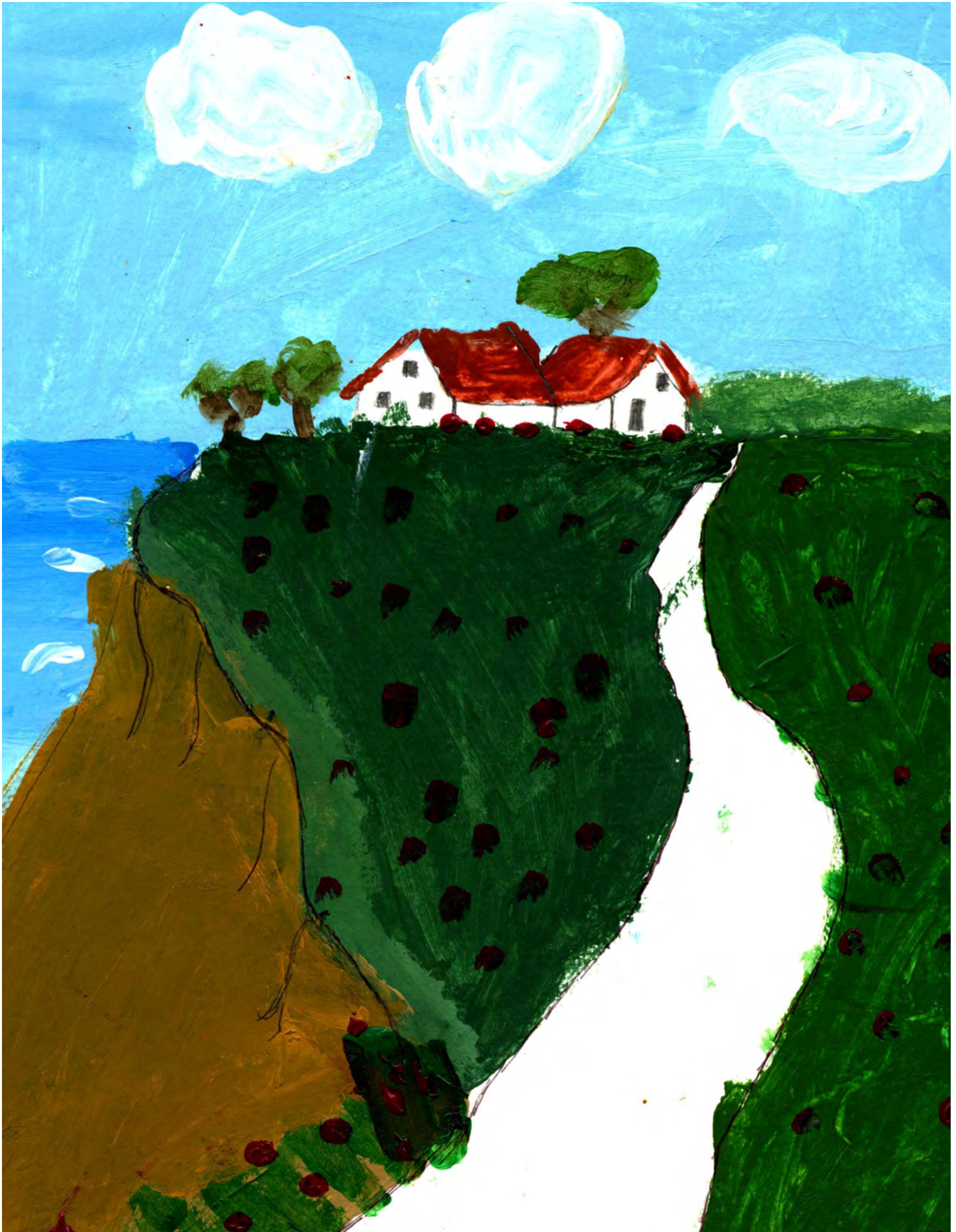
Zoe Zhang • Age 12

Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 83



Sophia Lobitz • Age 11

84 * Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022



Apollo Homb • Age 12

Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 85



Maria Smook • Age 11



Kenneth Zimmerman • Age 11
Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 87



