

# SCSC WRITING CONTEST

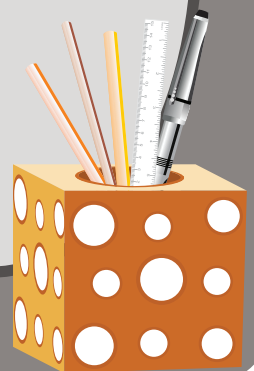
For Students in Grades K–12

**2018–19 Theme:  
Bravery**

Sponsored by



In Partnership with



The SCSC Writing Contest provides students with an opportunity to express themselves through fiction, non-fiction and/or poetry. This contest was established to encourage the love of language and writing for all students and as a way to recognize the talented young writers in south central Minnesota. SCSC is partnering with Minnesota State University, Mankato. Students in grades K–12 attending public, private or homeschools are eligible to enter. Up to three pieces per category and submissions in multiple categories are welcome.

*The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the sponsors.*

*Note to Readers: Some of the works may not be appropriate for a younger reading audience.*

COPYRIGHT © 2019

*This anthology is a joint project of South Central Service Cooperative and Minnesota State University's education department. Copyright reverts to authors upon publication.*

## CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS:

### **Poetry:**

Arrangement of words in an artistic and purposeful manner that expresses the writer's thoughts and/or feelings about a subject of their choice using style and rhythm (ex: sonnets, haiku, free verse).

- Limit three entries per student
- Maximum length is two pages, double-spaced per entry

### **Fiction (Imaginary/Fantasy):**

Stories that describe imaginary events and people that entertain the reader with realistic details, involving characters who experience a conflict (ex: historical fiction, realistic fiction, fantasy, science fiction, mystery).

- Limit three entries per student
- Maximum length is five pages, double-spaced per entry

### **Non-Fiction (True/Factual):**

*(Choose one or more non-fiction types)*

**Personal narrative:** A true story that describes a real event or experiences in the author's life.

**Information:** Factual writing to convey knowledge of a topic and research findings.

**Essay/Opinion:** A feeling or thought you have about a subject or topic, supported by research.

- Limit three entries per student
- Maximum length is five pages, double-spaced per entry

**All entries should relate to the 2018–19 theme: Bravery.**

**Bravery:** *courageous behavior or character when facing danger, fear or difficulty.*

### **Thank you to all those who worked with the SCSC Writing Contest and this anthology:**

To the staff at South Central Service Cooperative for promoting the contest, gathering and cataloging submissions, and designing the anthology layout.

To the students and staff at Minnesota State University, Mankato education department who served as judges and provided feedback to students on their writing submissions. Also, to the MSU print services for anthology printing.

To the teachers, parents, friends and relatives who encourage students to express themselves through writing.

Finally, to the students who shared their work for this year's contest. We are most grateful.

**For more information, visit [www.mnscsc.org/writing-contest](http://www.mnscsc.org/writing-contest)**

# Table of Contents

## POETRY

<i>Bravery, Thora Bratlie</i> . . . . .	3
<i>Scars on My Hands, Jasmine S. Grabau</i> . . . . .	3
<i>Untitled, Anna Heyda</i> . . . . .	3
<i>Be Strong, Ellie Heyda</i> . . . . .	3
<i>A Simple Act of Bravery, Adela Madson</i> . . . . .	4
<i>Bravery, Madison Milow</i> . . . . .	4
<i>The Forgotten, the Fighting, the First, Madeline Schoensted</i> . . . . .	5
<i>Gut Feeling, Liana Snow</i> . . . . .	5
<i>Internal Peace, Liana Snow</i> . . . . .	5
<i>Pure Weakness, Liana Snow</i> . . . . .	5
<i>Starts as a Whole, Eden Tollefson</i> . . . . .	6

## FICTION

<i>Mariah Mindee, Lavawalker, Jocelyn Balfanz</i> . . . . .	7
<i>Octopie Squidee: A Tale of Bravery, Jocelyn Balfanz</i> . . . . .	8
<i>The Tale of Jessica Peterson, Jocelyn Balfanz</i> . . . . .	8–9
<i>The Watch, Sophia Barnacle</i> . . . . .	9–12
<i>Brave, Brynley Bellig</i> . . . . .	12–14
<i>The Soldier Marches On, Thora Bratlie</i> . . . . .	14–15
<i>When You're Grey, Thora Bratlie</i> . . . . .	15–16
<i>Lights, Camera, Freeze!, Jordan Brown</i> . . . . .	16–18
<i>The New School, Jordan Brown</i> . . . . .	18–20
<i>D-Day, Zebuion John Davis</i> . . . . .	20–22
<i>Washington, Kuol Dual</i> . . . . .	22–26
<i>Seeprisdon, Sage Erickson</i> . . . . .	27–28
<i>Aphrodite, Ella Ann Haggerty</i> . . . . .	29–30
<i>Me, Wallie and the Wilderness, Taryn Hecksel</i> . . . . .	30–31
<i>Leo's Voyage Journal, Ethan Hutchins</i> . . . . .	32–33
<i>Rainbow!, Katrin Loftén</i> . . . . .	33–34
<i>The Enchanted Forest, Sophia Mullaly</i> . . . . .	34–35
<i>The Ice Cream Contest, Sophia Mullaly</i> . . . . .	35
<i>Darcy's Life, Sienna Murray</i> . . . . .	36–37
<i>TECH, Brandon Norbie</i> . . . . .	37
<i>A Gift from an Angel, Audrey Olson</i> . . . . .	38–39
<i>Terrifically Talented Tuesday, Sydnie Penhollow</i> . . . . .	40–43
<i>The MidPoint, Leah Proehl</i> . . . . .	43–45

<i>Wonderful World of Zoltaculis, Rebekah Roemhildt</i> . . . . .	45–57
<i>Life, Megan Scheel</i> . . . . .	57–58
<i>Don't Forget Me, Madeline Schoenstedt</i> . . . . .	58–60
<i>Snowflake Sees Snowflakes, Evie Schuller</i> . . . . .	61
<i>Fly, Elizabeth Schulz</i> . . . . .	61–63
<i>A Summer Adventure, Rohan Sharma</i> . . . . .	63–65
<i>Little Red, Adelina Sifers Clements</i> . . . . .	66
<i>My Sister Clara, Cecily Winterfeldt</i> . . . . .	67

## **NONFICTION**

<i>Bounce Up Fall Down, Nika Hirsch</i> . . . . .	67
<i>Finding My Voice, Nika Hirsch</i> . . . . .	66
<i>Brain Damage Both Ways, Sasha Jakovich</i> . . . . .	68
<i>Bittersweet Sugar, Amelia Lawver</i> . . . . .	69
<i>The Day the Earth Shook, Amelia Lawver</i> . . . . .	69–70
<i>Bravery, Rohan Sharma</i> . . . . .	70–71

# POETRY

## Bravery

By Thora Bratlie, Grade 6  
*Dakota Meadows Middle School, Mankato*

**B**eautiful in its own way  
**R**espect who people are  
**A**lways try to, even if you're afraid  
**V**ery great, bravery is  
**E**veryday somebody will do it  
**R**eady to do this?  
**Y**ou can do it, I know you can

## Scars on my Hands

By Jasmine S. Grabau, Grade 11  
*New Prague High School, New Prague*

When you look at your hands  
what do you see?  
I see Scars  
from work  
from play  
from pain  
from Life  
some hands are clean and pristine  
new and fresh like a child  
while my hands are Scarred and hard  
Do your hands show your life  
like mine?

## Untitled

By Anna Heyda, Grade 4  
*John F. Kennedy Elementary, Lakeville*

A new kid showed up  
around March 10<sup>th</sup>.  
He stood up and said  
The pledge.  
He seemed normal just like us.  
So I sat by him at lunch.  
All the other kids were teasing  
Him and me.  
I said to the kid, "follow me."  
We stood up to leave. And I brought  
Him to my wishing tree.  
I said, "Come here and make a wish."  
"I wish more kids were as nice as you."  
A couple weeks later he had to leave.  
His words always rang in my head,  
"I wish more kids were as nice as you."

## Be Strong

By Ellie Heyda, Grade 2  
*John F. Kennedy Elementary, Lakeville*

One day I felt  
like I couldn't do anything  
so, someone came up to me and said you can do  
anything if you try  
you can be one of the greats  
you can be the best  
you can be the King Kong banging on your chest  
you can be wild  
you can be free  
only if you try  
then you will succeed

## A Simple Act of Bravery

By Adela Madson, Grade 4  
*Homeschool, St. Peter*

An act of bravery need not be strife,  
Brave does not mean, "Save a Life!"  
A small act of courage is the only thing  
Needed to make your bravery ring.  
A small example, one fine day  
I was at a friend's house, playing away.  
Then my baby brother fell down the stairs,  
I caught him to let him know I care.  
In my arms he trembled,  
As scared as scared could be.  
Poor thing had had a dreadful fright,  
Anyone could see.  
The truest story I have told  
So everyone take heed;  
That big thing we call bravery,  
Is just one small, good deed.  
A simple act of kindness  
Shown to a much-loved friend,  
Will show them that you're always brave  
And stay true in the end.

## Bravery

By Madison Milow, Grade 5  
*Rosa Parks Elementary, Mankato*

What is bravery?  
Some may think that bravery is the absence of fear,  
But fear cannot be killed.  
Fear can only be bested by one thing, and that is  
bravery.  
Bravery isn't the absence of fear; fear will remain  
forever.  
Bravery is seeing fear and overcoming it.  
Those who can't admit they are afraid have never  
succeeded,  
And those who have fears and aren't able to face  
them aren't brave.  
Bravery can't be taught, it can only be seen and felt  
with the heart.  
And sometimes, bravery can be little things.  
You don't have to save a life or win a war,  
You don't have to move mountains or become a hero.  
Some think that bravery comes with wisdom and age,  
But you could be 1,000 years old and still not be  
brave.  
Every single person on this big blue marble has a fear.  
And all fears are different.  
Life is scary, but in the end, it'll be worth it.  
And take your time, because bravery isn't a sprint,  
it's a marathon.

## The Forgotten, the Fighting, the First

By Madeline Schoenstedt, Grade 6  
*Dakota Meadows Middle School, Mankato*

The heart that defies fear, cares for everyone's  
good, and stands strong for others,  
The courage and will, for the protection of children  
from all mothers,  
This is bravery, yes it is,  
The forgotten, the fighting, the first  
The hope, people conjurer in their souls, when their  
walls of normal life have crumbled,  
When voices shout out the truth, of what is right,  
without a half-hearted mumble,  
This is bravery, yes it is,  
The Forgotten, the Fighting, and the First.

## Gut Feeling

By Liana Snow, Grade 7  
*St. Peter Middle School, St. Peter*

Nobody would give up their heart,  
to replace a girl's rotten one  
So she tipped the acid  
to her mouth  
and thought about melting  
on the mountains  
Then a voice whispered in her soul's ear,  
that what she was searching for  
had always been here  
She asked the voice,  
"Why do you wish for me to climb  
a mountain of thorns that never ends?"  
The voice instructed softly  
to not go up,  
but to go below  
Because someone was waiting,  
with their heart in a lace,  
to grant to her  
So she went down the mountain,  
dirt and scars on her feet,  
just to find a desert of trees  
But she didn't fuss  
because she could feel  
her heart pump and her blood rush

## Internal Peace

By Liana Snow, Grade 7  
*St. Peter Middle School, St. Peter*

She walked upon the ashes  
of the ones whom she once loved  
The neon city had crumbled  
into a somber land of ruins  
She stood in the puddles  
of her own despair  
Waiting for someone, or anyone,  
to be staring back at her  
besides her own reflection  
Her heart raced,  
yet ceased  
Her soul felt so much,  
yet was numbed without a needle  
But she walked on the rubble with resilience  
Making her way to somewhere  
that was not even there  
The sun hid behind the clouds,  
counting her days  
Until one day she saw it  
and she knew it was worth it

## Pure Weakness

By Liana Snow, Grade 7  
*St. Peter Middle School, St. Peter*

Let your heart bleed out  
until you realize its scarlet purity  
And let it flow into the cracks  
of your shattered soul, skin, and bones  
Then glue them back together  
to seal the beauty in  
For without weakness,  
you can never truly be brave  
So let your pain and losses  
be worn as a medallion

## Starts as a whole

By Eden Tollefson, Grade 6  
*Dakota Meadows Middle School, Mankato*

I sit and watch out my window,  
The wind whispers to me.  
It tells me stay down low,  
And focus to see.  
I did as it said,  
And my eyes went wide.  
I went to my bed,  
And almost cried.  
I am told to be brave,  
But no one else sees.  
All the of the worlds hate,  
And all the disease.  
I am supposed to help,  
But instead I hide.  
I want to yell,  
But others think I lie.  
I saw evil, and hunger,  
Pollution and war.  
A girl, and among her,  
The threat of being poor.  
You sit on your couch,  
You think we are fine,  
But look around while you can,  
Because our world is starting to die.  
The grass is littered,  
We can't all survive,  
And at rapid speeds, we too will die.  
We sit and watch our family suffer,  
And animals fade because of us.  
If you want a change,  
Stand up and be brave.  
If you too want to remain,  
Help me win this race.  
Now I have seen this world.  
Now I know.  
I will be brave with you.  
At least I will try.  
Think about ten years from now.  
Think about Earth.  
Because if this keeps up,  
Eight planets will become seven,  
Earth a meteor.  
But you're right, don't worry. We started this war.  
We can end it.

Just spin and turn.  
But now you know,  
Being brave isn't enough.  
It's almost too late,  
But don't give up.  
I see a future,  
And you brave ones are the making of it all.  
You see a baby, I see the future.  
A brave soul,  
The cure to cancer.  
Now I hope you see,  
I hope you know.  
That being brave starts as a whole.



# FICTION

## Mariah Mindee, Lavawalker

By Jocelyn Balfanz, Grade 5

Raven Stream Elementary, New Prague

The town that I live in has a volcano. We call it No Name because the real name is super long and hard to pronounce. The thing about No Name is that it is active and getting ready to explode. No Name exploding could be very dangerous. But no one in the town believes that No Name is active, except for my family and me. My mom is a volcanologist, so she knows all about this type of stuff. My dad is a science teacher, so he is also a volcano expert.

If you're wondering, my name is Mariah Mindee. I live in a town that everyone likes to call Volcanoville, because of No Name, but the real name of the town is Ash.

One day, I was sitting in the room that my sister Mel and I share, doing homework, when I heard a loud *boom!*

Mom came into our room and grabbed Mel and me. Dad followed us to the door. *Boom!* We walked out of the house. I was holding Katrinah, my cat, and Lucky, my hamster, as we walked to the neighbor's house. The ground shook underneath my feet.

"Kyre! Don't you feel the ground shaking? The whole town has got to escape. No Name will explode soon! Tell your neighbors!" Mom yelled to the neighbor, Kyre Hale.

Kyre ran out of her house and to her neighbor's house. I realized that Kyre and my family were being very brave. No Name could erupt in 20 minutes for all we knew! But we were determined to do whatever we could to save the whole entire town. Deep down I was scared, but I swallowed my fear and decided to do what I could to help my parents evacuate the town.

"Mrs. McGregory! Mr. McGregory! No Name is about to erupt! Everyone *has* to evacuate!" Mom yelled to old Mr. and Mrs. McGregory.

"I won't leave my house!" Mrs. McGregory shouted back.

"It could be very dangerous to stay in Ash," replied Dad.

"You'll be fine, Mrs. M.," I said reassuringly.

With a sigh, old Mrs. McGregory walked out of her house, pushing old Mr. McGregory in his wheelchair. He was holding Kit, their cat, and Pom-Pom, their Pomeranian, on his lap.

We saved the whole town before No Name erupted. Every single person and animal.

Months later, when my family and I were living in a different town, we visited Ash to see the remains of our once beautiful town. Every house and building was burned down, and magma covered half of the town. Everything was in pieces.

I sighed, but then remembered that home is where the people you love are, not where your house is. In that case, I've got a great home.

# Octopie Squidlee: A Tale of Bravery

By Jocelyn Balfanz, Grade 5

*Raven Stream Elementary, New Prague*

Today I, Octopie Squidlee, was feeding my pet minnow, Mini, when Octagon screamed. Octagon is my older sister. She is much braver than I am, which is why it surprised me when she screamed.

I am a very happy octopus. I am small, red, and like I said, happy. Since I am so happy, I believe that no one should ever scream. Only in big huge emergencies. I floated over to a window in the sand castle that Octagon and I live in to see why my brave sister was screaming. *Aaaahhhh!* I saw a human! A fisherman, like the one that caught me in a net three years ago and made me afraid of humans.

Octagon and I escaped through the back window and swam away from that oh so scary fisherman. My tentacles shook thinking about getting caught in his net. We swam to Mom and Dad's sand castle in the middle of the ocean's biggest city, Fish City, to escape the fisherman.

At Mom and Dad's sand castle, we ate the best food in the whole wide sea, crab. It was delicious. Mom makes the crab taste amazing. Since I can float, I entertained my baby sister, Octolily, by floating up to the ceiling after dinner. Octolily clapped her little tentacles.

Mom asked me what I wanted for Fish Holiday. I said bravery. Mom said that she can't just hand me bravery on a silver platter. Bravery has to be earned through a way like facing your fears. Later, I raced the neighbor Mr. Octo, and won! I am the fastest swimmer in my whole entire school. Even so, beating a professional swimmer like Mr. Octo was and still is a big deal.

After the race, Octagon and I swam home to see if the fisherman was still there. All of the scenery and creatures of Fish Hillside, a suburb outside of Fish City that we live in, reminded me of bravery. Here's why: I saw tons of plants on the way home, and plants must be brave to survive. Fish are always trying to eat them. I also saw dozens of fish. Fish also have to be brave to survive. There are always bigger fish in the sea looking for a tasty snack or dinner. So, listening to Mom's advice, I decided to get over my fear and talk to the fisherman. If he was still at our house, of course.

When we got home, the fisherman was still there. I gathered all of my courage and floated up to the fisherman.

"Hi! My name is Octopie Squidlee! What is your name?" I asked him. The fisherman said that his name was Oliver Katinsky and we had a friendly, not so scary conversation.

And that's how I learned that not all humans are scary. Some of them are actually really super nice. Hopefully you get to meet one of these humans someday!

# The Tale of Jessica Peterson

By Jocelyn Balfanz Grade 5

*Raven Stream Elementary, New Prague*

I summoned all of my courage and stepped onto a plane to Peru. By myself.

My name is Jessica Peterson, I'm 13 years old, and I'm going to Peru to visit my best friend, Mia Mickey, and her mom, Mrs. Mickey. Mia and her mom are staying in Peru for three years for Mrs. Mickey's job.

My parents, Gina and Kyle Peterson, were too busy to come with me to Peru. My parents own Peterson's Clothing Company, a very successful clothing company. They couldn't come with me to Peru because PCC is super busy during Christmas time. So, I am flying to Peru by myself. I have never flown by myself before, so I'm pretty nervous.

Once I get to Peru, I will join Mia and her mom at their rental cottage. But now, on the plane for 7 hours and 38 minutes, I am by myself. I found my seat, and a scary looking man sat down next to me. Inside I was

screaming, but on the outside, I was bringing every ounce of courage into this moment to not be scared. I twisted my red hair around my finger and listened to the flight attendant explain safety precautions. On the other side of me was a woman with a baby. The baby babbled loudly, and I relaxed. Just a little.

I turned the movie section on the back of the seat in front of me on when the flight attendant finished talking. I picked a happy movie and watched several until the plane landed. The movies helped me relax.

Once, during the flight, the man next to me tried to start a conversation, but I pretended not to hear. Stranger danger screamed in my brain.

I started missing my huge house by the railroad with Mom, Dad, my dog Suzie and my horse Heart as I stepped off of the plane. But then I remembered Mia's cozy rental cottage just ten minutes away. And I stepped off of the plane and into Peru.

## The Watch

By Sophia Barnacle, Grade 7

*Prairie Winds Middle School, Mankato*

He knew when he heard the sirens that he should have never been there in the first place. Jameson looked around to see where they were coming from. The left. He turned around and sprinted down an alleyway lined with trash and filled with a musty aroma. Jameson could still hear the sirens, increasing in sound. The police car rounded the corner. Jameson could see the red and blue lights flashing in front of him. He slowed his speed and detoured to the side of a building and put his hands in the air. The police car pulled over and the officer got out of car. Jameson could see the man's shadow walking up to him.

"Sir, put your hands in the air," the policeman said. Jameson turned around. His badge read, 'Johnson' and his number was 11803.

"Huh?" Jameson asked, "Oh! Sorry, sir. I was just going for my daily run and when I saw you, I stopped. I didn't want to get in your way."

"Sure, kid. Then why were your hands in the air before I told you to put them there?" he asked.

"Because if you put your hands up after running, you supposedly get more oxygen to your lungs," Jameson responded. The police officer stared at him with suspicion.

"Who are you looking for anyways?" Jameson asked with curiosity, even though he already knew the answer.

"Well, someone stole a watch that had diamonds engraved into the face and 21 karat-gold and silver on the band. It cost a ton of money, close to a million. It was from the building that used to be a barber shop but got turned into a jewelry store," Johnson stated. "Have you seen anyone that looks suspicious around here? I just saw you running and assumed that you were running from me."

"Um, no sir. I'm sorry I couldn't help you. May I get back to my running?" Jameson asked. The police officer stared at him one last time before nodding and turning around.

"Don't be running on the streets anymore in the evening, okay? Go earlier in the day," Johnson hollered while walking away.

Jameson let out a deep breath and slowly started picking up his speed. He could feel the heaviness of the watch in his pocket. He slid his phone out of his jacket and started to dial his best friend, Alecia. Alecia and Jameson met in about first grade. They hangout every day at school and after school. Jameson and Alecia are as best of friends as they could ever be.

"Hello?" Alecia said as she picked up. Jameson ran up a set of stairs leading to his apartment.

"Um, yeah, Alecia, where are you?" He asked, out of breath from running.

"At my house, why?" Alecia asked, "What do you need?"

Jameson stopped in front of his door, holding his keys in his hand. "Can you come over?" he asked. "I

kinda need you to," Jameson unlocked the door to his apartment. There was a long silence on the other end.

"I'll see if I can. What do you need anyways?" she said, breaking the silence.

"Um... it doesn't matter. Just come over here. Please and thanks! K, bye!" Jameson told Alecia.

"Uh, ok. I'll probably be there in about ten minutes. You better tell me what you need though," she replied.

"No thank you. I'll tell you once you get here," Jameson said. "If that's ok with you." Jameson sat down on his couch and texted his mom that Alecia was coming over.

"You are so annoying. I'll be there in a minute," Alecia said then hung up.

Jameson grabbed the remote and turned on the TV. He flipped through the channels, looking for something interesting and fun to watch. "The moon rose high and then the screams began," (-- click --) "This frog is one of the deadliest frogs alive," (-- click --) "Hahahaha. No help him," (-- click --) "Ahhhhh!! RUN FASTER!!!!!" Jameson turned the TV off, upset that he couldn't find anything interesting to watch. He stood up to change into something more comfy just as he heard a knock on the door. Instead of changing, he went to go open the door.

"Hey, Alecia, come on in," Jameson said right as he opened the door.

Alecia walked in and asked, "Ok, what do you want or need?"

Jameson stared at her. Her blonde medium length hair was up in a bun and she had sweat pants and a hoodie on. "You look comfy," Jameson said.

Alecia glared at him, "You are avoiding the question. What did you want?"

Jameson sighed, "Uh, I didn't want anything but, I need to tell you something."

"Which is?" Alecia wondered. Jameson shifted his stance.

"Uh, um, well, uh, ok. So, um, I kinda stole a really expensive watch," Jameson admitted. Alecia stared at him.

"You did what?" she asked, dumbfounded, "Why the heck did you do that? You are so stupid! You're gonna go to jail, Jameson!"

"I know, I know, but there's a reason," he said. "I-I-I got it because I, I needed it to..." Jameson trailed off. Alecia waited for an answer.

"I need it because I have to pay for my rent and I thought that if I could sell it, I could get the money to pay for it."

"That's really why you stole it? Jamo, you could have told me and I could have helped you," Alecia responded.

"I know, but I just thought... I don't really know what I was thinking. I just thought that it would be an easy way to pay for it because I haven't been able to pay for the past two months and I don't want to get kicked out. You know? But now that I actually think about it, that was about the stupidest reason to steal a watch." Jameson knew he was going to be in some big trouble.

"At least you didn't steal it to pay your dog crap picker upper," Alecia joked.

Jameson laughed, "I pick up my dogs crap on my own, thank you very much. And that is a really good reason to steal a watch."

Alecia called for Jameson's dog, Eugene. "Eugene, come here buddy!" Eugene trotted into the living room and jumped up on Alecia and started to lick her face. "You're so nasty and your breath smells like the crap James picks up, doesn't it? Your breath smells just like crap! It's amazing!" Alecia petted Eugene's dark brown fur and when Eugene rolled over, she scratched the heck out of his tummy.

"Eugene is loving that scratchy belly rub," Jameson laughed as he reached into his back pocket. "Hey, Alecia?"

"Yeah?" Alecia asked looking up from the dog. Jameson handed her the watch he took out of his pocket.

"That's it," Jameson said. Alecia looked back up at him.

"This is a really nice watch, Jamo. You need to give it back. Just go to the store and give it back. That would be the best idea," Alecia told Jameson. Jameson looked at her, thinking.

"Wait, what if I didn't really have to hand it over? Because if I just gave it to them, I would probably get arrested or something. What if I gave it back to them the same way I stole it?" Jameson suggested.

"I think I get what you mean. So, you break back into their store and give the watch back. That's real

smart. Breaking in twice," Alecia said sarcastically.

"Well, the police haven't caught me yet, so it is a good idea. I could just go back in and then put the--" Jameson was cut off.

"No. I'm not letting you do that. You are going to get arrested. That is a terrible idea," Alecia told Jameson. "You need to go back to the store and just walk in normally and tell them the truth, because if you tell the truth you will have less of a chance of getting in trouble. Go up to the front desk and hand them the watch and say that you needed it to pay rent, but then realized that it was a bad idea, and you didn't do anything to the watch to decrease its value and that you are sorry and to not tell the cops because you don't want to die at such a young age, okay?" Alecia said in one breath.

"I get what you're saying. I can try that. I mean what's truly the worst thing that could happen?" Jameson asked.

"Well, first off, you could get arrested. Second--," Alecia started to say.

"Ok, ok, ok, ok, I get it. I will go there. But what if--?"

"You are fine Jameson. I'll go there with you if you really want me to, or else you'll probably get in more trouble," she told him. "And you should probably go back sooner rather than later."

"But the cops are probably still there. But they shouldn't be able to arrest me because I didn't technically steal it, I borrowed it without their permission," Jameson kidded. "But, yes, I understand. I'll bike down there right now."

"Want me to come with you? Because I can if you want," Alecia offered.

Jameson shook his head, "No, you didn't do anything wrong. Stay here. I'll be back in a bit. Bye, bye, Eugene! I love you!" Jameson kissed Eugene on the forehead. "I'll see you in a bit, I promise." Jameson grabbed the watch off the table and walked outside.

He ran down the stairs and then walked over to his bike that he propped up on the side of his apartment after school. Jameson hopped up and turned his bike in the direction of the jewelry store. The sunset was lovely that night. It was shades of red, orange, yellow, blue and light purple. Jameson rode through the silent neighborhood, praying that he wouldn't get in trouble. He finally rolled up to the store and laid his bike down on the sidewalk.

When he walked in the door rang and the store clerk looked up. "Um, hi, hello, what can I help you with?" He looked very tired and stressed. Jameson walked up to the counter.

"Hi, please be quiet about this, okay?" Jameson looked around, "Okay? Ok. So, earlier today I made a really stupid decision and I would like to undo it." The clerk stared at Jameson with fright. Jameson took the watch out of his pocket and slid it up to the man. "Before you say anything," Jameson said, knowing that the man was about to speak, "I need to explain. Is that okay?"

"Um, yes," the man said. Jameson looked at him. There was the slightest bit of relief in his eyes.

"I stole this and I am extremely sorry. I needed it to pay for my rent, which was a really stupid reason, and I realized that after I had stolen it. I haven't done anything to it, and it is perfectly fine. I brought it back to you because I knew that it would be the right thing, and I really am sorry," Jameson told the man. "I hope that that is okay. And if you could, please do not tell the police about this. I don't want to have a record. I am so sorry. I hope that giving this back to you will make this all okay."

The man looked up at Jameson and then back down at the watch. He picked the watch up and examined it. He shook his head, "I forgive you. But only because you told the truth. I could tell when you came in here that you were very nervous, but you did the right thing. And I am happy because of it. You will still have to have to deal with the consequences though," he said. Jameson's heart dropped.

"But, they will not be awful. You are banned from ever entering this store ever again, but I know you need something before you leave. Hold on." Jameson watched the man walk away, soon to come back. He came back with something in his hand. Money. "Here, I want you to have this."

Jameson was confused. "But, why me? I stole something from you. I don't get it."

The man pushed the money closer to Jameson. "Take it. If you stole a watch to pay for rent, and then brought it back because you knew that it was the right thing, that is really brave and I am very glad that you did that. But if you stole the watch in the first place, you obviously needed it. And I want to give you this money

because you need it way more than I do," the man said.

"But I--," Jameson didn't know what to say. He was overwhelmed with emotion. Jameson had never known his dad and his mom just left him about a month and a half ago, and he didn't know where she went. Jameson had been looking for a job, but no job would hire him because he was so young. He needed the money to pay for the apartment rent but didn't know how to get it. Alecia had offered that he stay with her family, in a house about a mile away from his apartment, but he had said no because he wanted to wait for his mom to come back.

"Please, take it. You need it more than me," the man told Jameson.

Jameson picked the pile of cash up and looked at it. There were mostly hundreds and a few fifties. The money in his hand soon became blurry. A tear rolled down Jameson's cheek. "Thank you."

## Brave

By Brynley Bellig, Grade 4

Roosevelt Elementary, Mankato

Yes, yes, yes! Today was finally Friday and Natalie and I are having a sleepover at her house. We have been best friends since first grade. Anyway, tonight we were going to the carnival together. It was two hours away, but her parents were renting a limo, a limo! When I got to her house, she grabbed her things and we watched the limousine pull up to her driveway.

"Alright you girls hop in we'll be there in a minute," called Natalie's dad. Natalie and I hopped in, this was going to be so fun!

When we arrived at the carnival went to get wristbands right away.

"Okay we'll be by the bleachers if you need us," said her mom.

"Where should we go first, Lola?" Natalie asked.

"How about the bumper cars?"

"Sounds good to me."

"Let's go!"

After bumper cars we went on four roller coasters, the World's Tallest Slide and the Tilt-A-Whirl. We were about to go on the Scrambler but the line was super long so we decided to get a snack. But, everything was super expensive so we settled on sharing a large cotton candy.

"This tastes odd," Natalie said as she started picking little chunks of dirt out of the cotton candy. "What are these," she asked, holding one up for me to see.

"Ewww gross," I said. "Let's just throw it away."

As she walked over to the trash can, a huge spider crawled out. "YUCK!" Natalie shrieked. She dropped the cotton candy and watched the spider crawl away. Just then I noticed a little torn-off piece of notebook paper where Natalie had dropped the cotton candy. I grabbed it off the ground and hastily unfolded it. It read: Meet me behind the bumper cars at 8:00. I showed it to Natalie, and she made a face, "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Um duh, meet them behind the bumper cars at 8 o'clock."

"Uh, Lola this is serious, do you think it was meant for us or not?" She looked worried.

"Relax, how bad could it be"

"Gee I don't know, just a kidnapper or a robber or..."

"I SAID CALM DOWN!" I spat. "We'll go and check it out from a distance, it's 7:45 p.m. now. We have just enough time to get there, let's go." I grabbed Natalie's hand and off we went towards the bumper cars.

When we got there we immediately crawled behind a bush and saw two shaggy-looking guys lurking around behind the bumper cars, one of them was wearing a carnival outfit – the same guy from the cotton candy

stand. The other looked like he had just finished a brawl; he had a bloody nose and a black eye.

"You told me they would be here at 8 p.m.," Bloody snarled. "They're not here!" Carnival Guy backed up.

"Look I put the spider and note in the candy just like you said. How was I supposed to know if they would actually come or not? After all, they are just little girls. They might have been too scared."

Just then Natalie stepped on a twig and it snapped. The two odd men jerked in our direction. Natalie and I bolted out from the bush and ran as fast as we could but when we hit the clearing, I slipped and fell into the mud. It felt like I had broken my rib cage.

"Run!" I gasped to Natalie, but she came back for me and grabbed my hand.

Together we ran straight for the bleachers. When we got there, we realized the place was deserted, everyone was gone. Then we started to look around and realized that there was nobody in the entire park. I pulled Natalie into a nearby ticket booth and locked the door.

Natalie was having a panic attack.

"What just happened?" she shrieked

"Calm down, you'll give us away!" I scolded. "Get down and be quiet!" She sank down to the floor and I grabbed her hand.

"Look," I said. "We are going to bust out of this carnival and we can go to my cousin's house, she lives a few miles from here. On the count of three, grab the door handle and push, but be ready to pull it straight back again if needed, alright?"

"Alright," Natalie said.

"1... 2... 3."

Natalie and I bolted straight out from the door and kept on running and running until we hit a gas station. When we saw there were people inside, we opened the door without a second thought. I grabbed Natalie's wrist and pulled her into the gas station's ladies room.

"I think my cousin lives somewhere around here," I said. "We can probably get there before 10 o'clock if we keep up our pace." Natalie nodded and we left the restroom only to find the Bloody standing right outside in the center of the candy aisle.

"Well, well, well, look who we have here." Just then my back started stinging and everything went dark.

I woke up in a damp warm cellar that looked like it hadn't been cleaned since the 1700s. I could hear Natalie rustling on the cot beside me. I woke up a little bit more and realized that Bloody and Carnival Guy were a few feet in front of me quietly discussing something in a whisper.

"Daniel, I told you to catch them before the gas station, now we are out of tranquilizers, which we might need for them." Carnival Guy nodded his head toward our cots. I pretended to be sleeping, and so did Natalie (if she was awake) and I waited to open my eyes until he turned back to whoever must have been Daniel and returned to the conversation.

"Look, I'm almost 50. You expect me to run faster than two tall kids? Randy, I don't know what gets into you sometimes," Carnival Guy (who must be Randy) sighed. "Let's just get to bed. We are gonna need lots of sleep for the morning." The two men left the room through a small trap door on the floor. I looked over at Natalie, who's eyes were wide open staring into mine.

"What's going on?" I could barely hear her she was speaking so quietly.

"I don't know," I replied. I quietly lifted myself out of the bed, and so did Natalie. "Let's try to find a way out of here," I said. We crept over to the trap door and stared at it. I pulled it open and looked at Natalie. "It's our only option," I whispered.

We both hopped onto the ladder below us and climbed down as quietly as possible. When we got to a deeper part of the cellar, we felt a trickle of hope when we saw a window that was left slightly ajar with some sort of spiral staircase leading up to it. We tiptoed past Randy and Daniel's beds towards the staircase.

Suddenly Randy lurched forward toward us. Natalie shrieked and we both bolted to the staircase with Randy hot on our heels. When we reached the staircase, I hopped on straight away and grabbed Natalie's arm. I pulled her all the way up and realized Daniel was up now too. I pushed the window up with all my strength. I

pulled myself up and then hoisted Natalie up too.

We ran and ran all the way to my cousin's house and knocked madly on her door until it opened. We jumped inside and locked the door behind us. Natalie's mom looked at us with a mix of urgency and tiredness. She looked on the verge of tears,

"You were so brave," she said to us. "Don't worry, Randy and Daniel are under control."

## The Soldier Marches On

By Thora Bratlie, Grade 6

Dakota Meadows Middle School, Mankato

August 20, 1942

The United States of America

The Jones family was eating dinner when everything went awry. There was Mr. and Mrs. Jones, and Adam, their only child, who was nineteen, and seemed to look more and more green as the moments passed. *I've got to keep them safe. I've got to keep them safe.* His head hurt from the repeating voice that was his only voice of reasoning at the moment.

"Mother, Father, I-I have something important to tell you," Adam said, his voice shaky.

"Of course, honey. But are you okay?" Mrs. Jones asked.

*I've got to keep them safe.* "I'm-I'm okay mother," Adam said. "But I'm, I'm, well I'm-I'm going to fight in the war."

Mrs. Jones's fork clattered to the floor. Mr. Jones's face started to turn an unnatural shade of red. Then purple. Then he did the only logical thing he could think of to get his anger out. Yelling at his son.

"You ungrateful little boy! You think just because you're better than us you can fight in some stupid war!" Adam was shocked. His father almost never yelled at him like that. But Mr. Jones wasn't done. "What about all we have done for you, eh? Feed you, watch you, keep you safe! But none of that matters anymore, now does it? You just want to be a brave little boy and a brave little war hero!" Mr. Jones took deep breaths. His rant was over. But his son's wasn't.

"You think I'm doing this so I can be a hero? I don't want fame or heroism or any of that idiotic mess! I'm doing this to help my country and my family! Although now I'm not even sure if you two even want my help!" he shouted, then stomped down the hall to his bedroom.

"ADAM! YOU COME BACK THIS MINUTE!" Mr. Jones shouted. The young man didn't even glance back at his once supportive parents. Mrs. Jones had tears in her eyes. She ran to the porch, also not looking back at her husband. When Mr. Jones heard the door slam, he knew it was too late to fix his mistake.

"Oh, what have I done?" he said to himself. "What, indeed." In his bedroom, Adam was asking himself different questions. "Why can't they support me? He says I'm trying to be brave, but I'm twice as brave as he is! At least I'm trying to help my country! How is owning a drugstore helping those dying in battle!"

He glanced around his room. Most of it looked like a normal bedroom, with a bookshelf, a large bed with brown sheets, and an old rug with several holes in it. But there was more than that in the nineteen-year-old's bedroom. Several Uncle Sam posters hung on his wall, a hunting rifle from his old Grandpappy was hung some hooks up near the ceiling, and his new squeaky clean military outfit was sitting on his bed, ready to be worn into battle. Everything in his room was ready for the war to come. And so was he.

Mr. Jones started walking down the hallway to Adam's room, rehearsing what he would say to his son. "Adam, I know I shouldn't have yelled at you, but I didn't want my only child to leave me and fight in the war. I know I'm selfish but-



He stopped short when he looked inside Adam's room. He saw all the things his son had hidden from him, the posters and the uniform. What broke his heart the most, was Adam rummaging through his dresser and throwing clothes onto his bed, next to an old brown suitcase, and muttering to himself, "I've got to keep them safe. I've got to keep them safe." Adam turned around and froze when he saw his father standing in the doorway.

"Oh, Dad. I can explain." But before he could say any more, Mr. Jones stepped into the room, and plucked a book off the shelf.

"Here. You'll need something to do on the train." Adam looked at the book in his father's hands. It was an old scrapbook he had made with his parents when he was ten. Adam took the book, threw it on his bed and hugged his father like he never would again.

"Thank you Dad," he whispered. "Thank you."

December 1945.

The war was finally over. Millions of men came back home to their loving families that they had not seen in so long. Adam Jones was not one of them. The day the Joneses heard the news, their hearts broke. He had been shot during battle after saving his comrade who had been injured in the battle. Two days later, Adam's funeral was held. When it was time for Mr. Jones to give his speech, he walked up to the podium, head held high.

"Adam was my only child," he began. "The day he told me he wanted to go to war, I probably yelled at him harder than I ever have. He was my son. My child. But you know what? He wasn't a child," he said, voice now rising. "He was a man, and I thought he was a boy! I never looked at him as a man, not until it was too late! He was a man who died in a war, trying to prove to his daddy that he wasn't a boy anymore." He stopped to take a few breaths, and then continued. "But you know what, I wouldn't have it any other way. One of the last things I heard him say before he went off to war was, 'I've got to keep them safe.' He said this over and over while alone in his room. He wanted to go out in the smoky battlefields, endure hours of awful training, even face the possibility of death, for us! He didn't care about how it would end, what would happen to him! All he cared about was making sure that we were not hurt! And you know something? He went out the way he wanted to... being the bravest man I've ever known."

## When Your'e Grey

By Thora Bratlie, Grade 6

*Dakota Meadows Middle School, Mankato*

Ella Gray. That's what they call me now. That wasn't always my name. But things change. They always do. Ain't nothing we can do 'bout it now. But let's not forget how things were, everybody. Let's go back to the beginning.

Things were better back then. My mama and papa were always there when I needed 'em to be. My little sister Sophie was too. We were poor, and were treated even poorer, but I was still fine. It wasn't till I was seven that I realized everyone else in my family wasn't.

It was a Saturday. The sky was clear and blue, like it had no idea no idea my life was about to be ruined. Mama and Papa were in the kitchen talking privately. I was supposed to be out playing with Sam, our dog, but my throat was dry so I went in to get some water.

"...they come in, and then they trash the place, just 'cause we ain't them!" Mama was saying to Papa as I entered the house. I hovered near the doorway and listened.

"Tom, it's got to stop!"

Papa held Mama's hands reassuringly. "Alice Victoria Rogers Bailey. Those folks may treat us like we're

the scum of the earth itself, but you know what Alice? We ain't the scum of the earth. There ain't anybody like that, and there ain't ever gonna be one." Mama started to sob into her hands, which she'd freed from Papa.

"But Tom," said Mama. "What if the girls find out! It could shake their world to the end of it!"

At this point I was getting nervous, so I walked into the kitchen towards my parents. "What could Mama?" I asked, my voice sweet and soft as sugar.

Mama looked at me and fresh tears started streaming down her face. Papa's face went through many different emotions. Sadness, anger, disappointment, and then settled on understanding.

"Alice," he said. "I think it's time we told 'em. Both of 'em." Mama looked devastated.

"But, but..." Papa looked at me, ignoring Mama.

"Ella, go get Sophie. We have something to tell you two."

A few minutes later, Sophie and I were sitting on our moth-eaten sofa, Papa looked serious yet calm, sitting in a chair across from us, and Mama pacing across the living room, biting her nails.

"So, girls," said Papa, not knowing where to start. "You know about how our skin is a different color than other folks, right?" We nodded, and I looked at my light chocolate skin.

"Yeah, Papa. So people have different color skin. What's that got to do with it?" I asked. Papa gave me a look that had a mix of pity, sadness and doubt all mixed in one, and I realized what it had to do with it. "Everything," I breathed, hoping it wasn't true. "It's got everything to do with it, doesn't it?" Papa's somber expression told me everything I needed to know.

"But that makes no sense!" Sophie blurted at the top of her lungs. "We're people too! I mean, what does it matter whether your skin is brown or not! I mean, ain't we all people?" Sophie huffed, taking a deep breath after her outburst. Papa stood up.

"I know Sophie. The world ain't always fair. That's just how it is." Papa stopped talking and looked solemnly at the floor.

In that moment, something happened to me. I don't exactly know how or what it was, but it filled me up to the point of no going back. I stood up. "Then I will," I said with a voice I didn't know I had.

My whole family looked at me. My sister's look was one of hope, hope that I could possibly, actually, make a difference in the way we were treated. My parents showed me pity, like they knew it was impossible.

"Mama, Papa, you can trust me. I will change how we're treated! And I ain't gonna rest until I do."

## Lights... Camera... Freeze!!!

By Jordan Brown, Grade 4

Hoover Elementary, Mankato

"Lights... Camera... Action!" I'm at a play, at Swan Legend Theater. My sister Summer is in "Friends are Forever!" It's about how Emily moves and has a hard time making friends. It's my favorite play, along with "Merry Christmas!"

I could be good at acting you know. If I could over my stage fright. And the fact that I could possibly humiliate myself every single time that I would get on stage. I'd be fine, yeah. In the play, we're at the part where Emily goes to school for the first time. She meets bullies that are mean to her. But instead of letting them be mean, she stays strong and stands up for herself. I want to be that way with acting. I know I can.

On our way out, I have a song stuck in my head. I can't stop singing it. Director Madison held the door for us and seemed to be listening to me.

"You have a nice voice. Have you ever thought about trying out for a play?"

"Emma would be happy to try out," Summer says.

"Our next production is Merry Christmas, you'd be perfect for the part, of the Yeti Princess," says Director Madison. "Auditions are Friday. Just try out!"

"I can paint sets instead," I say.

"Oh Emma why don't you?" I think about Emily being brave and how I wanted too.

"I'll do it," I say.

As we get into our car my sister chimes in, "You can do it." I wish I felt that way too.

Before I know it, it's FRIDAY! We get to the auditions there are a lot of people.

"I'll sign you up. Go get in line," my mom says. A girl with blond hair is ahead of me and is complaining about everything. The girl behind me is dressed like a rock star and is shooting a spit wad at people. Rocker shoots one at Blondie.

"Stop", Blondie says. That's when I realize she's talking to me. Oh no. She turns back around and rocker girl goes again.

"MOM!" Blondie screams. Her mom comes and looks at me. I run away.

Auditions went smoothly, but my audition, was a different story.

"Are you Emma Johnson," asked Director Justin.

"Can you act like Yeti for me," asks Miranda, who I realize is Blondie's mom.

"Sure," I say. "But how would a Yeti act?"

"However you think."

"Ok," I say.

"Frostina is my name. I like blue and purple. Yes I say." But with a look at the directors I freeze up.

"Is she ok?" asks Justin.