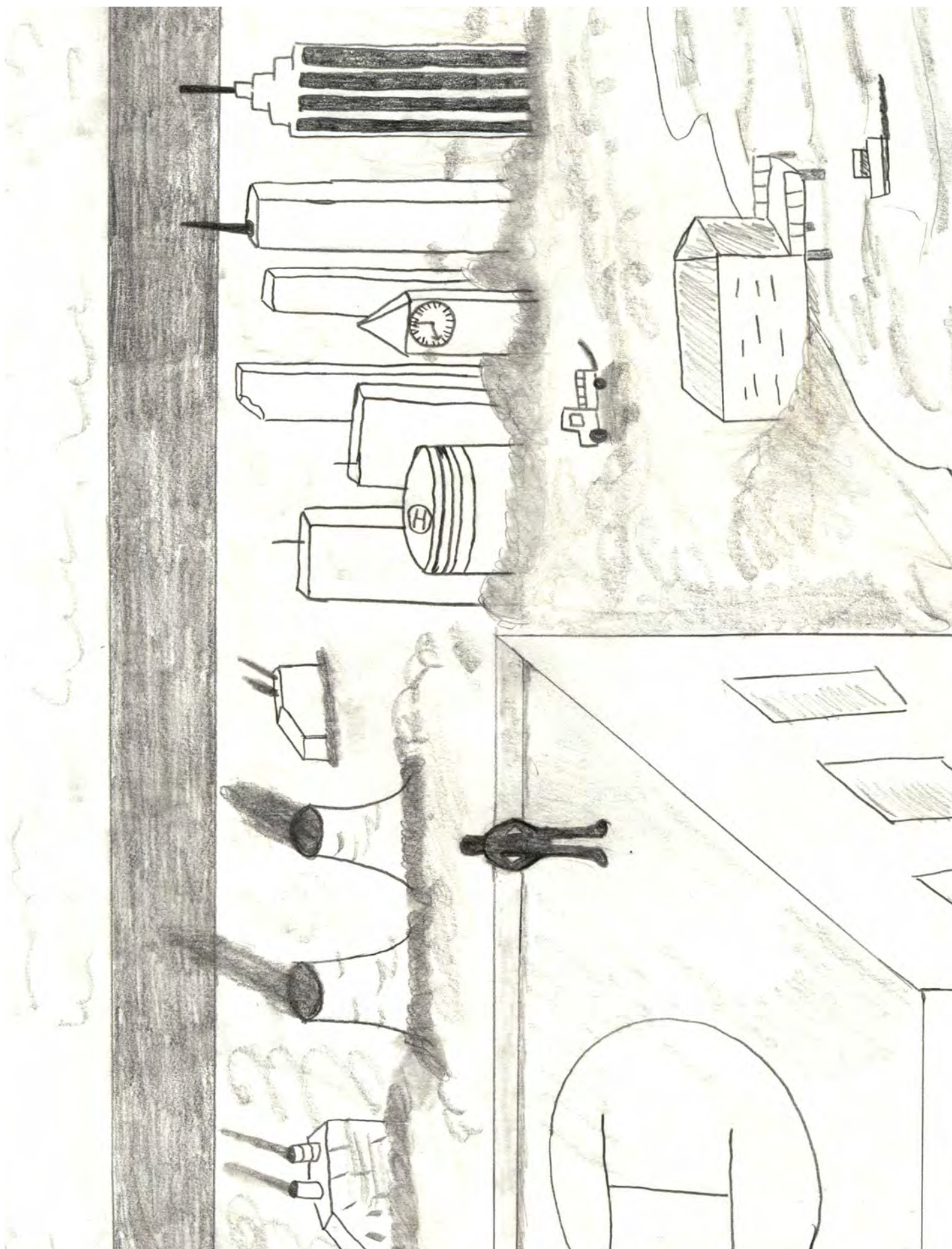
Athena Quinn • Age 11

88 * Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022



Jadynn Meerbeek • Age 14

Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 89

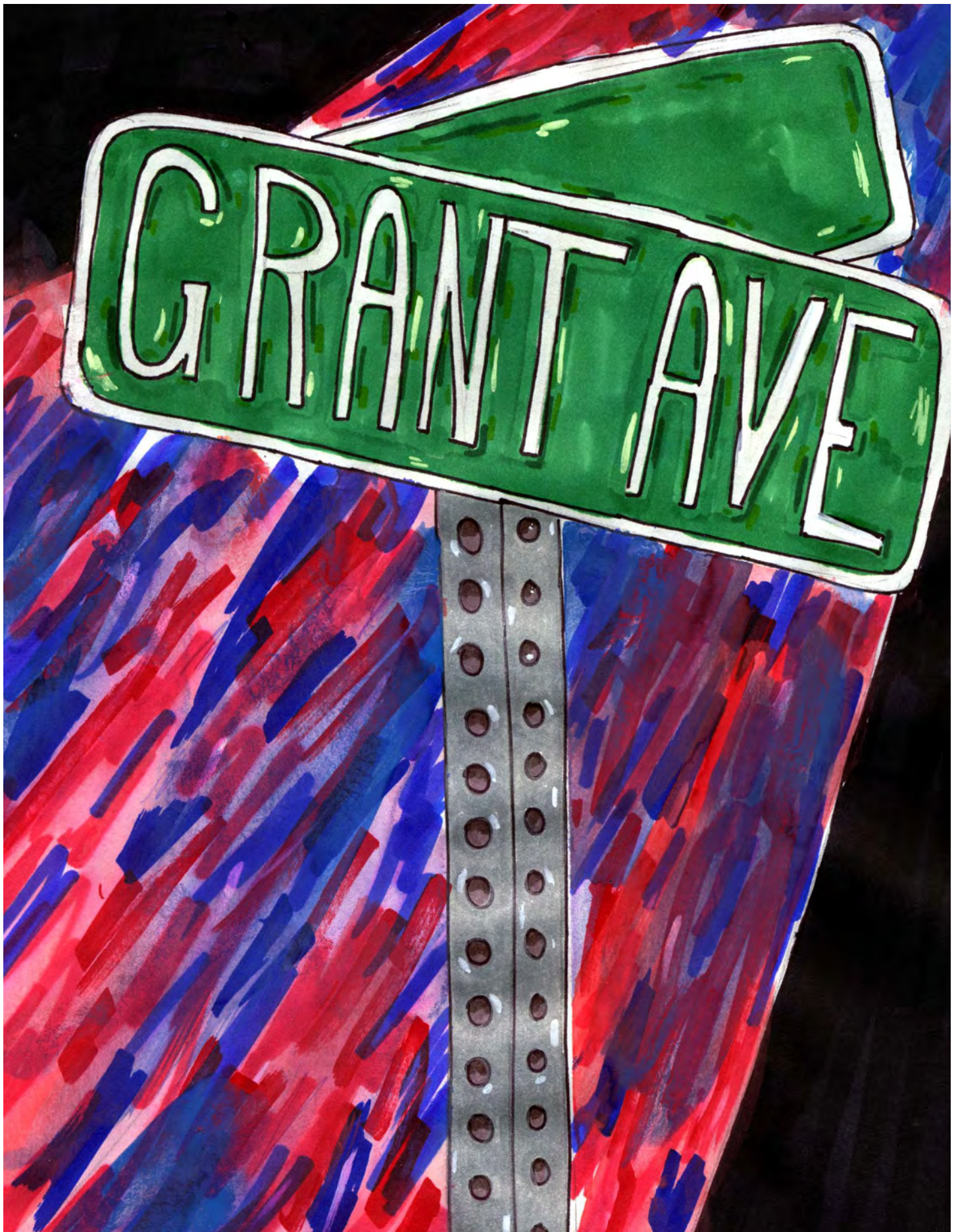


Megan Lawver • Age 14

90 * Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022



Rose MacPherson • Age 13
Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 91