"Next!" Director Leo calls. And that's how I blew it.

I was kind of relieved about not getting a part. I'm supposed to help whoever got the lead role and paint the set. Summer says she's really proud of me. Our show is the 23rd. Our first rehearsal is the 16th. I hope we're ready because next the month is about to get crazy.

Our first rehearsal went well. Blondie got the lead roll and was complaining, but towards the end she had stopped. Maybe the show will go on.

Over the next month we prepared ourselves. We were ready. Today though, we had our first problem. We were going to perform with our costumes, and McKenzie's (Blondie) Yeti costume was a clown costume. The last show had left over material and Miranda told me I should make new costumes with that. I was like, "sure" but I really had a lot of homework so I should have said no. Luckily Sage said she would help me.

"Emma, Summer, we have some bad news," my mom says. "We just found out that Swan Legend Theater might be closing down."

"Why?" I asked.

"They don't have enough money to stay open," my dad says.

"You said they might," Summer stutters.

My Dad says, "If the play sells out and with a fundraiser, and some extra money there's a chance it could stay open. We need a petition with 200 signatures." I couldn't help it. I ran into my room and cried. Some people say that Swan Legend Theater is just a place, but I wouldn't. It's where people come together, find their voices and let them be heard. And now it's going to shut down.

I came up with a plan. People like dancing, so I thought that Summer, I and a few others could do a dance at the park and encourage people to come see us. If they enjoyed it, they could donate to the theatre. We could do the same dance at City Hall. Before the show people can sign our petition. Summer will make a video about Swan Legend so people will come. I just hope it works. I'm choreographing the dance. We're going to do a Hip Hop thing. I can't wait until tomorrow.

I'm super nervous. There's four people here to join us in the dance. That's all I need to make it work. "As you know we have other things going on but we're here to show how much Swan Legend means to us. So, let's do this. Woohoo," I say energetically.

The choreography and dancing turned out perfect. McKenzie said she can make us cool costumes and by the end of the day we were all ready. We worked so hard.

Tonight's opening night. We get there early and a few people are there. Eventually everyone shows up

except Miranda and McKenzie. We all split up to find them but we couldn't.

"Stay calm," director Madison says. Just then someone burst into the practice room. It's Miranda!

"McKenzie's sick! Someone's going to have to fill in for her." We all look at each other. "Emma, you know all of MacKenzie's lines. Will you do it?" director Madison asks.

Everybody looks at me. If this makes me nervous, what will I do? AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!! Was what I was thinking when I ran into the practice room.

"Emma," I hear Sage call. "I know you're here, and I want to help."

"I'm not going on," I reply.

Hope sits down by me. "Emma, I know you can do this. You just have to believe in yourself. Think of those times you could have gave up when we were working on the costumes and you didn't; and we succeeded. Or when you told everyone that Swan Legend let people find their voices and let them be heard, and now it's your turn. So, let's get out there and do this play!" I suddenly remembered how Emily stayed strong and I wanted to too.

"Okay," I say. I walk back into the dressing room.

After the introduction, it was my turn. I took a deep breath and walked out. Out of the corner of my eye I see a lot of people watching. I couldn't remember what my lines where, and then I froze up, and ran off stage. I blew it! It feels like my heart has been ripped out, and it was my fault. I see Sage.

"Swan Legend will be closing because of me and I embarrassed myself."

Hope comes up to me. "That happens to everyone. There's still time and I know you can do it!"

"I don't want Swan Legend to close, so yes!" I say.

"Just remember stay calm," says Hope, rushing me on the stage. When it's my turn to speak, I almost freeze up but I remember what Hope told me, "stay calm," then strangely I remember my lines.

By the time intermission arrived I felt confident. I hope that the second part goes as well as the first.

The rest of the play was awesome! We just went out and took our final bow.

We finished five parks and we rocked it! We turned on our music and danced. People gave us money and many wanted to join us. We were about to go into City Hall. We were escorted in and brought into the main room. We all take our places, and guess what? We start dancing and can't stop. We do our original dance with no mistakes. After we take a bow, we got the news! We saved the theater! We did it! I'm so excited!!

Today is Christmas. I woke up early like every kid does on Christmas Day. It's my turn to open up the final present. I reached my hand in.

"Is it a puppy?" It's a puppy! "Let's name her Snowflake," I say.

My dad with the camera says "Everybody on the count of three say Snowflake. 1...2...3...  
"SNOWFLAKE!"

## THE NEW SCHOOL

By Jordan Brown, Grade 4

Hoover Elementary, Mankato

"And that's why we never had a pet rabbit again!" my mom ends her story. "It's time for our little princess to go to sleep!" My mom Emma just got done telling me, five-year-old Summer, how she and my dad, Xander had a pet rabbit.

"One more" I say, while my dad stands at my door.

"It is already 10 o'clock!" my mom exclaims. "I guess, maybe... I can tell it like it was happening. It will be about when I was 13, and how I met your dad...."

In the back to school breeze, my BFFL (best friend for life) and I wait for the school bus to come and bring

us home.

"Ok seriously, this much homework should be illegal." says Ashlynn. "I know what you're thinking, but I'm being real right now. It should be illegal. I'm so NOT joking."

"Yeah I know, but then again it would be even more illegal for them to give us the tests that they do, I mean, pretty much every kid is failing those," I say.

"Sad, but also true."

"Yeah, like, so true," she says.

"And I'm sorry, but aren't we forgetting something even worse?" I ask. We look at each other.

"CAFE-TERIA SCHOOL FOOD!" we shriek and then we laugh, as the bus pulls up. Still laughing, we walk up the stairs and slide into a seat.

After I've been home for a while, I hear my mom open the door to the upstairs and walk into my room.

"What's gotten into you, Emma? Your whole room is a mess! What were you thinking, there are clothes everywhere! And papers all over the place, garbage scattered all over the floor, AND not to mention food wrappers under your bed! Seriously, what has gotten into you?" she questions. I try not to roll my eyes but somehow that doesn't work.

"Ok mom," I sigh. My mom has a tendency to be PERFECT!!

"Sweetie..." she says.

"MOOM!" I say. I make a weird face. "Why am I the only 13-year-old in the whole universe who still gets called "sweetie?" Which I cannot stand, at all.

"So... I may have some bad news" my mom says.

"Uh huh ok and that is...?" I started to say as I tugged at my charm bracelet.

"We are moving!"

"WAIT WHAAAAA....??? OK, so maybe now I'm interested."

"Well.. you see sweetie... your father got a new job at Tech ATDOP in Mankato, Minnesota and we might have to move there from here in New York and you will have to start a new school, new clubs new dance studios and make new friends with new groups..." she trails off.

"What?" I ask. "Probably no more than two hours ago I got home from school, did my home-work, and now I find out that we are moving! When?" I ask, dreading the answer already. It almost doesn't bother me that she called me sweetie. Almost.

"Well...like in two days... but.... uhhhhh..." my mom says.

So, yeah. That's how I moved from the best place in the world to the worst. I'm here at my new school, and suddenly a girl walks by.

"Hi, my name is Annabelle!" the girl says. "Welcome to West High School. I am so happy you are starting here. Have a super great year. I bet that you will love it here and fit in right away!" she says. "I GotToGoGoGoGo ASAP!" She was tall, wearing a total red outfit! Must be popular. She leaves, turning back saying, "It's taco Tuesday but don't you dare even think about sitting close to me or any of my friends," she gives me an ice-cold glare.

I guess I must have gotten here late if it's already lunch time. Add that to my list of mega huge stuff that should not be happening! Which is a very long list! "Whatever, things cannot get worst." I tell myself, hoping with all my heart that it's true. I was so wrong.

I walked through the light halls until I reached the lunchroom. It was tacos and all I could think of was what a great thing to do, get lettuce stuck in my teeth on my first day of a brand new high school, ewwwww!

I walk to the lunch line, keeping my head down, carefully tilting my head to look at Anabelle and her table. Everyone secretly snuck glances at the table which had three open spots while some kids sat in the hallway and ate. Yep definitely popular. Slowly but surely I work up enough courage to get in line.

I end up getting a taco with peaches (not on it, of course,) and a bag of Frito chips, and I look around. I have no clue where to sit so I end up following the guy in front of me! Uh oh. He ends up taking a seat at Annabelle's table and leaves me standing in front of the table.

"I thought I told you to not come by me," she says, looking at me in disgust.

"Sorry, I was just leaving," I say. I can feel my cheeks flush beat red.

"NO!" the guy says.

"Xander, what are you doing?" Annabelle asks through her gritted teeth.

"I'm letting her sit here."

Annabelle glared at him saying, "But then where would Sabrina sit?"

"There ARE two open seats, not just one. She can sit here too!" he insists.

"But why, though? I bet she is gonna be SUPER annoying, talk about herself, and be an epic loser. How pathetic is that, that she has to move here in the middle of the year? And don't even get me started on her clothes. For one, they don't match, two, they were ALL sooo last season way to out of style. LAST YEAR!! Plus, you have to be popular to sit here and not a complete weirdo!" she says.

"Umm... what? I don't even KNOW you! Besides my mismatched clothes, you don't actually KNOW these things. That's not fair to say," I say. Whoa. where did that come from?

"Xandie, just tell her to leave, because there's no way that she's sitting here! But if you want to, you can leave to go be with her. It's me or her. You have to choose," says Annabelle.

"You don't have to be like this. If people aren't popular, you can still be friends with them," he smiles at me. "You know what, I choose her. She seems nice." So, we walk away. Annabelle, of course was mad, but I couldn't care less. I had finally made a friend.

"So, that's how you guys met!" I say.

"Yep!" says my dad. "We've always had each other backs, ever since the day we met."

"Is there a lesson to this story?" I ask.

"Yes," says my mom. "Never let anyone tell you that you're not good enough."

But I'm already asleep.

## D-Day

By Zebuion John Davis, Grade 4

North Elementary, St. Peter

-Note Book-

June 6, 1944 D-Day, WW2, 6:30 a.m.

Today's the day we visit frog beach and die, I'm scared; we're all scared. Right now I'm accompanied by Zussman and Clarence. We were having a good time laughing and doing stuff, until today. Ka Klik! I close my notebook and I hear footsteps coming down the stairs: thump, thump, thump, thump.

"WHATTA YOU BOY'S DOIN'," yells the commander. I haven't spent time with him that much; I don't even know his name. "YOU'RE LATE!" he yells again.

We stand up, grab our rifles, and scurry to the deck of the ship. Dwight D. Eisenhower is in the middle of his speech and he says a few words. He settles at the end and says, "You're all heroes."

6:55 a.m. on the higgins boat

Wish! Rrrhhhhhh! The boat rumples and jumps out of the ocean. It crashes and slams against the water. BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! When we hear cannons we all yell – frightened about what's happening. Tier spark tang tum! Bullets whiz past our ship. We hear boats blowing up BOOM! We all are frightened to death. NEEOOOW! BOOM! Water plumes in the air, it shakes our boat, left and right

bullets spew everywhere, we all scream, frightened of death.

"Is the beach long?" yells Zussman.

"You sound scared, private," yells the commander.

"No sir!"

We still are waiting, throwing up, screaming. "We must have drifted. I can't see the border!" yells a soldier

"Well, you heard the lieutenant, full speed!" yells the commander. Awhile later things get heated up, more people throw up, scream and shout. Then suddenly...

"30 SECONDS!" yells the driver.

"You ready, boys?" yells the commander. We all yell with rich morale, still with fear, but we also hope that we make it.

"WE'RE DROPPING THE BLOODY RAMP!" yells the driver.

Shhmrr -- the metal lock spins round and round. THUD! The ramp drops. We all charge with rage, but I slip on my shoe lace and trip. Suddenly blood is everywhere. Bodies fling like ragdolls and people yell in death. I think they must have aimed right at the doors. I think about whether I should run up front or crawl or maybe climb over. I'm drenched in blood. Some body parts are stuck on my body after swimming in hell. I fall in the water. My gear makes me sink further and further down. I quickly take off some of my equipment. I rise up in the salty cold water.

I feel almost unconscious. My eyes begin to fade and wade out. I almost drown when suddenly someone shoves me out of the water, grasping me.

"DANIELS, ARE YOU ALRIGHT?" It was Clarence. He swam and dragged me onto the beach. I couldn't find my gun, so I used a dead soldier's. I ran up the beach, blood was everywhere, there were explosions all around me. I quickly took cover.

Zussman rushed to my side and told me to hold a metal stick. "Can you rush this bangalore to the sea wall? I can't carry everything at once."

I sighed and looked, in the distance was a hill of sand. I saw soldiers running up there holding their helmets. A sudden fleet of bullets, to my surprise, hit me in the stomach. I limp down holding my stomach. I tried to crawl toward a fox hole, trying to get down, getting cover but I can't see anything. The sand gets in my eyes, blinding me and I can't do anything. I blink multiple times, but it doesn't help. I frantically panic. I get up and my eyes clear, a bit. I still can't see but I still go. I fire a few bullets at the enemy; they don't seem to be doing much.

Then a burst of bullets charges toward me. I was still limping, thinking it was the end of my life, but then suddenly, Zussman shoved me and I fell on the ground. He took my bangalore and charged.

A few minutes later, a medic came to rescue me. I was up and running, but I couldn't go fast. I was basically jogging. An explosion came toward me and knocked me like a bully hitting me with a baseball bat. The medic was killed but I kept on moving. It got worse and worse later on.

Finally, another medic came to me. He lost his gun, but still had his helmet. He gave me the last of his wraps. I couldn't wear my helmet because the metal could infect my head. I told the medic to put it on me because I am a man. I came with my gun and shot furiously. I wasted some ammo but we can hold them off like that, so I came down and up the beach with all my bandages. I was looking like a toilet paper ninja.

I helped people and encouraged morale in my teammates. I told them to not give up. We reached the sea wall. We tried to climb over barbed wire at the top, but I was rewarded with a dozen bullets whizzing by me from the Germans. We were stuck! We kept on firing at the enemy, but the bunker blocked them like a shield and the water was rising – cornering us.

We really didn't have a choice. All hope was lost. I was about to surrender when suddenly... KA-BOOM!

Then an idea popped in my head. I told the soldier not to give up because there is hope and I yelled, "GET THE BANGALORES!" They passed one to me and I got the shot. I used it and stuffed it in the sand FIZZzzzzz. "FIRE IN THE HOLE!" KA-BLAM! They all got the message from that, and who knew, I just saved my army from the invasion.

Next, we went through the passages we made. I saw Clarence and Zussman. I went over to Zuss and said, "Hey, we did it!"

We rushed up the cliff to our next advance. A soldier had already climbed up the giant hill of rocks with his bayonet. He dropped down ladders and ropes and we started climbing up.

When it was my turn, it was harder than I thought. You have to climb on a rope held by a knife which meant I could fall off at any moment. Plus, there were bullets EVERYWHERE. I had to get up quickly. Once I got up, it broke. I almost died from the fall. But I held on to the cliff. I pulled myself up, but my other men couldn't get up so... I didn't do anything. I couldn't help.

There were other ladders and ropes, but they started breaking too. Suddenly, I had an idea. I yelled, "CLIMB WITH YOUR KNIVES!" They started getting up the cliff.

Very few made it, but one brought a ladder with him and staked it with his bayonet and they all started doing it. And I did it again, sort of. I saved my army.

Once we got up the cliff, we dropped into the very slim trenches. They were packed with Nazis, or as I called them, Jerry Germans. One officer got his pistol and started shooting at my team. I quickly ambushed him and took his luger for my German gun collection.

We went through trenches helping man after man. It was nice. Zussman told me to get inside the bunker so we can take it down. We both went in and suddenly "FLAMETHROWER!"

A German soldier stole our squad's flamethrower and killed him and it buzzed everywhere. We all shook with fear. Zuss fast-balled a grenade and it hit the soldier's back so hard it popped and they both exploded. We both yelled, "ONE DOWN, 1000 TO GO!" and started laughing.

Suddenly, a soldier with a knife ran at Zussman and almost washed him with the knife, but I pushed him like I was in wrestling and pinned him down. I punched him and he tried to stab me, but I had an idea. I hit his head, knocked him unconscious for a few seconds, and grabbed his stahlhelm and banged it on his head a few times and, poof, done, I killed him.

Zussman looked bad. I dragged him out the entryway and found a base that Americans took over. I dragged him over there. Suddenly, out of the bushes, Nazis! I grabbed my pistol and fired my rounds at them. They quickly found me. I stopped dragging him across no man's land and I got my garand and fired at them. I completed it and we called a medic at the base. A medic came toward us and helped Zussman. A lot of soldiers came up the hill to the bridge and a giant army of German soldiers came over to us with their arms in the air, surrendering to our victory.

## Washington

By Kuol Dual, Grade 4

Lakeview Elementary, Albert Lea

March 18, 2019, 3:32 p.m.

I parked my car in front of the donut shop across the street from Walmart. Or what looked like a donut shop. I walked out of the car holding a black briefcase with handcuffs on it. I was told not to open it. They just told me that inside were important files that would not be discussed. I walked out of the car limping with a bandage wrapped around my leg looking as red as an apple.

I open the door to the store. It seemed just like a normal day. There was the usual angsty teens in the corner, an employee getting caught up on overdue work and finally a normal person getting a donut. There weren't many people around.

I walked up to the desk where I saw a tall masculine man with a giant beard standing behind the counter. He didn't seem very interested in me even though I was wearing the same uniform as he was. I had never seen him before so I just assumed he got hired here but I made sure to keep a high alert. I opened the door behind



him and walked in. There was a long dark hall with two men standing at the end of it. They seemed very stiff and unwelcoming.

"Lucas," one of the men said very firmly.

I've never heard such a deep voice ever before in my life. They opened the door and I saw my boss sitting at a round black table. The room was very small with four other men in there, each in their own corner. She was wearing a black suit with a tie and also wearing glasses covering her eyes. I set the briefcase on the table and sat down.

"Hello there, Agent 47," she said while grabbing the briefcase and bringing it closer. She looked at the briefcase for a second then looked at me.

"Did you open it?" she said with a suspicious voice. "One of the latches is open." I heard her grab a gun from under the table ready to shoot me in the forehead without feeling any guilt.

"Of course not," I said while sweating.

Even though I worked for the CIA I didn't even notice that one of the latches was open. She pulled out her hands empty handed. Luckily. Then she pulled out blue gloves from her pocket. The kind you would only see doctors use. She opened the briefcase looking satisfied.

"Great work agent," she said while sliding a paycheck to me. \$60,000. I always expected that I would be paid more so I had to put buying that Ferrari on hold. I got up and started walking to the door until my boss interrupted me.

"Wait," she said. "Here are your documents for the next mission."

"OK? What is about?" I questioned. I usually had to wait a month or two until I got my next mission.

"It doesn't matter what it's about. What's important is if you can handle it," she answered. I read the paper and my eyes widened.

"I can handle it," I said. Although I didn't really think I could.

*New York*

*March 25, 2019, 11:52 p.m.*

"We're here," the man said to me. I ordered an Uber to take me to my hotel. I flopped myself out of the Uber and walked into the hotel. My body was barely able to hold myself up. Once I got upstairs, I walked to the room and opened the door. To my surprise I saw someone on the bed eating pepperoni pizza. It was the man I saw at the counter from the donut shop.

"Who are you?" I said in a very menacing voice. I got into a fighting stance. The man looked confused for a second. "Lucas?" The man questioned. Wait what? I had no idea how this man knew my name, but I wasn't liking it. "Lucas? Agent 47?" The man got up and started walking towards me.

"Um... Yeah?" I said while backing up.

"I'm here to help you with your mission," he said. He turned around, opened his suitcase and then pulled out a document. "Here," he said. "See for yourself."

I grabbed the document out of his hands and inspected it. They were the exact same as mine. "Okay. I believe you," I said while putting down the document. "But one more thing. What's your name?"

"Jake," he answered. "Jake Warner."

*March 26, 2019, 9:23 a.m.*

By 9:20 a.m. I was already out the door. I made sure that Jake dude didn't wake up either. I should've known that my boss didn't think I could handle the mission by myself. I'm sure I could handle it myself. Scratch that. I know I can handle it myself and by the time I get back home I'll be wearing a golden medal for doing what I did. I just need to think of a plan.

I started walking until I saw a hotel I could stay at. I opened the door and was amazed by how beautiful it looked inside. There was a fountain with piles of pennies in it. I could see a lunch area to my left and bar to my right. Right in the middle was a counter made out of marble.

"Um hello," I said to the woman. "Could I stay here for the night?"

"Of course!" She said in a very pleasant voice. She grabbed a piece of paper and a pen from under the table and handed it to me. "I just need you to sign this paper really quick."

After I was done signing the paper the women slid me the key to my room. Floor 7, room 285. I took the elevator to my room. Once I got into my room, I opened my suitcase and took out the document and read it again.

*March 18, 2019*

*Classified*

We have sent you on this mission to defuse a bomb that will go off March 28 at 3:30 p.m. on West Haymore Street parking ramp. If necessary, we have equipped you with a pistol and a pocket knife that will be sent to your hotel room. Good luck.

*Dang it!* They were going to send the weapons to the hotel room! Looks like I'm going to have to find something else.

I then heard my stomach rumble. I looked around but I had nothing to eat. I decided I would just go out and eat. When I got out the door, I turned into an alleyway and then I froze. It was him. It was Jake.

"Agent 47," he said menacingly.

"How'd you find me?" I asked.

"Cause we're the CIA," he said while pulling out a gun. Like a snap of a finger, I grabbed the gun out of his hand and turned it right towards him.

"Shoot," he said. I aimed the gun towards his head and fired. As soon as the bullet and his forehead had contacted, the bullet stopped in its tracks and he dropped to the ground. "Ow," he said with a plain-spoken voice.

*Oh crap.* He reached out to grab me, but I was able to slip away and start running. When I was running, I fell to the ground since my leg was killing me. I got up but all of a sudden, my feet started falling asleep and I fell to the ground. Then the world went black.

???

My eyes slowly opened to see that I'm in a black room with a table in it. I tried to move my hands, but they're chained to a table, same with my feet. I look at the wall and see a picture with the words Central Intelligence Agency. I looked at it more closely and I saw that the bird on the picture had a camera in its eyes. I looked to my left and saw a giant mirror. I knew someone was looking at me through it. I looked around for a way to escape but I found none. I would rather be Webster and escape a farm rather than a CIA headquarters.

I finally came up with a way to escape and started to get in position. I dropped my head to the table and stopped breathing. I make sure to stay as still as a statue, so nobody suspects that I'm faking that I'm dead. I wait for a few seconds before I hear someone open the door. Once he noticed I had stopped breathing he unlocked the chains. Idiot!

I hit him in the face using the back of my head, making him back up. I got up and punched him in the face. He fell down and didn't move. I then took his gun and shot through the mirror. After that I took the key the man had and used it to stab the bird's eye that had the camera.

I turned my head to the left and got slugged in the face. I fell to the ground and the man got on top of me. I tried to stab him, but his reflexes were too fast. I grabbed his throat and pinned him to the ground choking him until he passed out.

I got up then and opened the door to see three people on the floor in uniform. I saw a door across from me, but I knew I couldn't just simply walk out there. I knew if I walked out of the room in ten seconds five people would tackle me to the ground like I'm some scrawny kid. I looked around and found a vent I could fit in. I kicked the vent open and crawled into it.

In the vent I felt like I was wearing extra tight skinny jeans that covered my whole body. When I was going through the vent I went over to a room with guns on the walls. I dropped down to see what else was in there and saw a table with a briefcase on it. I opened it up and couldn't believe my eyes. Luckily, it was able to fit

in the vents. I crawled until I made it outside.

I found myself at the back entrance of the place and saw a lot with parked cars there. I walked away like nothing happened and finally made it back to the hotel.

"Welp. Tomorrow's the day," I whispered to myself before I fell asleep.

*March 28, 2019, 3:18 p.m.*

*West Haymore Street*

I opened the door to the top of the building with the black briefcase I saw in the room the other day. The building was about 30 feet bigger than the parking lot building, giving me the perfect view. I broke open the briefcase and took out the gun and scope. I put all the pieces together and got in position. I stared down through the scope looking to find the bomb and finally found it on the 18th floor. I also saw three other men readying the bomb. I waited around for a while until I got a clear shot on all of them.

"I got you now," I whispered while aiming the scope towards one of their chests. I was about to pull the trigger when I felt a cold piece of metal on the back of my head.

"Agent 47," a cold deep voice grouched. I dropped the gun and put my hands in the air trying my best to remain calm. I turned around and see Jake pointing a gun at my face, not looking very forgiving. "Now you will walk off this building and act like nothing happened or things will get ugly," he said moving the gun closer to me.

"Okay! I'll move," I said with a nervous voice. I started walking away and then I turned around and tried to grab the gun out of his hand. BANG! There was a loud noise that moved through the air and was heard even from down the street. I backed away with blood gushing out of my chest. I walked by to the edge cornering myself. He got closer and closer right until he was all up in my face. I tried to look for a way out but there wasn't any way I could get out. I start panicking and then look down the edge and it came to me. The only way out was down. I braced myself for what could come and then threw myself over the edge falling faster than a cheetah could run.

I kept on falling until I grabbed a window. I look down and then my eyes widened. If I let go then I would be a pancake on the street. My hands started slipping. I try to break the window open, but it wasn't working. While I tried to break the glass, a giant helicopter came down with two people in the back with guns.

"AGENT 47! YOU HAVE BROKEN THE LAW AND WILL NOW BE COMING WITH US!" One of them yelled through a megaphone.

I knew I couldn't break the glass, so I came up with an even more stupid idea than before. I pushed myself off the wall and grabbed the helicopter, then jumped off it and broke through the window head first. I fell on the table and it broke underneath my body. Splinters covered my body head-to-toe like I was a tree. I kicked down the door and ran through the hall.

Three men were down the hall so I ran the other way but there were more people. I saw a door right next to me that said EMPLOYEES ONLY. I broke through the door and saw another door labeled EXIT. I opened it and found myself in another hall.

There were people all over the place going in and out of their rooms. When I was running down the hall, I saw an elevator door closing so I put my hands on both of the doors and pried it open with my bare hands and went through.

When the elevator was going down, I felt the ground shake beneath me. Everyone grabbed onto something until the door opened. I went outside and saw smoke and people running around screaming. Cars were on their sides and some lit in flames. I looked up and saw a raging fire in the parking lot building. And then I knew I had screwed up.

*3:45 p.m.*

I don't know what came into me, but I ran in the building without thinking. I didn't have a plan or an idea of what was happening, but I knew I had to do something.

The smoke clouded my lungs, making me cough. I ran to the stairs to see that it also had gone up in flames. It was the only way up and I had no other way, so I ran up the stairs. My jacket caught on fire, so I left it behind to burn like the other things.

"Hello!" I yell hoping to get a response. It would be disappointing to risk my life for nothing.

"Over here!" I heard someone yell back.

Behind the flames that were in front of me I saw someone covered in rubble. I looked around and saw a fire extinguisher. I picked it up and killed the flames. I went and tried pulling the rubble off them, but it wouldn't budge no matter how hard I tried, so I picked up a pole and try pushing it off with that. Luckily it worked.

Underneath the rubble was a tall blonde man. I saw a sharp piece of shrapnel in the side of his body. I ripped a piece of my shirt and tried to wrap it around his wound, but I couldn't.

"Sir I'm going have to take out the shrapnel so wrap this around your wound," I said.

"Okay just do it fast!" He replied back. I took the shrapnel out very slowly trying not to hurt him.

"AHH!" the man yelled.

I picked him up and started to make our way to the stairs. I picked the fire extinguisher back up and brought it with me as well. Just like I expected, the stairs were still on fire. I used the fire extinguisher to get rid of the fire, but there was too much fire and I already used half of the extinguisher.

After getting rid of most of the flames, I carefully walked by it. My shoe caught a flame, but I kicked it off and kept walking. We made it to the door and three policemen held up guns at me.

"Lucas Smith," one of them yelled out. "You are under arrest!" I looked around but I knew I couldn't escape. I couldn't run. I couldn't fight. I couldn't do anything.

### *Bare Hill Correctional Facility*

*August 12, 2019, 12:05 a.m.*

I grabbed the cold metal bars of my prison cell dividing me from the others. The people across from me in their cell were going crazy like they usually did. Usually when the guards came by, they would tell them to calm down but this time they took out their batons and hit them.

I don't really differ from any other prisoner. An orange jumpsuit and what used to be white shoes. The mud in the courtyard got them all dirty.

"Okay, come on out," the police officer said as he unlocked the door and took me out.

"Wait, where are we going?" I asked.

"Shut up and keep walking," he replied. He took me to a changing room and threw me a bag and a pair of clothes.

"Change into these clothes and then we're leaving," he said to me.

"Wait, what?" I was still confused about what was going on, but I just did what he said.

"Don't forget the bag," he said very annoyed. I picked up the bag and walked out the door that said EXIT. Wait, didn't I have 30 years of prison left? He was walking really fast, so I picked up the pace. He took me to a black car with tinted windows. The windows rolled down and I saw my boss.

"Hey Agent 47," she said. "We've been thinking about it and we want you back." A huge smile rolled onto my face. "What do you sa-"

"YES!" I bubbled. For the first time I saw my boss smile.

"Well then get in," she said while the back door opened. I hopped in the car with my stuff and we started driving away.

"Aw yeah," I whispered to myself. "Aw yeah."

# Seeprison

By Sage Erickson, Grade 12

New Prague High School, New Prague

Darkness encompasses him; a thin crack of light enters his room through the blinds covering the window. Two hands lay across his body, but he shrugs them off and turns on the lamp beside his bed. The hands are illuminated, their darker than black color stark against the teenager's white sheets. It does not breathe, it does not eat, it does not sleep. It is there, but it had not been for long. The kid only started noticing it a few months ago, but it had not caused him issue.

The kid dons a smile because the first day of junior year starts today. The monster stands as he throws on skinny jeans, a hoodie with a zipper and his glasses. He worries, for the monster never stood before the teen went to brush his teeth. The junior zips his hoodie and crosses his arms before opening the door to the hallway. He crosses to the bathroom, where he brushes his teeth and adjusts his hair. The monster follows. His hair isn't perfect, so he adjusts it again. It won't stay. Dejected, the teen frowns and heads downstairs.

The monster is following him, just about resting its head on his shoulder. He finds two other monsters in the kitchen who scream at him. They scream his name, and they scream his insecurities. The kid looks away and swipes a banana and yogurt. He forgets a spoon.

His days are like this, normally, but the kid notices his own monster is now resting on his shoulder and pushes it away, puts on another smile, and jumps into the car where the monster appears in his passenger seat silently looking in no certain direction. It does not have a discernible face, nor does it seem to have a reason for being there or an origin. It simply exists to cause odd occurrences every day in the boy's life.

It is a nuisance, yes, but it begins to follow at a distance once the boy reaches school and talks with his friends. The boy tries to forget the monster is there, that it wants something for which the boy does not know, but he cannot. The boy's friends see it too. There are other monsters around, closer to some, some further than the teen's, but they're there. No one ever discusses the monsters. They are strange, they are unknown, but they are common.

At lunch the boy attempts to have a conversation with friends he was so close to with at the end of last year, but he finds it's harder; they've changed. And then the monster whispers in his ear, "What if it is your fault?"

He brushes against the monster's hand for a moment, but then slaps it away. He feels its head on his shoulder again and he sighs. He tries making conversation again and asks how everyone's summers went, but the group falls out of sync and becomes silent.

The monster remains on his shoulder and the kid does not bother to push him off. Over the next couple of weeks everyone around him acts differently; they glance at him and quickly look away. No one speaks to him. His old friends are gone now and he eats alone at lunch. The monster continues speaking to him whenever he is most vulnerable.

"They do not like you."

"You're a failure."

"Look at them, they pity you."

"You're wrong."

During that span of time the teen resorts to playing video games a lot as he finds the monster lifts its head off of his shoulder and abandons whispering into his ear. It is almost like the monster is not there. He also finds the entity leaves him alone while he is in the shower. Sitting, the water flows down his back and he curls up with his head to his legs, and he stays there for long tracks of time.

Mornings become a chore for him, but he learns the monster does not let go when the boy wants to wake up and loosens its grip if he stays in bed longer. Staying in bed longer is nice too, and he realizes it's okay to miss school sometimes. Maybe the monster was right... no one likes him.

The two monsters also living in his house simply become annoying. He doesn't bother speaking to them because they only yell at him when they see him leaving for school or playing video games. They yell at him for everything. He tunes out all of the monsters bothering him, and with that, everything else.

He comes home every day and sits in his room or plays video games. His homework falls to the wayside. Besides, he's not good at it anyways; the monster doesn't need to tell him that anymore.

One day, however, the kid does not sleep and finds no more sunlight filtering through his blinds, but he manages to make it to school. The monster clings to the teen's skinny body, attached with too many arms now around his waist, wrists and legs. There is a mandatory school meeting today. He doesn't remember what it is going to be about. He sees his friends – his old friends – but ignores them and sits alone near the top of the auditorium.

A speaker walks onto the stage. How can someone be so chipper? He starts speaking about the monsters. Wait, the monsters? The teen perks up. No one talks about them. The speaker says, "No one talks about the monsters that follow us, some follow closer than others, others cling to us, but it's okay to wonder what they are." The speaker shares that he has a monster, and it used to be much closer to him, but he learned how to keep it at bay.

The teen glances down at his old friends again, and he catches them trying to look at him, but they quickly turn away. He turns red and his ears start to burn when his monster whispers, "You cannot move. Too many people will see how afraid you are; you do not want to be here, I know, but oh how your reputation will be scarred for leaving with me clearly visible, encasing you. You struggle with life anyways, why make this harder on yourself?"

So the teen stays, and in turn tunes the world out once again, trying not to make himself smaller as to draw attention to himself. He shakes trying to disobey his instinct to curl up into a ball. He is normal. There is no monster that weighs him down and makes him different. He can talk to his friends!

"No you cannot," his monster retorts. It's right. It's right. It's right, he's a fool.

The seminar ends, and the kid bolts. He leaves school and heads home. His monster laughs. "Of course you run, you can't handle one single day. You're weak."

The two monsters in his house bark at him, but the teen slams his bedroom door and cries into his pillow. This is all too much; he needs to find a way out of this torment, of this constant fear and belittlement, but he does not know what to do except look at his monster.

Its hand is a knife now. It does not move. Maybe ... his monster never really moved? What if this was all his creation? The teen shakes his head and wipes his tears. No. No, he couldn't be the cause of all of this torture. It has to be the monster's fault.

He grabs the monster's wrist. It is the perfect hilt for the knife, and the kid wonders why it would have such a weapon. Maybe this would help him finally seeing something ... maybe something was wrong with him. He tuned everyone out, everything, out, so why not use this to feel something?

He inches the blade ever so close to his body. What is he doing? Where should he do it? Should he? Nothing else would help.

But then he remembers the meeting at school. As hard as he tried to tune out everything the words still cut through his mind. "Monsters cannot harm you, only you can, but they instill a hatred and a fear, but there is hope. There is that ray of sunshine that cuts through the darkness."

The speaker was so cheesy, but it struck a chord. It reminded the teen of the stupid light coming into his room on the first day of school. Why that? Why such an insignificant detail?

"Hope that you will detach from it." The teen glances down at one set of his monster's several arms. Detach? He barely has the energy to move.

"I believe in you."

Someone believes in me? He drops the knife. A ray of hope. He sprints from his room and stops to see the two monsters looking at him. He hugs the shorter one and she pauses. Then she caresses the teen's head.

The teen drives back to school and stands just outside of his counselor's office, and takes the hand of his monster, who remains fixed on his body.

"I... need help," he tells the well-dressed adult who dons a look of concern at the sight of the boy's puffy eyes and tired expression. Those three words took so much for him to say, and he breaks down crying.

His monster does not whisper, does not gloat, and does not interject his thoughts now. The child has taken control for now, and steps into the office, in which glints of sunshine poke through the blinds covering the window.

# Aphrodite

By Ella Ann Haggerty, Grade 4  
Roosevelt Elementary, Mankato

July 21, 2009

Dear Mrs. Huphburg,

What are my parents' names? Where am I from? Who are my parents? Where are they? Can I visit them? It's manifest that my parent has a normal life, right? If you know anything, please tell me.

Sincerely,

Jackie

The next day, muttering to herself, "I wonder if Mrs. Huphburg got my letter? Wait Mrs. Huphburg is calling me. She got my letter! I think she has a letter for me. I'll be right back okay..."

The letter says that my parent is on top of Mount Olympus. It also says you will be surprised of who it is.

I'm pretty sure that's in Greece. Why am I in the United States and my parent is in Greece? They must have been really brave to leave me like this. Anyways, Mount Olympus sounds fun and I get to meet my real parents. I can't wait!

Wait, the letter says my parent is on Mount Olympus. My parent, not parents. I only have one parent? But it is still a huge opportunity. This might be a once in a lifetime opportunity for me. Am I brave enough? What's going to happen when I my parent? Is everything going to change? I think it is going to be an arduous journey, but I got this. I can handle it. Let's start our prodigious journey! But first I have to ask Mrs. Huphburg something.

Mrs. Huphburg said it's alright, but only if I come back with my parent. Let's go to Athens.

Eleven hours and 31 minutes later...

Okay I'm in Athens right now. All I have to do is rent a car, drive it for five hours and 48 minutes. I think I can learn how to drive a car in five hours and 48 minutes. Here I come!

Five hours and 48 minutes later...

I am here at Mount Olympus right now. All I have to do is climb Mount Olympus, it will only take 10 hours and 40 minutes. It will probably be an uphill battle... literally.

Ten hours, and 40 minutes later...

All I have to do now is find my parent. Is that my parent with the pale skin? Is that Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty?

"I found you! I found you! I've been looking for you forever. Do you find beauty in my parent?" I exclaimed, so surprised.

"Wait, you're Jackie, right?!?"

"Wait you know me! But yes, I'm Jackie."

"You're my daughter Jackie. Come here Jackie. Wait, I left you at an orphanage this whole time. Oh dear, I'm so sorry. I should have loved you more. That's what I do, and I didn't do it to you. I'm ashamed of myself, but I can still love you with all my heart. Right?"

"Wait, you're my parent?" I said with eyes wide open looking at the beautiful lady.

"Call me Mom," she proudly announced.

"Yes Mom, I'll always love you no matter what. But there is something I have to tell you," I said nervously.

"Anything sweetie. What is it?" Aphrodite stood with her hands open.

"Mom, I didn't tell you but we have to leave Greece and go to the United States. We have no choice unless you don't want me. If you're actually the goddess of love. This is a manifest decision."

Aphrodite's countenance has so much confusion on her face. "Yes, it is. I'm staying. I can't leave my people. I'm too precious to them. I can't take the chance."

"YOU CAN'T TAKE THE CHANCE OF LOSING ME AGAIN!!! I wish I could find my real Mom! One that supports me!" I said, the daughter of Aphrodite angrily.

"I do support you but, I support my people too," she said lovingly.

"I can't break the deal to Mrs. Huphburg. I am too loyal to her. She was the one who took care of me all these years. I can never break a promise to her. I'll leave right now... if you don't want me," I said to my mom. "Then I will have to go back to living in an orphanage again. Do you want to leave me further behind? I wish I could have a family again."

"No, but this is the only place I can be! I'm sorry!" she said.

"I guess we can't be together anymore. Anyways it wouldn't work out. Why did you leave me anyways?" I asked curiously.

"Because I couldn't love you as much as Mrs. Huphburg could. I'm sorry!"

"You know I didn't see it before, but it's manifest that you never loved someone," I said in frustration. I started going back down the mountain.

"Wait, Jackie stop!"

"Look Jackie, I'm really truly sorry okay. Live with me... everything will be okay. I promise." She wanted everything to be okay again.

"Wait, you're really truly sorry," I said, finding a little bit of hope.

"Yes!"

"Wow! You do really want me? I'm the one that needs to say sorry. I'm very sorry how I acted earlier," I said.

"It's okay Jackie."

"Does that mean we are a family again?" I asked, confused.

"We were always a family. So, yes, I will go to the United States, but only for a little bit. Only to check in with Mrs. Huphburg. Then we are going to live on Mount Olympus again!"

"Love you Mom." I said with all my heart.

"Love you Jackie. You're a great daughter," said Aphrodite happily.

## Me, Wallie and the Wilderness

By Taryn Hecksel, Grade 3

Franklin Elementary, Mankato

One day I was walking in the woods and I saw this cute little chipmunk. Behind it there as a huge beast that had scales all over its body. It had a tail like a dog and horns like a goat. It had wings like a dragon, ears like a bunny, eyes like a lion and paws like a cat. It also had a roar like a lion. He looked sort of cute until... he started chasing me!

I ran through the forest as fast as I could, I noticed that it wasn't chasing me anymore. I walked back to the place I was before. On the way back I heard this groan and I decided to follow the groaning sound. When I got closer, I saw the beast! In its paw was an arrow. He was crying and hurt.

I stepped closer and closer. Surprisingly, he didn't make a sound. I walked forward like a tiny dog until I was right next to him. I touched his paw, it was smooth. I touched the part where he was bleeding, he groaned low.

"Does that hurt?" I asked. He nodded his head as if he were saying yes. I started to pull the arrow out of his paw, he growled. I stopped and said, "it's going to be okay," and then I pulled it out.

He roared as loud as he could and put his head down. Then lifted his wings and made his tail look like stairs



as if he were saying get on, so I got on. I mean, who wouldn't? First he ran, then he took off flying. It was amazing! I could touch the clouds!

Then he looked down with a worried look, I saw people bows and arrows and they were pointing up to the sky.

"Oh no!" I said. We zoomed up and zig zagged all around. I almost couldn't hold on. The people with bows were chasing us but they were no match for us. We kept flying until we got to a big wall. We tried to go over but there was a cover of bricks on the top. We tried going left, then right, but brick walls were everywhere. It was almost as if we had been trapped.

Hunters were pointing at us. Suddenly, there was this noise that sounded like a lion's roar and in a blink of an eye, we were going through a portal. We were back flying in the sky! The beast dashed sideways. Now we were going south towards my house. I jumped off and looked into his eyes and said, "I'll name you Wallie."

I walked home thinking of the things Wallie and I would do tomorrow. Then I thought back about today and what happened with the hunters. Why were they chasing a creature like Wallie? He'd be nice if they were nice to him. Then I remembered how he chased me when we first met, only because he thought I was a hunter.

I got home and asked my dad where he went today. "I was at the lab, the usual," he said.

We all sat down for dinner and I asked my Mom if I could go outside after dinner. "No there is a dangerous beast and I don't want you getting hurt," she said. "Now get to bed, you have a big day ahead of you tomorrow."

When I woke up, I got dressed, brushed my teeth and ran downstairs. I gobbled up my breakfast as fast as I could and ran out the front door, forgetting my lunch. I ran out the door so quickly that I never even had to lie to my mom that I wasn't going to school. I ran to find Wallie. I found him lying near a tall tree.

He lifted his head and looked at me happily. He made his tail look like stairs, just like he did before. I climbed up and sat on his back. It felt smooth, scaly and cold. He lifted his wings and took off. We flew above the clouds and zoomed straight ahead.

We landed on a big rock. Next to the rock was a cave. Wallie and I walked into the cave. Inside there were crystals, glowing mushrooms and waterfalls. Wallie started to eat some of the mushrooms and I laughed.

"Do you like it here?" I asked. He nodded his head.

Wallie and I went down waterfalls, ate mushrooms and picked crystals. We had a fun day. When Wallie and I were sitting in one of the pools at the bottom of the waterfall, we heard an explosion. I heard chains and Wallie cried out.

"Wallie!" I shouted. I heard his cry one more time and then silence.

I ran and ran as fast as I could. Wallie was nowhere to be seen. I ran and ran and then I saw Wallie. He was chained up surrounded by people with lab coats on. I saw that one of those people looked just like my dad. It was my dad! He looked at me. I ran towards him and said, "Why did you capture him, he's just a normal creature."

"He's really a unique beast. That's why we want to kill him and use him for medicine," said dad.

"Dad, you can't! Wallie is my best friend. We met when I pulled an arrow out of his paw. Then he took me on rides, and we had all sorts of fun and that's our story," I said.

My dad had tears in his eyes. He hugged me and said, "Stop! Clearly the beast is more important than medicine so let it be free."

The rest of my years were spent with Wallie.

# Leo's Voyage Journal

By Ethan Hutchins, Grade 6

Central Middle School, Norwood

My name is Leo McGloven. I am 27 years old and I was born in Vancouver Canada in 1723. I have one brother name Liam and he was born in 1726. We were both born in an old rugged shack on a farm that belonged to my dad. Back home I have a wife named Margett and we have a daughter named Sue. Sue is very artistic and is educated like Margett and me. Sue was born on August 2, 1751 in a log cabin at 3:18 pm.

The reason I became a voyageur is because my family is poor, and we need food. Some of the good things about becoming a voyageur is that I will get a third of my salary at the start. I gave all that money to my wife and daughter. I do very much dislike that I have to leave my family. My brother and I are just leaving home to travel to Montreal, Canada to start our trek as new voyageurs.

Liam and I just left the Montreal port to start our trek down the long and windy St. Lawrence River. When we were leaving it was very loud with the French songs being sung. It was a very sunny and calm day that made the river extra beautiful that week. As a new voyageur I love being able to explore Canada and see the amazing sights.