Samantha Liebl • Age 17

92 * Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022

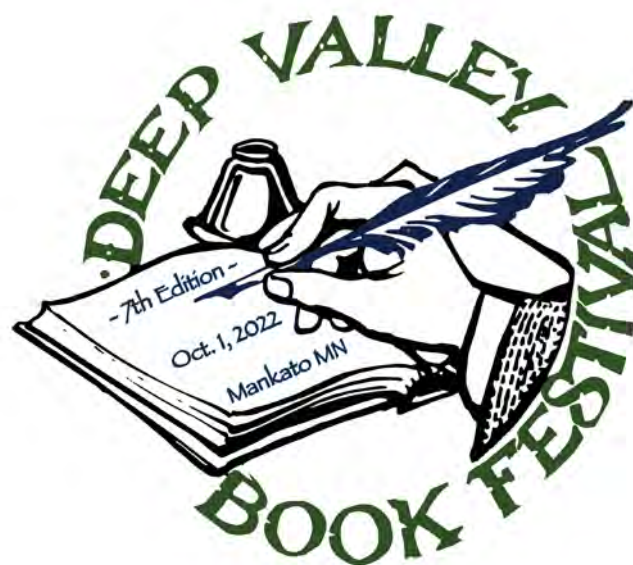
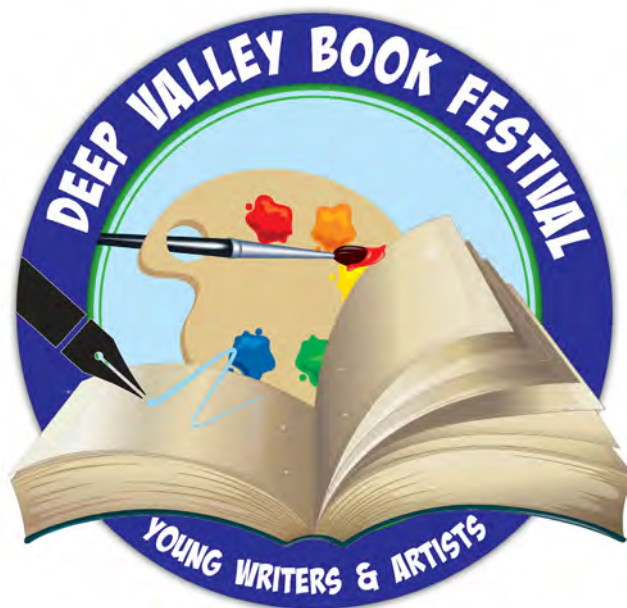


Grace MacPherson • Age 16
Young Writers and Artists Contest 2022 * 93

Thank you to all of our entrants!
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2023 contest. You can find
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