I would never let myself die working for the fur company because I want to see my family again. I am very worried that we might hit very fast and dangerous rapids and flip the canoe. On the first morning my brother and I slept in too long. The chef dropped the tent on us so we would wake up. We were on our way to the church and a man named Carl broke his paddle. Right before we got to the church, I kept thinking what would happen if I die? My family needs me, and I have to stay strong for them.

My crew and I just made it to the peaceful church after two days of paddling down the calm river. At the church I left a big donation so I could stay safe on my large trek to the fur trade company. Others left smaller donations because they did not have family at home that they needed to get back to. I was the most worried I have ever felt in my life when we left the outpost. I felt this way because I did not know what animals would hurt us in the night and if we would hit rocky spots on the river and flip the canoe and be taken down stream.

This is our tenth day of paddling and we have made it to our first portage. Carl, Liam and I had to carry the water logged canoe for three miles. A tall man named Jack had to carry a heavy bag with our goods and supplies. Finally, we had made it back onto the long stretch of river. So far, the journey has been rough, and I miss my family very much.

Our crew has been paddling for hours and then it started to get rough when we were going through the very dangerous rapids. Our crew leader Laporte decided to wait out the bad storm in the woods nearby. Two days later there was still a very bad storm but Laporte said we must leave so we can get to the Grand Portage on time. We put all the supplies back in the canoe and then we got back on the river. It was a long day of paddling and finally we stopped at a camp along the river.

There was a whole tribe of American Indians picking up their teepees. They had three beaver pelts that they wanted to trade. We traded them a glass necklace and a bag of eight ducks for the pelts.

After three days of paddling we were faced with a decision. Do we take the rocky rapids, or the muddy and slippery portage? I was sick to my stomach when Laporte said that we were taking our chances on the slippery and muddy portage.

At first the portage looked okay and I thought we were going to make it out safely. But then Carl missed his footing on the hill and slipped and fell, knocking over Liam who was carrying the canoe. We gathered up our supplies, but we could not find three of the paddles. Finally, we got back on the river and paddled five more hours and made it to Grand Portage.

We finally ended the long journey at every voyageurs dream... Grand Portage! The first thing I did was compete in a long game of cards with Liam. In the end I beat Liam and won the money we gambled with. With the money, I bought Liam a rum and used the rest to buy glass necklaces for Margett and Sue. It was a very sunny day and there was a lot of singing and dancing at the rendezvous. After that I ate the best feast I have ever had in my life.

The feast consisted of duck, wild rice, and maple sugar. The duck and the rest of the feast smelled really good, but the odor from the smoke and rum was unpleasant. I thought to myself, oh how I wish that Sue and Margett were here with me. This was by far the best experience I had on my voyageur journey.

Our crew was packing up to leave and a group of American Indians came up to us. It was the tribe that we saw

by the river bank. We all greeted each other and then one of the Indians pulled out six beaver pelts and asked if we would make a trade with them. Liam traded five traps and a bottle of rum for the pelts. We packed up our goods and left the greatest summer festival. We had seven long days ahead of us before we hit our third portage.

We were finally at the third portage after seven straight days of paddling. The large brigade reached a point in the river where they could portage. Four groups of voyageurs took the muddy slope. The trader, Triston Comfrey, had told us to take the portage so we would have less paddling. However, he was not on this trek so Laporte decided to go down the fast running rapids instead as he thought this would be quicker.

Right away our canoe was bouncing down the rapids. We hit a large rock, and Carl and Jack fell into the cold rushing water. Within a few seconds they were swept down the rapids. The rest of the rapids were calmer and we made it out alive. Sadly, we were not able to save Carl and Jack. When we could not find them, I thought to myself what if that had been me, I would have never gotten to see Margett and Sue again!

After a long and cold winter of hard work, we counted our beaver pelts and as a crew we had a total of 54. We all celebrated by feasting on the duck and rum from the trades we made throughout the season.

It was a rough season, but we now must say our goodbyes and wish each other well as we make the trek back to Grand Portage. I had no debts to my company. However, after finding Liam at the rendezvous, I learned he did. He had the choice to either work another season to pay off those debts or sneak away hoping to not be caught.

Liam decided to sneak away with me back to Vancouver. He made this decision because he wanted to stay close to his family and he had never had the opportunity to meet Sue yet. This journey home was going to take us another four weeks. We both agreed we were up for the challenge.

The time had finally arrived, the log cabin was in sight. We both ran as fast we could to the door. Once inside we realized no one was home. An hour later Margett and Sue arrived home. They had been picking berries and fishing. They were spooked when they first saw us. Then Sue realized it was me and she ran across the room to give me a big hug.

Many tears were shed and we all greeted each other. I gave them their glass necklaces from my trip. This last year was very challenging but I knew I needed to do this for my family. I thought to myself, how wonderful it feels to be back home.

## Rainbow!

By Katrin Loftin, Grade 2

Washington Elementary, Mankato

Once upon a time, there was a unicorn named Aliya. Aliya was walking down the road when she saw Mia. "Hi Mia!" she said. Mia was an alicorn, a princess in fact. She was so beautiful that Aliya wanted to be just like her. Aliya thought, "What can I do to get my wings?" and then she had it.

Mia had helped the poor to get her wings! There was also a way to lose your wings. If you don't keep doing the good deed that you did to earn your wings to begin with.

Right after that, she heard a scream for help. She ran to where the screaming was. There was a fire!

"AHH! HELP!" the woman screamed. "MY BABY IS STILL IN THERE!"

Then, Aliya ran through the forest. She found the baby panda stuck in a tree, which was on fire. Aliya picked up the panda and ran away from the fire. The baby panda was saved! Aliya looked on her back and saw wings! Aliya was so happy she got her wings that she could burst!

Meanwhile not so far away, there was a merpony. Her name was Sierra. She was a very powerful pony. But one day, she lost her trident! Just before she died she said, "Whoever finds this trident shall become the new Water Goddess!" And that was that. The end of her life.

Our friend Aliya kept going back to help the mama panda. She flew to the beach and saw something. Something blue, yellow and red like blood. She flew down to see what it was. It was the trident! She picked it up and got a tail! She was now the new Water Goddess!

Our friend Aliya is going for a swim in Hawaii, she is on an island with the same volcano the Fire Goddess once

lived in. By the volcano, Aliya saw something gleaming in the sunlight. She came closer and closer and closer. She saw it! It was the necklace worn by the original Fire Goddess! She picked it up and had a crown engulfed in fire. She was the new Fire Goddess. The air became warmer and the atmosphere less grim. She has saved Hawaii from being less populated!

Back on the mainland, the earth goddess was playing in the forest, but just then the forest got polluted! She tried to help but died trying. She dropped her vines, all the flowers drooped, everything was silent. Aliya was playing in the very same forest. She was having so much fun! Until she noticed some vines. She picked them up and then she became the new Earth Goddess! She had gotten all the elements!

Aliya was playing around with her powers when a fierce dragon came along. He said, "Fight me you wuss!"

And so she did. As soon as she was ready, they fought for 500 years. But finally, the dragon died and Aliya lived happily ever after.

## The Enchanted Forest

By Sophia Mullaly, Grade 3

North Elementary, St. Peter

Once upon a time, a long time ago, lived a prince, a king and nature. Prince Philip loved nature. On the other hand, his father, also known as King Mower, hated it. He never let Prince Philip out of the castle, ever.

One sad day King Mower passed away. Everyone was sad. There was a funeral and Prince Philip snuck outside through the door and went to see the trees, bushes, flowers, leaves, and more! Then he built a treehouse and taking his school work, backpack, books, a blanket and pillow, he went to bed.

The next day, he saw faces on the trees and arms as the branches. He rubbed his eyes. Could this really be happening? The tree said, "Yes."

"A talking tree," he cried. "This has to be a dream!"

"No," a bush started saying.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" yelled Prince Philip. Flowers started to faint because Prince Philip was so cute!

"Ew!" yelled Prince Philip again.

"We need your help!" cried all of them.

"Why would you need my help?"

"Professor Longbottom is trying to take over our city!"

"OMG!" cried Prince Philip. "This is a city? Okay fine, I will help. What do I have to do?"

"Well you can go to his city and defeat him," said the happy faced tree.

"I will have to do all of that? No, I can't do all of that!"

"Yes, you can," said bush and the happy flower at the same time.

"Oh fine, fine. If I die my castle guards will not be happy, but I will do anyway, just for you!"

"Thank you, thank you!" cried the bush.

"But first, here's the map to his kingdom. Well off you go. Don't you have a horse to ride there?"

"No," responded Philip.

"Ok, then we will take you the easy way down this tube."

"Will I get hurt?"

"No, here you go!" said all of them.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!" yelled Prince Philip. "Is this Professor Longbottom's kingdom?"

"Yes, it is," said a scratchy voice. Prince Philip turned around.

"Are you Professor Longbottom?"

"Yes, I am. Why are you here? Did your nature pals tell you to come here?"

"Umm, yeah, but I'm going to defeat you!"

"Actually, no you're not!"

"Well, I have a sword as a prince. It's for emergencies and it is an emergency. So, yeah, I will defeat you one hundred percent sure." Then they fought.

"Wha ha ha ha. You lost," said Prince Philip.

"Oh I did, did I?"

"Ahhhhh!" yelled Prince Philip. "Well, since I have a sword, I am not going to kill you, but my friends that are made out of nature might."

"How are they going to help you?"

"Kinda like this," said Prince Philip as he closed a chest that was floating in the air with Professor Longbottom inside.

"Aaaaaaaahhhhhh!" yelled Professor Longbottom.

"Well, that got him," laughed Prince Philip in a sneaky way. "Oh no, now I have to go through that tube again. Okay, here goes nothing. 1...2...3! Aaaaahhhhhh!" yelled Prince Philip as he rushed through the tube.

"Hey, I feel light headed," said Prince Philip touching his head.

"Well, that is the main part of the tube, you know," said one of the flowers. "You did it!"

"But don't I get something?"

"Well, um, yeah, what do you..."

"I don't get a prize, what a rip off!" yelled Prince Philip.

"Well, that's not a rip off," said one of the bushes. "You helped us and that's what counts."

"Oh yeah, I guess you're right," said Prince Philip. "I better get to the castle. I hope the guards don't notice."

"Ok, bye!" they all exclaimed.

"I hope dad likes nature now," said Prince Philip.

## The Ice Cream Contest

By Sophia Mullaly, Grade 3

North Elementary, St. Peter

Sally the skunk went outside to check the mail and she could not believe her eyes! An ice cream contest. She was so excited. The prize was \$100,000. She had to sign up for it. She loved ice cream so much it was insane!

So, she signed up for the contest and went to the store to buy her ingredients. Here are some of the things she bought: vanilla ice cream, mint chip ice cream and now for the toppings! Chocolate syrup, strawberry syrup, caramel syrup, rainbow sprinkles, chocolate sprinkles, and of course a cherry for the top. Now Sally has to go home.

Sally is super excited, so she had supper, took a shower and now is sleeping in bed.

*Ring, ring ring*, went Sally's alarm. "Time to get up!" cried Sally. "Today is the day!"

Sally went through all her clothes to pick out a good outfit! She finally decided on a hot pink dress with ruffles and some black heels. She went over to her mirror and said, "A skunk could never have this much fashion you would think!"

Now that she is dressed, she needs to get her ice cream ready. Sally grabbed three glasses just to be fancy. Now she started her ice cream sundae! First two scoops of vanilla, two scoops of mint chip, and now seven squiggles of chocolate syrup, seven squiggles of strawberry syrup, and caramel syrup, rainbow sprinkles, chocolate sprinkles, and the cherry on top!

She just got a thing in the mail about who was going to judge her. Emily the dog, Maya the cat, and Shelby the bird. The people she was up against were Ellie the owl and George the squirrel.

She was judged and won first place!

# Darcy's Life

By Sienna Murray, Grade 4

Lakeview Elementary, Albert Lea

Hi, my name is Darcy and my BFF's name is Hannah. I've had a rough two years. I lost my grandma, my dog, and worst of all, I was diagnosed with ependymoma, which is a type of brain cancer. When Hannah found out she was heartbroken!

She always checks in on me and asks, "How are you doing? Do you need anything? Are you thirsty, hungry?" It kind of rattles me, and for sure gave me a headache, just what I needed.

I don't go to school because of how often I'm at the hospital. Hannah is homeschooled and visits me a lot. When Hannah is not there I feel abandoned, but she gave me a journal to write in and that helps me not feel as lonely. I write how I stick through the hard times, and about my feelings, because I'm very emotional.

After I was done pouring all of my emotions into my journal, someone knocked at the door. Then I felt happy. "Yippy, Hannah is here," I thought. But then I felt sad again, because my doctor walked in.

"Darcy I have some bad news," he informed me.

"What is it now?" I asked.

"Today you are going to have a brain tumor removed and you *could* die from the surgery. But if we don't remove it, you *will* die."

I started to cry. The tears were warm and salty, I was mostly crying about the fact that I might die. Then I thought to myself, I can get through this, because I am brave, strong, and God will lead me through this.

When Hannah arrived at the hospital she was sobbing and she wanted to stay by me while they were doing the surgery but they said no. Since she couldn't stay with me she whispered in my ear, "You're going to be fine. Just remember I'm always here for you." She pulled out a stuffed animal panda from her glittery backpack that she brings everywhere. "I got this for you. I thought you might need it, to know I'm always there for you."

"Thank you, you didn't have to get this for me, because I always imagine you when things are sappy," I said. Then we both started crying and we gave each other a hug.

"See you in a few hours."

"What, a few hours? That's so long!" We both laughed. Then when I was far, far away she yelled, "BYEEEE!"

When I got to the surgery room there was so much medical gear. It was all very shiny and sharp, and there was a big screen. I didn't know what that was for. I started to feel nervous, but I had to remember to be brave. So I squeezed Mr. Giggles, that's what I named the stuffed animal panda, to remind me that Hannah was there with me. Before they put me asleep they told me what they were going to do and how I needed to try to not roll around.

Dr. Frederick asked, "Are you ready?"

"I was born ready!" I replied.

"Alrighty, let's do this." He then put a mask on me that made me fall asleep. I don't know what tools they used or if they even used that big screen but what I do know is that I did it I made it through the surgery.

When I woke up I wrote in my journal and I drew a picture of Mr. Giggles. Then someone knocked on the door it was my doctor again. "How are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm OK, but I'm kind of hungry," I replied.

"What do you want?"

"A sandwich, pudding, Jell-O, Fruit by the Foot, and an apple, because you need to have something healthy right?"

"Yeah, I guess. I'll be back in a jiffy." Then he rushed out of the room. I love my doctor; he's really humorous and he laughs all the time. He used to be a cross country coach which is why he came back with my food so quickly. "Here you go," he said while panting.

"Thank you," I said with a smile on my face. I think he was too tired to say, "You're welcome."

The food was scrumptious, the sandwich had cracked pepper turkey, iceberg lettuce, cheddar cheese, and my favorite part of the whole sandwich, mustard. The pudding tasted like, well, chocolate, and the rest of the food was good too. About five minutes after I was done eating, Hannah walked in.

"Hey," she said quietly. "How ya doing?"  
"Good," I answered. "I'm kind of tired."  
"Oh, well I have to go anyway, because I have dance."  
"Okay. Have fun."  
"See you at the pool tomorrow?"  
"Yeah I'll be there, bye."  
"Bye," she said as she gave me a hug and left.

It was a long night. I couldn't fall asleep. I kept thinking about how many people die from cancer. I was so lucky to be alive, even though it took around a year to recover. I learned that I was one of the luckiest people on earth. I didn't feel lucky at first because having cancer sucks. Just know life's a journey and you have to have fun to make it a good journey.

## TECH

By Brandon Norbie, Grade 5  
*Jordan Middle School, Jordan*

Rob stared at the mighty palace. Never had he seen such a beautiful dwelling; the king's palace was glittering like a gigantic, golden star, glittering with gems. Now, though Rob could spend hours marveling at the magnificent castle, he knew that was not what he was here for.

Ever since the humans' betrayal to the AI life-forms, not realizing that, over the years, the robots have learned emotion and pain. Eventually, sad about their creators misunderstanding, the robots escaped civilization, and restarted on the little-known island, and started building a new robotic civilization.

Now, for many years, the robots lived peacefully, completely understanding the humans blunder. Well, until 2012 rolled along.

You see, these robots all had a very similar political and well-built society that you and I have. But, instead of a president, the robots had a king. So far, they have had 12 kings. Now election day was coming up, and everyone was buzzing about with their election candidates. Among them were: Moltorien Flama, Cyboren Clanker, Artemis Arachanox and Senator Voltron Colfer.

Most of these candidates were very nice. They were hard working, truthful, and believed in peace with humans. Voltron, however, was quite different. He was cold, cruel, pitiless and more. But, most of all, he hated our kind. In fact, he would probably be breathing down your neck at this very moment if he were still... oops, better not give away too much of the story.

Now, as the final election speeches the candidates gave, it was Voltron's turn. "Citizens!" He said in a very broken and scratchy sounding voice. "We have suffered great loss because of the humans. But we are more powerful than them."

And so, Voltron gave his scratchy, fib-filled, evil, and kind of dorky speech. Dreadfully, everyone nodded and clapped at his long and boring speech and in the end, it was decided, Voltron was king.

Rob was there, and he was one of the few people who did not like Voltron's speech. And so, very noble like, and very daring, Rob went to face Voltron at his castle. As Rob opened the gigantic door to the palace, a bright light clouded his vision, and before he shut down at a system failure, he saw Voltron's eyes staring at him.

"Nice try," Voltron said, and cackled, which turned into a cough, which turned into hacking.

"Guards!" Yelled Voltron. Two guards fell through the door and banged their heads into Voltron's heels. They quickly got up and brushed themselves off.

"You called?" asked the fatter of the two guards.

"Yes," said Voltron. "Take Rob and throw him to the mecha beasts. Also, I suspect rebellion. Search the town for more undesirables like this." With that, the guards clumsily grabbed Rob and dragged him to the beast's keep.

Voltron smiled coldly and walked to the arena where Rob would surely be executed.

Want to see what happens next?  
Then be sure to wait for the full book!

# A Gift from an Angel

Audrey Olson, Grade 6

New Prague Middle School, New Prague

"Lyla? Can you hear me? We are taking you to the hospital okay? You're gonna be alright."

The sound of sirens and the blurry vision of a woman with dark skin. My head was pounding. My heart was racing. What was going on? The woman's hands were cold, and moist.

"Wh...what's happening?"

The woman looked at me and yelled, "She's awake!"

I just laid my head back and closed my eyes. All I knew was that I was in danger. Cancer had taken over. I gently fell asleep, peacefully and quietly.

Not much later, I was woken up. I was being wheeled away on a stretcher, by a bunch of people in white coats. As I was looking up at the ceiling, the only thing that my blurry vision could make out were the lights. One passing each second. I managed to turn my head far enough to see the woman. She saw me and turned back to say something to a man following behind. This time, I couldn't understand what she was trying to say. More lights passed. The stretcher started to slow down and turn, and the next thing I knew I was in a room, a big one.

"Lyla!" It was Mom.

"Mom!" I found the strength to sit up a little and turn my head.

"Hold on honey! Hold on! You're gonna be okay!" she yelled. I laid back down, comforted by Mom's words.

"Stay strong..." I heard her say one last time as the door to the room shut. Her words stuck like glue in my head.

My heart was already weak, and I was very tired. I fell asleep again. I was so scared. Whatever was going on was not good at all. The people in white coats took off my clothes, and put me in this... blue? I could not see the color clearly, but I think it was a blue nightgown. My vision got a little better for a second. The woman came over with a needle in her hand. She grabbed my left wrist and said, "This is gonna hurt a little, but try to relax."

She took the needle and stuck it in my chest, very slowly. I yelled, but another person came over and pressed my head down and grabbed my right wrist that was reaching out to grab the needle. The woman got it in. This was stressful. This was scary. This was it.

More people came over and hooked me up to more stuff. A bag, and a thing that went beep every second. I missed my mom, dad, brother and sister. Why did they let them do this to me?

The woman came over again with another needle and told me to be brave. Be strong. She stuck the needle in my right arm. It was not as bad as the other one though. I looked at her wondering if that needle was supposed to do anything. She just walked away. I looked back at the ceiling. No lights passed. Just one right above me stayed in place.

A minute later my vision was all better. I could comprehend what was going on. I was in an emergency room. The people in white coats were doctors. The needle in my chest was a port-a-cath. An IV tube that had been surgically implanted under the skin. It really hurt to put in though because they couldn't use the EMLA. They said it takes an hour to work, and we needed to get the needle in now.

But just as everything started to make sense, I got very tired. I yawned. My eyes started to close and I fell asleep once more. While I was sleeping, the doctors did surgery on me. I didn't feel anything but jitters. I was so nervous and scared.

I had a dream while the doctors worked though. I was walking on fluffy white clouds. The sun was always shining. Nobody died, nobody was sick, it was wonderful. I was walking around this magical place when all of a sudden, a creature walked up to me. Just when I was about to see its face, I was thrown into a world of black. Darkness. Fear. My heart beat flatlined. All I saw was black. All I heard was black. All I could think of was black.

Little did I know I couldn't do any of those things. I couldn't see. I couldn't hear. I couldn't think. I was living in a world of black. Darkness. Doom. Doctors took off my shirt and put these pads on my chest. Then they clicked a button and it shocked me. They did it for a long time. It had been five minutes since my heart stopped beating.

Suddenly a light started appearing in the world of black. I was starting to go back to the light. Soon enough, my whole mind went white and the magical creature walked up to me. Its face emerged from the clouds. It was God. I was



mad at him.

"Why? Why did you decide to put me through this pain? This struggle? I'm a little girl who deserves to live a healthy and happy life!" I cried out to him. He just walked closer.

"Because I know you Lyla. You are a warrior. You are an inspiration. And I believe in you," He said.

"I know but," it was hard for me to talk to him. "I've always loved you. And worshiped you. But now it feels like you are abandoning me," I said.

"I understand. And I do agree that you should live a happy healthy life," He said.

"Then why did you do this to me?" I asked. He smiled and handed me a small golden cross.

"You'll know soon enough." And then he vanished.

My eyes shot open, and a doctor had her hand on my neck, checking for a pulse.

"You're awake!" they all said. I looked into her eyes and noticed that it was the woman. She took her hands away.

"Lyla..." She tucked my hair behind my right ear. She turned around and told the doctors that I was alive. They all came rushing over at the same time. Gasping, they smiled and told me I was so courageous. Mom and Dad came running in.

"Sweetheart!" Mom said. "You're here!"

"Yeah Mom...I'm here," I smiled. She started to cry as she wrapped her arms around me. Dad wrapped his arms around her. We joined in a group hug.

"I love you pumpkin," Dad said, crying. I have never seen my dad cry. Ever!

"I love you too," I said.

Two months later...

"Lyla, come on! You're gonna be late for dance!" Mom yelled from the kitchen.

"Coming!" I yelled back.

Life had changed ever since I was cured from leukemia. I was not back to how I was before, but I was more grateful. I was more confident, and I was stronger. I wanted to help others and be more thankful for who I am.

"Okay, I'm ready!"

My dirty blonde hair was pulled back into a bun and I was wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, with tight white shorts. As we were driving, I opened my bag and saw a small golden cross laying in it. I smiled and grabbed it out. Mom looked over at it.

"What's that?" she asked.

I looked away from it, to her and said, "Oh...It's just a gift from a doctor at the hospital," I said. "Aww...that's thoughtful of her."

"Yeah," I said. We continued driving into the cities, when I spotted a homeless person on the side of the road.

"Mom! Pull over!" She turned the car and parked it at the side of a street. I opened the door and walked to him. I pulled out my snack money for dance and gave it to him. Then I turned and walked back to the car. I put one foot up in the car but then stopped myself. I walked back over and gave him the cross.

"May God be with you," I said. He smiled and thanked me, and I turned around and walked back to the car and got in.

"Lyla, that was very thoughtful. I'm very proud of you." I smiled and Mom continued driving. She stopped at the dance studio and dropped me off. "I'll see you later honey!"

I walked in and started putting on my pointe shoes. At that moment right there, I knew why God chose me to have leukemia. Why he put me through that pain. He did it because I, Lyla Prena, am a fighter. I won't give up. My survival was a gift. A gift from an angel.

# Terrifically Talented Tuesday

By Sydnie Penhollow, Grade 4

Lakeview Elementary, Albert Lea

It was Sunday, August 18. I squinted my eyes as I started waking up slowly to see the moist fog from the window of my bunk bed. Calmly, I turned to lay on my back. I twisted again to lay on my right side.

I saw the rest of my room as I realized it was Terrifically Talented Tuesday auditions at my middle school. All of a sudden, I got very excited. It was like I was on a horse that was standing still and suddenly it was running so fast I didn't even notice! I heard a thump on the other side of my door. It sounded like it came from the kitchen.

I walked into the kitchen as I saw my mom making fried eggs. The eggs smelled so good it made my mouth rain with water.

"Good morning, Mom!" I cheered full of excitement.

"Good morning! What makes you so cheerful?" my mom asked politely.

"Remember? It's Terrifically Talented Tuesday auditions!" I added as I sat down at the table.

"Oh yeah, I forgot! What time are the auditions? I could drive you there if the auditions are before 11 o'clock because I have to go to work at 11:10 a.m. this morning," my mom exclaimed.

"Auditions are at 10:30 a.m. Could you drive me please?" I wondered in a slightly high-pitched voice.

Half an hour later I tightened my hand around my mom's SUV door handle and slammed the door shut. I slightly waved at my mom through the window as I turned around to face the middle school. I had butterflies in my stomach. It felt like the butterflies were on a tree and then somebody scared the butterflies off. Then it felt like the butterflies were fluttering around in my stomach. My hand was as shaky as a stage experiencing an earthquake. With a lot of muscle, I managed to pull the school door open. I tightened my hands around my ukulele. I walked into the halls of my middle school.

"Hey, over here Hazel!" my friend Ami shouted from the back of the Terrifically Talented Tuesday auditions line. I walked over to Ami.

"Hi! I thought you weren't going to audition," I stated politely.

"Well I decided to do Terrifically Talented Tuesday because my mom had to work on Tuesday, and I didn't want to stay home by myself. I always get bored when I'm home alone," Ami explained.

"What are you going to do for Terrifically Talented Tuesday?" I asked in a kind and confident voice.

"Well, I'm going to play piano. My mom called the school and asked if I could borrow the piano. They said there is nothing to worry about because there are other kids playing the piano too, so they already have it backstage," Ami added out of breath.

"Sounds like fun! Are you nervous?" I asked Ami in an excited voice.

"Of course I am! Who wouldn't be nervous? Everyone auditioning is going to be sitting in the audience! What are you going to be doing for Terrifically Talented Tuesday? All I see is your ukulele!"

"I'm going to sing a song I wrote with my handy ukulele! I'm going to sing my good song today and my better song on Tuesday," I gushed happily.

"That makes sense! I wrote the songs that I'm playing too," Ami told me. We walked backstage to where there were changing rooms and a bunch of mirrors.

"Woah I've never been back here!" I excitedly yelled.

"I have! I got to go back here when my sister was participating in a play," Ami remarked. Ami had a 15-year-old sister. Ami says she is rude all the time. I don't think she is. I think that's because they're sisters.

A lady walked backstage. She had brownish hair with dark brown eyes. She looked like a young adult.

"Ok! Let's settle down! We are going to separate into groups. Group one is going to be piano people!" the lady told everyone.

"Bye," Ami quietly told me.

"Bye! Meet me outside and good luck," I chirped.

"Ok! Thank you," Ami replied as she walked to the piano group.

"And the ukulele players in group two!" the lady shouted.

I walked over quickly so she wouldn't yell at me if I was too slow. But then I noticed I was the only one in the ukulele player group! I was so excited! At least I was the only one playing ukulele so I would have a chance to win. I felt bad for Ami because there were four other pianists in her group.

"Hi, I'm Mrs. Hamilton. Since you are the only one playing ukulele do you want to audition first?" Mrs. Hamilton questioned me.

"Are you talking to me?" I asked Mrs. Hamilton.

"Yes! Who else would I be talking to?"

"Oh sorry. Umm yes, I would like to go first," I nervously told Mrs. Hamilton.

"Ok. You can go on stage whenever you are ready," Mrs. Hamilton added calmly.

"Ok," I answered quietly. I took a slow deep breath in front of the stairs that led to the stage.

"You can do this!" I whispered to myself as I lightly stepped on the stairs.

I heard a little creak. I walked over to where I saw a microphone. There was a little piece of tape that I stood on. I looked up and got even more nervous, there were three judges staring right at me, one man and two women. I felt like I was going to puke. I desperately wanted to run off stage! But if I wanted to win this talent show I had to stay where I was. I looked in the audience and saw a group of seventh grade boys laughing at me.

"Hi! What is your name?" one judge asked.

"Um, my name is Hazel," I answered quietly.

"Ok and what will you be doing Hazel?" the judge asked.

"Um, I'll be singing a song that I wrote. I'm going to play my ukulele while I sing the song," I added. I adjusted the microphone to my height. I'm in sixth grade and I'm the height of a third grader.

"Ok whenever you're ready," the judge told me.

I took another deep breath. "Um, my song is called You Can Do It On Your Own," I nervously continued. I began singing very nervously. I heard whispering in the audience. I started strumming my ukulele. Then I started feeling more confident and motivated because the whispering stopped and the judges started looking more interested. They also started writing notes down in their notebook. Then I got more nervous because I didn't know if they were writing good things or bad things about me. But I continued singing.

"You Can Do It On Your Own!" I sang confidently still strumming my ukulele carefully. I felt like nobody liked my singing. My song was over and nobody clapped until finally somebody started clapping. Other people started clapping and standing up! I felt so proud! I felt like I could fly as high as a butterfly. I smiled as big as I could smile. I was so happy that people liked my singing. The judges finished writing in their notebooks.

"Ok, as you can tell, people liked your singing. But now we need to decide if you are going through to Terrifically Talented Tuesday," one judge explained.

Then the judges leaned into each other and started discussing if I was going through to the talent show. After a while they were finished discussing. I swallowed hard. I think I might've had a panic attack.

"So, we had a conversation and we think... you are going through to Terrifically Talented Tuesday!" the judges excitedly shouted.

I jumped up so high it felt like I could touch the sky! "Thank you so much!" I bubbled.

"You're welcome! Just keep practicing and you will be great! Trust me!" one judge said.

"Ok!" I shouted excitedly as I waved to go backstage.

It was now 2 o'clock. I got in my mom's car and turned on the air conditioning. I felt the cold air blow on me. It is really hot in Arizona in the summer so I drank the rest of my water too. The water helped with my sore throat. But I didn't want to tell my mom that I had a sore throat otherwise she would say "Maybe you shouldn't participate in Terrifically Talented Tuesday." I really wanted to participate.

"So, tell me. Did you make it in the talent show?" my mom beamed.

"Uh, no. I'm really bummed. Ha ha, just kidding. I did make it in!" I cheered.

"I'm so proud of you!" my mom cheered to me.

"Thank you! I'm so excited! But, I'm still nervous," I gushed.

"There's nothing to worry about!" my mom exclaimed.

"Ok. I will try not to worry!" I told my mom.

When I was going to sleep that night, all I could think about was the talent show. I tried to go to sleep. The last time I looked at the clock it was 11:23 p.m.

On Monday all I thought about all day was the Terrifically Talented Tuesday show. I tried to not think about it because we also had a test at school. On Monday night I went to sleep early so I could wake up at 5:30 in the morning on Tuesday. I wanted to make sure I could warm up my voice and practice a little bit. However, I didn't want to practice too much in the morning because my voice could get sore again.

On Tuesday morning I got up and got dressed right way. My mom must have heard me rummaging around because she woke up and came into the kitchen. "What are you doing up this early?" my mom complained.

"Getting ready for today, that's what I'm doing!" I responded.

"Well, I'm going back to bed and try not to be so loud!" my mom barked tiredly.

"Ok! Sorry," I sighed.

My mom always gets ornery in the mornings. I ate a banana, peanut butter toast and waffles for breakfast. After breakfast I brushed my teeth. Then I did vocal warm ups. Finally, I practiced the song I was going to sing for Terrifically Talented Tuesday. The song that I was going to sing was The Wind Blows.

When I got to school, I headed to homeroom. I'm in the same homeroom as Ami. I was so excited to ask Ami if she made it through to Terrifically Talented Tuesday! When I got to my homeroom, I sat in the seat I always sit in, the third seat in the third row. I got my notebook out and started writing in my agenda. I heard someone call my name as somebody walked in the room. It was Ami!

"Ami did you make it into Terrifically Talented Tuesday?" I shouted. Two kids in the back corner said "Shh!" But I ignored them, I was too excited to hear what Ami was going to say. Ami frowned.

"Umm... no. There were two other kids that were pianists and I guess they were better than me," Ami sobbed.

"Oh my gosh I'm so sorry. I feel so bad," I murmured quietly. I wished I could cheer up Ami.

After school I got dressed in the nice clothes I had laid out the night before so I wouldn't take so long to figure out what I wanted to wear. Then, I put my ukulele in my ukulele case. After that I grabbed a granola bar from the kitchen and ran so fast it felt like I was riding an amusement park ride.

"I'll be in the second row in the fifth seat. Ok?" My mom told me as she drove into the middle school parking lot. I saw a bunch of cars and that's when the butterflies in my stomach started.

"Ok, love you mom!" I exclaimed as I heard the footstep of my foot lightly touching the ground.

"Love you too honey! I'm so proud of you! Good luck!" my mom bubbled.

"Ok! Bye mom!" I added.

I walked into the middle school. There was a long line leading into the gym. I walked backstage and saw that there were a lot more seventh graders than sixth graders. I felt like I was going to throw up. But I wanted to remember something awesome. So, I sat down on a stool by a mirror and fixed my hair because it was really messy. I drank some of my water so it would make my nervousness a little better. Then, I saw that Mrs. Hamilton was backstage.

"Hi Mrs. Hamilton!" I excitedly chirped.

"Hi, Hazel! I was thinking, do you want to go first again because you are the only one in your group? I was just wondering. But, if you don't want to you don't have to," Mrs. Hamilton asked me.

"Um sorry but, I don't really want to go first today. I decided maybe I could wait until the end. I wanted to see other acts and see how good they were so I could figure out how to make my singing a little bit better," I explained.

"Makes sense! You can go at the end and I can guess that you probably want to see other acts because you were first on auditions and you didn't get to see any other acts," Mrs. Hamilton told me.

"Yeah pretty much. Thanks for asking though!" I exclaimed.

It was five minutes before I was going on stage. I was really nervous because all I could think about was what if I mess up in front of all these people. I slightly looked behind the curtain. Oh my gosh it looked like there were two hundred people! A man walked up to me.

"Two minutes until you go on stage! Good luck!" He beamed as he walked by.

"Ok, thank you!" I answered. I took my ukulele out of its case.

Then, I heard someone say, "Next up is Hazel Lamers!" Whoever said that was on stage! I was so excited and

nervous at the same time!

"Come up on stage Hazel Lamers!" I heard a man on stage say. I took a deep breath and stepped up the stairs onto the stage! I heard cheering, clapping, and whistling.

"Ok!" Take it away Hazel!" the man said and turned away so quickly I couldn't see his face.

I sat on a stool next to the microphone. "Hi, I'm going to be singing a song that I wrote on my own!" I exclaimed.

"Woo hoo!" everyone cheered.

After I sang my song everyone cheered like crazy! After singing I sat in the back and waited for the results. Then they started calling names up to stage!

"Hazel Lamers, come up to stage!" When I got up on the stage, there was a line of people.

"Ok, these people step forward!" the judges announced. "Hazel Lamers, Lindsay Evans and James Harden step forward! The back people are eliminated from Terrifically Talented Tuesday!" the judges shouted. "Hazel Lamers and James Harden are moving on! I'm sorry but, Lindsey Evans you're eliminated. Audience drumroll please! And the winner of Terrific Talented Tuesday is... Hazel Lamers!"

I jumped up and down! I felt like I could do anything! When I got home, I was so proud of myself!

## The MidPoint

By Leah Proehl, Grade 8

Maple River Middle School, Mapleton

The harsh sun was bearing down on the bleak city, never moving, forever fixed in its place. All of the streets were empty, except one. This street was filled with citizens of the dark side. It was so full that if you wanted to see what was happening, you would need a stool or an apartment in the nearby buildings. For in the middle of the street, the leader of this city was standing, and the angel-like being was enraged.

The leader threw the boy down on the ground. It stared down at the victim with pure hatred burning in its red eyes, the only thing that gives away the true state of his soul. He had a simple polo shirt with a remote thing in its pocket on the front. His blonde hair tan skin, and wings would fool most people into thinking he was the good one. He's not though. He was standing in the middle of the city that was bathed in sunlight. It doesn't sound like your generic dark side, but he wasn't the one who set it that way. No one knows who did.

The boy, on the other hand, had dark brown hair and smoky grey eyes. The boy wore a sweatshirt with an odd symbol sloppily painted on it. The sign looked like a gleaming broadsword, with a yin-yang pattern at the hilt. This is what had angered the angel, for it was a sign of rebellion. The boy had been shopping, but he had been noticed and reported for bearing the MidPoint's crest on it. The angel never wanted to lose his not-so-dear citizens of the dark side to the pit dwellers.

The boy just lay on the ground, his head drooping and he held his posture low to the ground. He was covered with the dirt from the street and the blood that had been dripping from a gash in his head. A crowd had gathered, and the boy slowly looked around at them, trying not to draw his tormentor's attention to his movement. He noticed all of them had a collar around their neck, as if they were animals. Some had decorated the strange accessory, others had tried to cover it up.

The angel slowly walked closer to him, taking a good look at the battered human laying on the ground. The boy swiveled his head around and notice that the older male had moved closer and was now looking him in the eye. He stared defiantly back. The angel kicked him hard in the ribcage, and laughed as the boy lowered his head again, groaning in pain.

"Can't the rebellion fight back?" the angel scoffed as he continued to glare at the boy. "I can't believe Flip chose to recruit you before all of my more than worthy fighters."

He paused, adding, "Of course they wouldn't be able to take my people, I would have them put to death if and

when they are caught." His eyes shone with an amused gleam as he looked down at his victim.

The boy tried to crawl away, but his strength failed. He tried to push himself off of the ground, but his arms failed, and he flopped down again with a grunt. He was too weak at the moment. He could hear laughing erupt around the crowd, and it brought him back to when he was in school. His school had allowed kids from both sides, but the majority were kids from the dark side. They had tormented him and teased him for being a softie.

The other kids from the light side had stood by and watched, not wanting to get bullied either. The thought filled him with rage, but he stayed down. He couldn't die. Not here. Not now. He had to get back to the tunnels, and to Flip, who was his best friend and who was running the whole operation. She relied on him.

Then it hit him. The oddest thought. The remote. The collars. He could see a small box with a red light on the collars that he missed before. What if the angel was controlling them? It was strange but everything fit. How many of them were okay with this? He couldn't tell because they were all still laughing at him.

Even though they were laughing at his demise, he pitied them and wanted to punch the stupid angel for it, but he was still overpowered. He clenched his fists, trying to control himself. He had to stay calm.

"Oh, I get it. You're not a fighter. You were just chosen to do the chores because you're disposable."

The audience continued to laugh at him, as he started struggling to get away from there again. He couldn't even wait until night for them to go home, because it's always day on the dark side. The irony of that is really odd if you think of it. The ruler of the dark side is an angel-like being, it's a city stuck in permanent midday, and yet it's where half of the population was forced when the world split.

The smoky-eyed teen gave up on crawling away again, for his body ached from being beaten so ruthlessly. He couldn't even tell how long it had been, due to the sun not moving at all. He just lay there, hoping that the angel would give up soon. He wished he was in the tunnels. He wished he was home, in the forest, on the light side.

Except Flip would be there if it was going to be perfect. He hated being alone, but his old friends always wanted to run off to the carnival that was located near the center of the light side of the island.

"Oh yes, and when you're in jail or dead, depending on what I feel like, remember the name of the one who brought not only yours, but the MidPoint's downfall too, was me. Apollo Yang, leader of the superior side of the planet."

Apollo strutted forward in the cockiest manner possible, and was about to kick the poor boy again, when he froze. The audience froze too, listening intently for what they had just heard. A voice, yelling over all of them.

"Let go of the Fin. He is mine."

Everyone in the street looked up and got wide eyes, for on top of the truck parked on the side of the street, was a girl. She had biker gloves and an unbuttoned flannel, revealing a white shirt with the MidPoint crest painted on it. Her cocoa brown hair was chopped off into a messy bob with some longer bangs in the front that she kept. She thought it gave her an edge and she was right. Her amber eyes gleamed with pure fury, lighting like a forest fire, as she saw what they had done to her right-hand man.

She had heard from the dark side rebels about Apollo, but she had never thought that this many people were as bad to just watch. The darker toned girl had a megaphone in her hand, and a dagger in the other. All of the people in the street could only stare at the girl. They had known the leader of the rebellion was a girl, just not one so peculiar.

"Didn't your mamas ever tell you that it's rude to stare? C'mon just give me hazel boy back and I'll leave you in peace." She was growing impatient, tapping her checkered sneakers on the roof of the white truck as she waited for someone to react.

Apollo stepped forward, finally snapping out of the shock that he was in. He thought he had the borders guarded, but he can always step up on defense. He smiled a toothy side grin, showing off his perfect row of teeth, trying to charm the girl.

"My bad, I didn't mean to stare so long." He paused with a chuckle, "But I was merely mesmerized by your beauty." His voice was soft, as if he was trying to show her that he is not her enemy. He spoke kindly, as if he wasn't just beating up her best friend in the middle of the street. The girl's face scrunched up in an absolutely disgusted expression almost immediately. She hated the thought of such a bully even trying to woo her into dropping her guard.

Since the tunnels got more crowded every day, she became more and more defensive as if waiting for a traitor to come out of the midst. She burst out laughing at the thought of someone actually being tricked by this monster. This annoyed Apollo, and his face fell, showing his signature scowl. He threateningly stepped towards where Flip was perched.

“Ok, but dude, I barely let my guard down back at headquarters. I promise you, you could never make me soften up, or put the knife away. A for effort.”

The girl tucked her dagger under her arm carefully and started slowly clapping, giggling lightly. Apollo took another step forward and she quickly stopped and pulled out the silver blade. A fight was inevitable.

She slowly jumped down from the truck, waiting for the first move to be made. Apollo started walking towards her briskly, putting his wings out, trying to make himself look bigger. He was mere feet away from her before he stopped.

“You don’t want me as an enemy.” He spat at her feet, all patience gone.

The girl glared at him, trying to hide the fact that she was not going to directly fight him. Now was not the time nor the place. The two leaders stared at each other, the sun beating down on their faces. The slight breeze that managed to weave its way through the city blew up dust, whispering in their ears to fight.

Apollo sprung at the girl, trying to land a blow to her skull with his fist. If she dies, so does the rebellion. That’s what he believed, but deep down in his thick skull, he knew that it wasn’t true. As he swung again, the girl ducked under his arm, dashing for her friend. She approached the crowd, she didn’t waver, disappearing into the crowd like a needle in a haystack. She continued to weave through the crowd like a weasel, getting closer to Fin by the second. Behind her she could hear the angel let out a cry of rage as he realized where she was going, and she started running faster, if that was possible.

She finally broke through the group to the center and dashed over to Fin, who had gained the strength to slowly start crawling towards the edge of the circle. He wasn’t fast enough though, so she helped him sling his arm over her shoulder and get on his feet. His bleeding had ceased a bit, but he looked terrible. He was bruised and his posture suggested a few broken ribs. She started practically dragging him back through the crowd.

“C’mon Fin. We have to go faster.” She was irritated, but glad he was okay for the time being. He picked up the pace as much as his injuries allowed. They finally got back to the edge of the circle, and they fought their way through as fast as possible and got to the other side.

They broke towards the alley, but not before they heard the sound of electric shocks behind them. The people had helped them. Flip looked back to see a large electrical current moving amongst the people, who had made a barrier to keep Apollo away from her and Fin.

“I’ll come back, I promise,” she whispered to the people. She opened the sewer cover that lead to the secret tunnel entrance, and she and Fin were gone.

## Wonderful World of Zottaculis

By Rebekah Roemhildt, Grade 5

*St. Peter Middle School, St. Peter*

### Chapter 1 Exploring

“Jeffery! Jeffery! Sam? Sam! You two are going to be late for dinner!”

There was no answer in return. Sam and Jeffery were brother and sister; they seemed to always be getting themselves into trouble. Aunt Jenny looked all around, they were nowhere to be seen.

“Oh, I see how it is, yep, a good idea I have, okay children we are going to play a little game. If you come back for dinner in five minutes, I’ll give you ice cream tonight and \$50, each!”

She heard footsteps from far away. Sam and Jeffery were running back home. They held out their hands waiting for their \$50.

“Go!” Aunt Jenny pointed towards the door.

“All right, all right! Don’t be so pushy!” Jeffery complained.

Jeffery was a thirteen-year-old boy who loved adventure. Sometimes he wondered if his brown messy hair was part of the universe. Sam on the other hand actually had logic, loved science and always knew the answer. She was perfect, aside from her sharp brown glasses and her dirty blonde hair. Jeffery sat down and looked disgustedly at his

dinner. Salmon and kale were for dinner.

"Ugh, fish? Again? Ew!"

Jeffery clearly didn't like fish.

"You boy, should be more considerate! You know, you guys are lucky! Lucky as can be!" Aunt Jenny scowled.

"She is right, you know, and besides fish is good for you!"

Sam was being her old know-it-all self. Jeffery rolled his eyes and turned to Aunt Jenny.

"So, when are we going to have ice cream?" Jeffery and Sam's faces lit up when they said that.

"I guess I did promise that to you two youngsters," Aunt Jenny replied.

"And our 50 bucks?" Jeffery questioned.

"No, I was kidding about that one," Aunt Jenny remarked.

"Yum!" Sam exclaimed.

She was having cookie dough ice cream while Jeffery looked for the best ice cream in the freezer. When Jeffery finally found the right one, he served himself three big scoops. Sam looked at his and compared it to hers. She had one little scoop and he had gigantic scoops of cotton candy ice cream.

"Ugh! How can you eat that? That looks disgusting! First of all, you have too big of scoops! And second of all, cotton candy? Bleh!" Sam said, sticking out her tongue and pretending to throw up.

Jeffery shot a look up at Sam and did the 'whatever, you're the dorky one here' face.

"I saw that!" exclaimed Sam.

"You were supposed to!" cried Jeffery.

"I'm telling. AUNT JENNY!" yelled Sam.

"What did you guys break now?" Aunt Jenny said, walking into the kitchen.

"Yeah...I just wanted to say that...JEFFERY DID HIS LITTLE FACE AGAIN AT ME!" Sam yelled.

Aunt Jenny sighed and put her hands on Sam's shoulders.

"First of all, Sam, don't yell when I'm right around the corner and two, don't make such a big deal out of things."

Sam looked down at her feet. Sam always thought she was the good child, she always thought she was perfect. Aunt Jenny never did that type of stuff to Sam. Aunt Jenny put her hand on Sam's chin and lifted her head up and hugged her and walked over to Jeffery.

"And Jeffery, I've got two things for you also." Jeffery's face went from smug to shock. "Jeffery, don't make that face again because your sister doesn't like it, and two, don't serve yourself so much ice cream!"

Sam and Jeffery began to crack up and snicker.

"Ha! Okay, Aunt Jenny. We'll be better," Sam said, laughing.

"All right, good. Because I know that your father and mother wouldn't like you to be mean," Aunt Jenny stopped, and then walked away to her bedroom.

Sam and Jeffery grew silent. Their parents had died when Sam was 7 and Jeffery was 5. Jeffery barely even remembers them, and when Sam does it hurts. They died in a plane crash on a trip to Hawaii. Sam and Jeffery were staying with Aunt Jenny when they got the news. There was bad weather, and lightning struck, no one survived. It was sad and it was all over the news. Their names were Katie and Josh Marine. Sam and Jeffery sat in silence as they ate their ice cream and then headed to their rooms to go to bed.

"Hasaa... Who... Sheno... Kanatoo... you.... two... must... go.... tonight... out... in... the... DARKNESS AND COLD!!! AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Both Sam and Jeffery woke up, hearing these voices coming out of nowhere. The voices seemed to be getting louder and louder! Sam held tightly on to her little brother. Sam started to run out of the room to go get Aunt Jenny, but instead collapsed to the floor. Jeffery tried to help his sister, but he collapsed too!

"SAM! Sam! Sam..."

The voices stopped. All was silent. Both Sam and Jeffery faded away into unconsciousness.

Jeffery's eyes open slowly. His ears were ringing and buzzing. He tried to move his fingers, but they wouldn't listen. He was too scared to move. Once he realized that the voices were gone, he slowly got up to check if Sam was all right.

"Sam?"



He got up and walked over to Sam. He lied down by her. She wasn't moving. Jeffery started to cry.

"P-please! P-please d-don't b-be d-d-dead!" Jeffery said, barely able to speak.

He couldn't lose another family member. Sam slowly started to wake up. She could hear Jeffery saying things to himself under his cloak of tears.

"O-oh S-Sam! I t-thought I lost y-you!"

"I-it's okay Jeffery I'm here now!" Sam said, trying to be supportive.

"Are you children okay?"

Aunt Jenny had walked in. She heard Jeffery and Sam's conversation.

"Yeah...we're all right..." Jeffery replied looking at Sam.

You could tell that Sam didn't want to tell Aunt Jenny about what had just happened, she tried to cover it up with a lie.

"Yeah...we... um...we... were...." Sam looked at Jeffery and gave him a face that meant, 'back me up!'

Jeffery did as he was told.

"Yeah, we were playing a game. We were playing hide and seek, and Sam hid behind the kitchen counter!"

"Hmm..." Aunt Jenny looked at their faces curiously and then said, "All right then, my eyes are still on you though!"

She pointed to her eyes and then at Sam and Jeffery and walked away.

"Aw man! What was that?" Jeffery said, helping Sam up.

"I don't know...but I didn't like it..." Sam replied rubbing her head in pain. She had a tough fall.

"Well, whatever it was, I sure hope it doesn't come back!" Jeffery exclaimed.

"I'm going to bed! Surely it won't come back at night, right?" Sam said, looking scared and confused.

"I don't know...I don't know." Jeffery and Sam headed to bed. But as soon as they closed their eyes, the voices came again.

"Hoo...hassa... kato... shanpayca..."

"W-what is t-that?" Jeffery heard the voices again, trying to already forget that.

"Canisa... latto... beno..."

Sam heard it now too; she got out of bed and went to the bathroom to wash her face. She thought she was crazy for hearing the voices again. Sam headed back to her room and there she found Jeffery sitting in her bed. He was curled up near her pillow, holding a blanket around his head.

"Jeffery, uhh, what are you doing here exactly?" Sam asked trying to push Jeffery off her bed.

"I-I heard the VOICES AGAIN!" Jeffery answered in panic.

"Yeah, well so did I! But nothing happened! I didn't collapse you didn't collapse, we are okay! We are goanna be okay!"

At that very moment, they heard a loud sound. It sounded like someone falling.

"Oh no," Sam and Jeffery looked at each other. "AUNT JENNY!"

They raced to Aunt Jenny's room. They stopped dead. There lay Aunt Jenny on the cold, hard, floor of her bedroom. Sam raced to her side. She checked her pulse.

"She's still breathing, just knocked out... wait what's happening?"

Aunt Jenny started to twitch. Her shoulders were raising up and down, but it looked like they were in a badly created stop motion video because her shoulders were all choppy. First, they were down then not even noticing it, and then they were up.

"Jeffery call 911!" Jeffery stood frozen, not knowing what to do. "JEFFERY, CALL 911!"

Sam was yelling at him now. She pointed towards her phone lying on her nightstand. Jeffery finally got the words through his ears and up to his brain. He runs to Sam's phone and dials 119, then changed and enters in 991. Jeffery was so scared he couldn't even put in the right number. His fingers were shaking. Finally, he gets the right number dialed, 911. He waited, it was ringing.

"911, what's your emergency?"

"Uhh, yeah, m-my A-aunt I-is, umm..."

"Jeffery!"

Sam heard what he was saying. She held out her hand, Jeffery gave the phone to her.

"My Aunt collapsed for no reason, and now she's twitching, and we don't know what's wrong with her."

"Okay... we will send an ambulance over," the dispatcher said.

"Oh! Okay! Our address is 609 Cornfield Drive, Acre Meadows, Wyoming!" Sam exclaimed.

Ten minutes later an ambulance parked in front of their house. Paramedics and police asked Sam, "Where is she?"

"U-upstairs. To the left once you reach the top," Sam replied quivering.

"All right, follow me!" The man shouted.

They came back out with Aunt Jenny on a stretcher. They pulled her into the ambulance.

"Let's go with her!" Sam said to Jeffery.

They were about to get in but there were too many people in the ambulance!

"We won't fit in there! It's too crowded!" Jeffery complained.

"I hate to say it, but your right! And I haven't even taken my driver's test yet!" Sam agreed.

"Well, what are we going to do?" Jeffery asked scratching his neck.

"I don't know..." Sam looked awkwardly into the distance while Aunt Jenny was loaded onto the ambulance.

"We could always go into the woods and find a way to get to the hospital from there?" Jeffery asked with his eyebrows going up and down.

"What? Are you crazy?! No way! There are wild animals out there! And it's the middle of the night! No way am I going in there!"

Two hours later Sam and Jeffery are lost in the woods.

"Oh...oh I don't like this," Sam said, scared to be out there.

"You're gonna be fine!" Jeffery exclaimed. "Besides, I see a light up ahead!" he added excitedly.

Jeffery and Sam started to run towards the light. Five minutes later Sam and Jeffery were still running.

"H-how m-much l-longer is it?" Sam asked out of breath.

"I n-not q-uite s-sure," Jeffery remarked as much out of breath as she was.

They walked through a pile of gigantic leaves. Behind the leaves floated a blue oval looking thing. Sam and Jeffery were almost blinded.

"What the...?" Jeffery and Sam ask together.

"Whatever that is, it doesn't look like a hospital," Sam says looking at Jeffery.

"What is it?" Jeffery asks curiously.

"I don't know," Sam says while circling it.

"Wha-!"

Jeffery puts his foot inside the oval and it's gone, it disappeared. He put his whole body in, and he is suddenly gone.

"Jeffery?" Sam was confused and scared.

She goes inside the oval and disappears too.

## **Chapter 2 Zoltaculis**

"Ahhhhhhhhh!"

"Glurk... bfsfn!"

"Ahhhhhhhhh!"

They were falling through the oval. It was all blue. They both fell hard on wet, mushy grass.

"Ouch!" Sam said quietly.

"OW!!" Jeffery yelled.

They got up and looked out at a large beautiful grassy plain.

"Wow!" Sam and Jeffery said together.

"W-what is this place?" Sam said frightened yet intrigued.

"Yeah, what is this place?" Jeffery asked looking out onto the wide gorgeous area.

"W-wait, Jeffery do you remember what the voices said?" Sam asked Jeffery.

"Yeah, why?" Jeffery remarked.

"I think I know how we got to this beautiful place," Sam stated.

"Really? Great! How?" Jeffery roared.

"Well... the voices said you two must go tonight out into the DARKNESS AND COLD!" Sam did an impression of the voices and it was pretty good.

"So? What does that have to do with anything?" Jeffery said puzzled.

"Well, when Aunt Jenny fell... we couldn't get to the hospital. Right?" Sam asked.

"Yeah, well, how is that helping us?" Jeffery questioned.

"Well, if my calculations are correct, we did go out in the darkness and cold," Sam said widening her eyes. "Ohhhh!" said Jeffery. "That explains a bit!"

"I know how we got here, but I don't know where we are."

"Hem hem," said Jeffery getting on a large boulder.

"Yes?" Sam said slowly facing her head to Jeffery.

"Well, I for one, know precisely where we are!" Jeffery said with his finger high in the air.

"If you say that we are in one of your zombie video games I will HIT YOU!" Sam exclaimed.

"No! No, No, No!" Jeffery said making an x with his arms and then pushing them away. "I was going to say that we were in JUMANJI!"

"OH-MY-GOSH!" Sam said pushing up her black glasses.

"What?" Jeffery asked looking puzzled. "We weren't sucked into a video game!"

"We-what is that?" Sam said turning her head away from Jeffery.

Jeffery slowly turned his head too, and together they saw a pack of rabid and vicious beasts. They kind of looked like a wild boar and a warthog mixed together with scales. There were probably hundreds of them. The vicious pig-like animals each dressed in silver armor, with one man wearing armor riding on them. Jeffery screamed, so did Sam, although she was so scared that nothing came out of her mouth. The animals came closer.

Jeffery screamed, "RUN!!!"

He looked behind him, but Sam was already half way down the hill.

"WAIT!" He ran after her thinking that this way was safe. But soon Sam came running back almost knocking him down.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! THEY WILL HIT US AND WE WILL DIE!!!" Jeffery shrieked in her face. "T-they have guns!"

But Sam already ran away. Jeffery ran to be safe and save his sister, but aching pain suddenly shocked him in his stomach.

"AHH!" Jeffery held his hand over the place where he was hit.

Blood was coming out of him so fast that he wanted to scream. But he couldn't draw attention to himself. Everyone would hit him. His head began to pound and spin. All he wanted to do was take a five-minute nap.

Jeffery woke up. He wasn't in pain in fact, he felt great! He looked up and with a startling shock he saw Sam staring down at him.

"Oh JEFFERY!" Sam shrieked while putting her arms around him. "You're okay!"

"Yeah... I am... how is that exactly?" Jeffery asked observing the area of his stomach where he had been shot by a gun.

"A lady cured you! You were just shot, and she found you! She ordered the pig animal-thing to stop, and then she brought you here!" Sam said gesturing around.

Jeffery looked up. There was a giant vanilla colored cloth hung up by wooden sticks. Jeffery wasn't alone like in regular hospitals, with rooms. He looked around and saw all the other people who were hurt or injured. He looked to his left, there was a man praying. It looked like he was hit in the stomach so bad it was dented. He looked to his right; there was a woman that wasn't shot once, but twelve times.

"Where am I?" Jeffery questioned again.

"You're in the Zoltaculis Hospital!" Sam said sounding excited.

"Wha-" Jeffery was about to ask something else but then Sam interrupted him.

"And before you ask, 'What is Zoltaculis', that's where we are now! But I don't know how we got here."

"Yes but, what is Zoltaculis?" Jeffery asked.

"Oh, it's another planet, I think," Sam said looking in another direction now.

"WHAT? ANOTHER PLANET?" Jeffery screeched and jumped out of bed. "Now that's a different story than JUMANJI!"

"That is just the same story!" Sam yelled at him.

"I don't think so!" said Jeffery shaking his finger at Sam's face.

"You are so, so dumb, and worst of all you..." Sam was about to say something else horrid about Jeffery, but a voice over the loudspeaker interrupted her.

"Now what?" She said turning around annoyed.

"We have an intruder! Intruder alert! West side of the cave of Zoltan!" the speaker said loudly into everyone's ears.

"How many distractions are on this planet?" Sam said flinging her arms up and crossing them.

All of a sudden, Jeffery and Sam heard a loud commotion outside the hospital. It sounded like a roar of an engine.

"Coming through!" yelled someone behind them.

It was a girl on a motorcycle, but she was wearing a helmet over her face, so you couldn't see exactly what she looked like.

"Whoa!" exclaimed Jeffery stepping backwards so fast he almost tripped over his own two feet.

Soon enough, other people riding motorcycles followed the girl.

"What are they doing?" Jeffery asked Sam alarmed.

"Obviously, their looking for the intruder!" Sam told him.

"Jeez! You're right. How much commotion is there on this planet?"

### **Chapter 3 Abigail and the Gang**

Twenty minutes later, it was 9 p.m. and Sam and Jeffery are walking out of the hospital.

"Man! Am I glad that we are out of there!" Sam said.

"Oh, I don't know. I mean, it was kind of exciting!" Jeffery said looking around.

"Exciting? EXCITING?! Oh, I don't know about exciting," Sam said looking appalled at her brother.

"What makes you say that?" Jeffery asked looking at Sam.

"Oh...well I don't know...HOW ABOUT THE PART WHERE WE ALMOST DIED? OR WHEN YOU WERE SHOT?! Or how about the part where we were almost run over by those pig things!" Sam thundered.

"Oh, all right. I mean that type of stuff only happened a few times," Jeffery said not looking at Sam.

"A FEW TIMES?!" Jeffery, we- we were almost killed, and you think that's exciting?" Sam asked him calmly. Jeffery froze. He looked at Sam with a shocked expression. He had never thought about it that way.

"I-I don't know," Jeffery looked at her, and then looked back at the ground. "Ugh!"

Jeffery held onto his stomach. There was an arrow coming out of it. Jeffery fell to the ground.

"Jeffery? Jeffery! Jeff-" An arrow hit Sam's stomach too. "Ugh!" Sam fell to the ground.

"We got 'em!"

A figure came out of the woods nearby with two other people.

"Should we bring zem' to ze' boss?" the second figure said. She had an accent.

"Nah' let's grind 'em till we can see their bones!" the third figure said.

"NO! We won't do either. We'll keep 'em," the first figure said.

"Mmmmm," Sam whimpered.

"Wakey, wakey, eggs and bakey," someone in the shadows said.

Sam opened up her eyes. She was tied to a chair.

"Wha-"

"No need to speak," the person in the shadows interrupted.

"You are here because you were harming the world of Zoltaculis. So, I brought you here, to ask you WHY." The person in the shadows suddenly came into light. It was the girl on the motorcycle. Sam recognized the clothes. She was wearing a green t-shirt with a leather jacket over it. She had wavy dark chocolate colored hair and looked mysteriously angry.

"So, do you know why? Or will I have to do what Red suggested and grind your bones?" The girl said.

"Um, no thank you," Sam replied anxiously.

"It's not a yes or no question, girl," the girl said.

"Uhhh... um...sorry, not trying to be rude, but who are you?" Sam asked politely.

"Abigail, chief of the protectors of Zoltaculis," Abigail said.

"Um, okay. My name is Sam, chief of..."

"No need to waste your breath. You're too dumb to be chief of anything," Abigail said while examining a knife, which made Sam very nervous.

"Okay... um... can you wake up my brother now so that we can leave, please?" Sam said still very nervous.

"I can wake him up, but I won't let you leave. If you do leave, that means I would have to kill you," Abigail said, now the knife very close to Sam's neck.

"HMMMMMM?" Jeffery opened his eyes, looked around, and found that he wasn't at home. "Ahhhhhhhh!" he yelled. "Where am I?!"

"Relax. I won't kill you, yet," Abigail said this time sharpening the knife.

"Please! We didn't do anything! We were the ones that you said 'coming through' to us! We were in the hospital at that point! And when you found us, we were walking out! Because we were done!" Sam explained to her.

"Hmmm, I do remember you. You'll have to answer some questions," Abigail replied. "Where were you at the point when the warning went off?" Abigail said while looking at each of them.

"W-we were i-in the h-hospital," Jeffery stuttered.

"Okay, that's all I needed to know. Now to set you up to the lie machine!" Abigail exclaimed looking happy yet still a little bit angry.

Jeffery did not know how this was possible. Before they could even realize it, Sam and Jeffery were hooked up to a contraption, which Jeffery did not like.

"Now... where were you the time the warning went off?" Abigail asked them.

It took a bit of time for Sam or Jeffery to answer. A wide grin spread across Abigail's face.

"We've told you we were in the hospital," Sam answered.

Abigail looked at the lie detector. It wasn't beeping. The grin faded away from her face and turned into an angry raging face.

"You're free to go," Abigail said through clenched teeth.

"Okay- wait!" Sam said untying and then stopping herself. "We NEED your help," Sam said to Abigail.

"With what?" Abigail replied rolling her eyes.

"We've never been here before, and we need to know how to get home," Sam said.

"Oh my, that would mean to face A LOT of challenges. You would have to go through the army, and then you would have to ride a Bartscalee."

"A what now?" Sam interrupted now untying Jeffery.

"A Bartscalee! You don't know what that is? It's kind of like a wild boar and a warthog mixed together," Abigail explained.

"Oh yeah! I know what that is! So, we would have to ride that, and what else?" Sam asked.

"Oh, and the hardest part would be to go to the cave of Zoltan," Abigail numbered off.

"The cave of what?" Sam asked looking puzzled.

"The cave of Zoltan! Oh, so you don't know what that is either? Well, there was a man long ago, named Zoltan. He found this planet and named everything after himself. So selfish... so selfish," Abigail clarified.

"Okay, so can you help us?" Sam asked.

"I guess so, but you have to meet the gang," Abigail said crossing her arms. "RED! RETRO!" Abigail howled to the back of the room. Two figures came into the light.

"This is Red," Abigail gestured to the character on her right. She had bright red hair that faded into dark red at the end of her long ponytail. She had claw marks all over her body and was wearing a green leather jacket covered in claw marks also. She looked mighty angry.

"And this is Retro," Abigail now gesturing to the girl on her left. She was wearing a black sweatshirt, which looked like the sleeves were ripped off, and so was the hood. It also had mint green pockets and lines all over it. She

was wearing purple eye shadow, and tons of mascara. She also had purple lipstick. Her hair covered one of her eyes. Her hair was black with blue streaks of hair dye, which was shoulder length. And she was blowing pink bubble gum.

"What are you staring at?" Red said angrily to Sam.

"Hi, who are zey'?" Retro said to Jeffery then to Abigail.

Abigail replied, "Guys, they need help. So, we... we're goanna help them."

#### **Chapter 4 The Challenges**

They were walking, they were tired.

"Why couldn't we just use your motorcycles?" Jeffery asked Abigail.

"No, they are for protective use only. Besides we're here!" Abigail said looking happily onto the battlefield.

They could see men firing at each other's side.

"Why are Zoltaculins firing at each other?" Jeffery questioned.

"They're not all Zoltaculins," Abigail answered. "See that side over there?" She pointed to the left side of the battlefield. "Those... those are Fers," Abigail said still pointing to the left.

"What are Fers?" Jeffery asked her.

"Zey' are anozer' planet," Retro answered him. "Zey' come to fight in the war," she said to him.

"Why is there a war?" Sam asked this time.

"Because," Red said while rolling her eyes. "There was a disagreement on slaves."

Red looked at Sam very angrily. Sam could hear her say under her breath, "Don't you know anything?"

"You guys have slaves?" Jeffery asked.

"Yes, we do. People that have betrayed Zoltan are all slaves," Abigail replied, still looking out onto the battlefield.

"That's why no one can betray him anymore. That's why we can't betray him," Red stated.

"Move," Abigail ordered while walking directly into the battlefield.

"What are you doing? You could get hurt!" Sam whispered to her through clenched teeth.

"COME!" Abigail shouted gesturing with her hand.

Out came a big black motorcycle, with a helmet to match.

"COME!" Red and Retro did the same thing.

Two large silver motorcycles came out with a helmet to match. They all got on their motorcycles. Drove out directly in the middle of the battlefield. They were all being shot. But none of them got hurt. Sam watched in awe. Jeffery watched as though his mind was blown up.

"Whoa!" Jeffery screamed with a big smile on his face.

"That's awesome!" Sam said while looking to Jeffery, then looking back to the battlefield.

Abigail pulled out a gun from her leather jacket pocket. She shot. And shot. And shot once more. Almost all of the Fers were down, while the Zoltaculin army men were watching in awe just as Sam and Jeffery were.

"Where are Red and Retro?" Sam asked Jeffery.

"I don- whoa! There they are!" Jeffery said.

He pointed to a large building with two girls on it, on top of a motorcycle.

"Wow! What do you think their doing up there?" Sam asked Jeffery while still looking at them on top of the humongous building.

"I-I don't know," Jeffery replied while looking frightened.

"COVER ME!" Abigail yelled at Red and Retro while the Fers that were left were clamoring towards her.

Red and Retro started their engines. They drove, they jumped off the building!

"WHOA!" Jeffery said this time very, very afraid. "THEY WILL DIE!"

Red and Retro landed on an old piece of metal and used it as a ramp. They came down onto the battlefield. The Fers shot at them, but they didn't get hurt. They distracted the Fers while Abigail came back up to Sam and Jeffery and told them to get across the battlefield as best as they could.

"Sam, Jeffery, while the three of us make a diversion, you guys will go across the battlefield and wait for us when we're done. Understand?" she told them.

"Yes," Sam and Jeffery said together.

"Here take these," Abigail handed them each a gun.

"Um," Jeffery said kind of nervous.

"I hope I can trust you," Abigail remarked while looking at them straight in the eyes.

"Uhhh...let's go Jeffery," Sam said to Jeffery shaky and edgy.

They ran across the battlefield.

"Shoot!" Sam told Jeffery as a Fers was coming closer.

"O-okay!" he replied.

Jeffery shot and hit him directly in the stomach.

"Nice!" Sam told him.

"Uh, thanks?" Jeffery sounded unsure.

"Okay, let's keep on going!" Sam told Jeffery.

Sam and Jeffery were almost at the end of the battlefield.

"Wait!" Jeffery yelled at Sam.

"They need our help!" Jeffery pointed at Abigail, Red and Retro.

They were being absolutely covered with Fers.

"No! They are helping US! We're not helping them!" Sam shouted back at him.

Jeffery sighed, and shook his head. He ran back to help them.

"I'm just trying to be accurate!" Sam shouted at him as he ran.

"No, you're trying to be SMART!" Jeffery hollered back at her.

Sam rolled her eyes and ran over to Jeffery.

"We'll help you!" Jeffery screamed at Abigail.

"No! You have to go to the end of the battlefield and wait for us!" Abigail shouted back.

"NO!" Jeffery cried and ran over to her.

To Sam's astonishment, Jeffery took his gun and got every single Fers there was.

"Come on!"

He pulled Red, Retro and Abigail over to Sam.

"Okay then!" Abigail said looking puzzled, nervous, and excited.

"Let's go!"

Jeffery pulled all four of them to the end of the battlefield. They soon reached the end of the battlefield.

"Okay! I'm pumped! Let's go to the next challenge!" Jeffery said while rubbing his hands together.

"Nah' I need a break! 'Zumping from a building is not as easy as it looks!" Retro exclaimed, breathing heavily.

"Oh please! Man up! You're so wimpy!" Red ridiculed her.

Just as Red said that, Retro put her hands up and started to choke her.

"Love a good choking, do you?" Red wheezed.

"Break it up! Break it up!!" Abigail told the pair of them.

Red hacked as Retro released her.

"She started it!" Retro yelled while pointing her finger at Red.

"I don't care who started it! All I want is to go to the next difficulty without one of us dead!" Abigail told them.

"Let's just go! The next challenge isn't that hard!" Abigail told Retro.

"Fine! But I'm not traveling wis' her!" Retro shouted as she pointed at Red in disgust.

Pretty soon they got to a long wooden shed.

"Get in." Abigail ordered at Red and Retro.

She was angry now. They walked in. There were a bunch of Warthogs mixed with wild boars with wooden scales. They were all wearing armor.

"Not again!" Sam whispered.

"Okay, so the key to riding a Bartscalee, is that," Abigail started.

"Why can't we just walk? Why do we have to ride these things?" Jeffery interrupted her.

"It's way too far to walk." Abigail replied.

"Where are we even walking?" Jeffery asked.

"The cave of Zoltan!" she told Jeffrey, then turning to Sam, "Does he ever pay attention?"

"Why do we need to go to the cave of whatever?" Jeffery asked.

"Cave of Zoltan, and that's where our leader lives! He came here long ago and found this planet. He decided to name everything after himself. He decides if you can go home. He decides if you have to stay," Abigail explained.

"Wait, have to stay?" Sam asked Abigail frightened.

"Yes, have to stay," Abigail said looking mighty bored.

Abigail started walking. Sam and Jeffery caught up to her.

"When you came here, did you have to stay?" Jeffery asked Abigail.

"I-I didn't have a choice," Abigail froze looking highly unsure about this conversation.

"Why didn't you have a choice?" Jeffery questioned.

"It's classified," Abigail said, getting angry.

"Why is it classified?" Jeffery asked once more.

Abigail took Jeffery by surprise, and almost hit him, but Retro held her back.

"Hey, Is' okay man, is' okay." Retro whispered in her ear. She whispered something else, but Sam and Jeffery didn't hear it. Once Abigail calmed down, and Retro went on a walk alone, Sam caught up with her.

"Hey, what did you whisper to her?" Sam asked.

"I van't tell you," she answered back.

Sam noticed she wasn't looking at her.

"Why not?" Sam asked again.

"Because, vit' is very personal," Retro answered, still not looking at her.

"Please? I promise I won't tell anyone!" Sam begged.

"NO! Why' do you even want to know?" Retro said now looking at her.

"I-I don't know! Just want to know what you said to her!" Sam pleaded.

"I'm sorry, vut' no," Retro resolved calmly.

Before Sam could beg again, Sam and Jeffery were getting ready to ride the Bartscalees.

"Uh, do we need a helmet for these things?" Jeffery asked worriedly.

"You don't need a helmet. But if you're too wimpy then you should probably have one," Red mocked him.

"I'm not too wimpy! I'm just really scared," Jeffery muttered under his breath.

"Okay so you want to put your foot on the twenty-ninth scale," Abigail clarified to the pair of them.

"But first rule... is that you need to let them choose you," Abigail probed the set of them mischievously.

"Say what now?" Jeffery asked troubled.

"Yep, now go," Abigail demanded.

Abigail, Retro and Red hopped immediately onto three vicious animals while Sam and Jeffery looked nervously around at the pack of the rapid Bartscalees.

"H-how d-do y-you k-know t-that t-they c-chose y-you?" Jeffery asked Abigail quietly and cautiously.

"They walk up to you and sniff your hand," Abigail approved.

One Bartscalee walked up to Sam and sniffed her palm.

"Oh okay, this is kind of weird," Sam said now petting the Bartscalee.

"Okay, so remember set your foot on the twenty-ninth scale, and pull yourself up," Abigail said calmly.

Sam did as she was told.

"I feel so tall!" Sam exclaimed. "Now where do I put my hands?" she asked Abigail.

"Put your hands on his ears," Abigail told her.

"On its ears? Won't they get mad?" Sam asked unsurely.

"Nope, they will twitch a bit."

Sam grasped her hands around the ears. The Bartscalee twitched a bit like Abigail said, but the Bartscalee found it as a way of affection.

"Aw! He's actually kind of cute!" Sam exclaimed happily.

"She," Abigail said coolly.



"Oh, does she have a name?" Sam asked.

"Dewei. It's Chinese for highly noble," Abigail clarified.

A Bartscalee walked up to Jeffery and sniffed his fingers. Jeffery did exactly what Sam did.

"What's his name?" Jeffery asked.

"Oh, his name? His name's Kevin," Abigail said casually.

Jeffery sighed and said under his breath, "Kevin. Of course she gets Dewei! It's Chinese for Highly Noble!"

Sam laughed at this comment.

"Okay, where to?" Sam asked Abigail.

"THE CAVE OF ZOLTAN!" She hollered.

Her Bartscalee came up on its rear legs and oinked. Sam and Jeffery copied what she did and took off. The journey seemed to last for hours.

"How much longer? This is tiring!" Jeffery screamed from behind Abigail.

"Not much longer!" she shouted back.

They entered a large rainforest.

"Where are we?" Sam shouted at Abigail in the lead.

"Almost to the Cave of Zoltan!" She answered back.

They went through an area of large wet leaves, which once Jeffery went through, he got cuffed with cold icy water and a leaf.

"Ow!" he hollered.

"You're fine! Besides we're here!" Abigail breathed heavily.

They looked upon a large dark cave which the only source of light was purple crystals leading the way in.

"Was this..."

Sam wondered when they were going to go back to their beloved home and Aunt Jenny. Or were they destined to stay in Zoltaculis?

## **Chapter 5 Time to Say Goodbye**

They had made it. They looked out onto the dark gloomy cave when Abigail said, "Okay, well let's go."

Abigail sounded uneasy about her last sentence that she had said. They walked into the murky, dim cave. They were all silent.

Red interrupted the peaceful silence and said, "You know, he's not going to jump out at you."

She rolled her eyes and put her hands on her hips and walked forward around the corner of the cave so the rest of the group could not see her. Sam and Jeffery heard some talking, and they walked around the corner and saw Red bowing to a man hidden in the shadows. It was too dark to see clearly.

"Hello, my master," Red said still bowing lowly.

"What have you brought me here today, woman?"

Red twitched at that name. She much preferred being called her name than anything else.

"I have brought you humans, master," she said standing up now.

For the first time, Sam saw Red look actually scared.

"What do these humans want?" the man said.

His voice was low, and scornful.

"T-they want to go home master," Red explained.

"And why do you wish to help these creatures, woman?" the low voice requested.

"Um... because..." and for the first time anyone had heard it, Red said, "Because... they're my friends."

Sam looked around. Everyone near her was looking at Red, stunned.

"Bring them here women," the low voice demanded.

Sam and Jeffery walked out from behind the corner. They saw the man. He was wearing a long black cloak with purple fragments all over. It had three different types of purples around the collar. His face was dark and cold looking. He had a mask that only concealed half of his face. The mask had a purple computer-looking eye and the rest was black. He had a scowl on his face.

"Humans?" the man said.

"Um... our names are Sam and Jeffery... sir," Sam said catching herself in time.

"I don't care what your names are!" the man said. "And secondly... don't call me sir. Call me Lord Zoltan," Lord Zoltan demanded wickedly rubbing his hands together.

"Well... you're not my lord... you're just a man to me," Sam said smartly looking in another direction.

"Don't you dare talk to me that way! You're on my planet, I am your master!" Zoltan yelled at her getting to his feet.

Zoltan grabbed a long sharp knife beside his chair and held it up over Sam about to stab her. He got closer and closer. But at the very last second Abigail came out running with Retro behind her.

"STOP!" Abigail demanded.

Zoltan only cut Sam's lip. It was bleeding.

"You dare command Zoltan to stop?" he yelled at her.

"You're not Zoltan... you're Jacob," Abigail said calmly while moving Sam out of the way.

"Jacob?" Red whispered to herself.

"This game has gone on long enough," Abigail said walking towards him, still very calm about the subject.

"What game?" Zoltan requested.

"This game!" Abigail said looking at him. "This game!" she repeated gesturing her hands to the ceiling. "This game!" pointing to outside of the cave. "Everything!" she said. "You are not Zoltan! You are not the master. You are Jacob...my brother," she said to him coolly.

"Everyone looked at her appalled except for Retro.

"Heh, you're right... about nothing!!!"

Jacob took his knife and tried to hit Abigail. The knife scraped her arm.

"That little thing won't stop me!" Abigail shouted at him.

She kicked his face with the heel of her shoe. Jacob fell to the ground.

"Ugh!" He yelled.

Sam took her gun from her pocket, about to shoot at Jacob, but Retro stopped her saying, "No! Zas' her brozer' right zere!"

Sam put the gun back in her pocket and came out from behind the boulder she was hiding. She kicked him and pushed him over again.

"No! Stop! This is my fight!" Abigail told Sam.

"I can help!" Sam told her back.

Sam ripped the knife from Jacob's grasp and handed it over to Abigail.

"See?" Sam supported.

"Okay!" Abigail said to her proudly.

Abigail took the knife and put it very close to Jacob's neck.

"Don't you dare hurt them!" Abigail commanded upon him.

Jacob stole back the knife from Abigail and sliced off her long hair! She looked at the ground, looking at all the pieces of her own hair. She felt her hair with her hand and felt her new short mane. She looked at him angrily and pushed him back with her foot in the stomach. He fell back, Abigail punched him. He fell back again. Abigail took him by the collar and lifted him above the ground. She clenched all her fingers together and pulled her arm back. Jacob dropped his knife and pleaded desperately with Abigail.

"Okay! Okay! I'll stop!"

Abigail dropped him onto the cold, hard ground. He wheezed loudly.

"Jacob... this is not you. Come on," Abigail told him.

She put out her hand. He took off the mask and gave it to her.

"It's okay Jacob! We all have tough times. This was just one of your big ones... what even happened to you to make you like this?" Abigail asked him.

"I-I don't know," he answered her.

"Well I know... how about Mom and Dad?" Abigail said kneeling down to get to his level on the ground.

Jacob looked up. He nodded at her.  
"I'm sorry about your hair," he said.  
"That's okay... it'll grow back... it'll just take some time," Abigail said looking away now.  
Abigail helped him up off the ground.  
"So... can my friends go home?" Abigail asked him.  
"Yeah, they can," Jacob answered.  
"Let's help them get to the portal then," Abigail said to Sam and Jeffery.  
They were soon at the portal.  
"Well, I guess this is good-bye then," Jeffery said to them.  
"Yep... I can't believe it!" Sam said looking at the portal.  
"It was great knowing you guys," Abigail said to them.  
"Yeah, I'm surprised to hear this myself, but it really was," Red said sympathetically.  
"Yeah. I sure am going to miss you guys and this place! This awesome, amazing place," Jeffery said looking around at the magical world. Sam and Jeffery gave them each a hug.  
"Bye. I'll miss you guys," Sam said while hugging Abigail. "Well, later Zoltaculis!" Sam called as she stepped into the portal.  
"Wait!" Abigail called after Sam and Jeffery. "Will you visit?"  
"Of course!" they answered back.  
They stepped into the portal and disappeared. They were falling through the portal again. They landed on hard ground.  
"Ah! That always hurts!" Jeffery said getting up and rubbing his back.  
"Sam! Jeffery!" a familiar voice called after them.  
They turned around. Aunt Jenny stood there waiting to give them a hug.  
"I've been worried sick! Where have you been?" she asked them concerned.  
Sam and Jeffery looked mischievously at one another and Sam said, "Well, let's just say... it was wonderful!"  
Jeffery finished, "Yes, the wonderful world of Zoltaculis!"

## Life

By Megan Scheel, Grade 9  
Mankato East High School

I walked slowly through a dark and simply frightening forest. A bow strung across my body and arrows hung out of a bag on my back. Dark clothes covered my body keeping me hidden. I looked behind me with a worried glance. Behind me at the entrance of the woods stood my father. He sent me a proud smile before walking out of the forest. I sighed and made my way forward.

My feet crushed and crumbled the leaves below me as I walked. The anxiety and fear filled me more and more the farther I got in. No signs of anything. No animals, no monsters, no nothing. Just bare trees with their leaves laying calming on the ground. The moon's light shined down into the forest floor making patches of light where I could actually see.

A strong wind blew suddenly sending the leaves around me everywhere. It caught the hood covering my pale face and blew it off. Right then in front of me, I was able to see the giant dog and dragon-like feet walking in front of me. The small bit of courage I still had left me. I raced behind the biggest tree I could see. While sitting there, I remembered the words my father had told me.

*"This forest and its creatures are magnificent my boy. Magnificent in many good and horrible ways. It is forever dark in that forest because of that horrid monster who brought darkness across this land. You, my boy, must go out there and defeat this monster but be warned. This monster will and can take many forms. Harmless and extremely harmful*

forms. Always watch your back son. This is your step to becoming the man your mother would've loved to see you become."

His words echoed through my ears, playing over and over again. Then everything faded and all that stayed was his last sentence. *This is your step to becoming the man your mother would've loved to see you become.* I looked up through the trees at the dark night sky.

"Mother," I said. "I'm doing this for you. I'm going to bring back the green fields and the crops. I'm going to bring back the sunset and sunrise. I'm doing this for you mom."

Her voice rang through my head in a muffled voice. "Be brave my son. Have courage and go. Defeat this nighttime beast and bring back what is good in the world. I believe in you my son,"

A smile spread across my face and I pushed myself off the ground. "For you mother, I will bring back the good."

I spun around coming out from behind the tree with my bow in hand and an arrow ready. I stepped forward, arrow ready to fire, ready to rid of this beast. Unfortunately for me, silence filled the air again. Nothing but silence. Still standing with my arms ready to fire I walked even deeper into the forest. It got darker and darker as I went. My vision was becoming limited to what was almost right in front of me. I was waiting to feel wind again, even the slightest breeze.

The forest became even darker all of a sudden and the wind hit my face. I bent my knees ready to leap away in any direction if I needed to. I aimed my bow up into the air in the direction the wind had come from. I wasn't able to see anything in front of me, the forest had become too dark. I heard and felt the steps of the monster. I decided to trust my senses on where to aim.

I let go of the string on the bow and the arrow went flying. I got another one ready and waited. A strange roar rang out through the forest. I aimed at the sound and fired again. Again, I loaded another arrow and waited. Another roar rang out. I continued this, surprised at the fact that the monster never came charging in my direction. Its footsteps came to a stop and it roared again.

"Good job my boy," I heard my mother's voice say.

"It's dead?" I questioned, confused at how such a large creature could be defeated so easily.

"Yes, my boy. Now go back to your father and watch as life comes back to this place," her voice told me.

I smiled up at the slowly changing dark sky. I slung my bow back around me and raced back home with a smile on my face. Beside me as I ran, the ground turned from dead to living with vibrant flowers littered everywhere. The trees grew their leaves and the sun came out. Birds, squirrels, deer and so many other forest animals came out showing themselves. As I got closer to the edge of the forest, I could see my father standing with my living mother next to him. I ran to them dropping my bow and arrows on the way. I threw myself into their arms and we all held each other as life surrounded us. Behind us a giant shadow like creature stood. I looked up at mother and she smiled at me then at the creature.

"I'll explain later. It deserves to live," she quietly told me. Mother wrapped her arms around both father and I bringing us back to our home. I looked back over my shoulder and the creature was gone. I ignored it trusting my mother. All that mattered was that we had life back and that mother was back with us.

## Don't Forget Me

By Madeline Schoenstedt, Grade 6

Dakota Meadows Middle School, Mankato

June 19, 1942

My heart beats fast, as I smooth down the front of my uniform. Ugly, disgusting khaki. This was the fabric of war I think, closing my eyes for a second to block out all thoughts of fear. I never thought this day would come, the day where the world sort of split into pieces, though still containing the main points.

How I wanted to just magically rebuild those pieces into its natural, complete form. My soul feels like it is clenched in a ball, as I walked down the stairs in that uniform. My sister and mother stared at me, tears overflowing from

their eyes. I tried to smile but find no joy, I try to look away but have not the strength.

Mother holds my hand fast, as if it would keep me from going, and says with a dry and heartless sound, "Goodbye my son, take courage, we shall always be with you."

I take my sister's hand and hold my only family close. "Come back," my sister tells me, with pleading eyes. "I will," I say, just barely choking out the words. "Don't forget me."

*June 20, 1942*

At the train station, about fifty other boys are departing in khaki. I shoulder my duffel bag and take a deep breath.

On the train, I find the last compartment with three men already in it. I look around, everywhere else is full. I slide open the door and sit down. The man next to me has fiery, curly hair, and brown freckles all over his nose.

"Hello! My name's Chet," he says. I look confusedly at his smiling face. Did he not know that we were going to war, to kill, to possibly get killed? Or maybe I was just a wimp.

"Uhhh... a pleasure to meet you," I say, looking for some hidden emotion in his sunny, expectant face.

"Nah, the pleasure's mine," he says, still grinning like a mad man.

I spend the rest of this awful train ride, staring out the window, or looking at his bright face. The train stops every 20 minutes, each time at another station, where I watched people crying and cheering, as more men in khaki board that hateful train.

*November 1, 1942*

After more than five months of intense training, we are going into military action. Our first battle is now, today. Chet is excited and looking forward to it, and sees it as an adventure, not a bloody, gruesome war.

Chet and I have become like brothers, during these long past months. He is my only friend, in this dark place. It has been so helpful, and lucky to have a friend like him here. We decided to stick together, during the battle, no matter what the commanding officer says.

Chet now sits on our bunk, with a pained expression on his face. It is unnerving, and surprising to see him without his usual, happy personality.

"I'm frightened," he says, looking at me with terrifying emotions in his eyes. "What if one of us doesn't come back... alive?" He looks down at his shiny black boots. I stare at him. This is not the Chet I know.

"We will be fine," I say in a fake positive voice.

"I guess you're right," Chet says, slowly breaking into a grin. "After the battle, you and me, we will be going home for Christmas!" My heart pounds as I think of the promise, what seems so long ago. My sister clasping my hand had said "Come back." And I had known then, so sure that I would. Now, my eyes resting on the commanding officer's stern, almost heartless face, I realize that I might not return.

*November 2, 1942*

We are finally behind enemy lines, shots are going off everywhere, my ears are ringing from the sounds of screaming, and sirens going off. An ambulance flies past me, to the injured soldiers shouting pleas of help. A fire has broken out in one of the German's forts. I want to curl up in a ball and hide from this hideous battle. How long until the people in this world can live in peace with their neighbors? I ask myself, staring out at the pain, and affliction around me. My heart yearns for something familiar. Home, family, friends...

"Chet!" I scream, but it is like I never said anything at all. The noise of gunshots and screams, carries my voice away. I whirl wildly around searching for my friend. I run past the flaming fort, my heart speeding up with every step. A shot flies past my right ear, the earth shakes with a sudden explosion, and I tumble to the ground.

My head aches from the noise, and the crumbly, rocky land which my brain has made contact with. I clutch the nearest boulder, and am thrown to the ground, as an explosion sends it to pieces. Cement and rocks tumble all over me, as if I was simply a doll that could be pounded and squashed with no output.

I lay on the ground my left leg bleeding, my head pounding, and then there was darkness. Cool, painless, empty darkness. My hand fumbles for something to clutch, and I feel a soft hand, I look up and see my sister smiling at me, calling "You came back, you came back!" I try to tell her that I can't come back, and that I know my fate, but she

continues to smile and laugh, telling me I had kept my promise.

I plead and scream, trying to tell her goodbye before it is too late. I reach out, but no matter how hard I try, I cannot seem to be able to grasp her hand. Tears are running down my face as I call out to her, but she is gone.

I wake up with a splitting headache. Where am I? I pull myself up and am immediately overcome with a horrible dizziness. Gunshots are still ringing out, and I remember instantly where I am. I feel an overwhelming surge of sorrow and pain. Why must I be in this awful place! I feel like courage and bravery, have completely deserted me.

And then I remember, it hits me like a bullet. The reason I put on that ugly khaki uniform, the reason I said goodbye to my family, the reason I risked breaking my promise to come back alive. Loyalty to stopping this war, loyalty to my family and their protection, and lastly, bravery, for doing what is right.

I stand tall, ready to face the enemy. Not the Germans, nor the Japanese. I was facing my fear, and my torment. This was a battle for me, that I needed to face. And then I see him. Chet. I shout, and start madly running across the field, bullets are flying past me, but I am unaware. I fall to the ground, tears streaming down my face. Chet lays motionless on the ground, cold and dead. His face is full of dirt, there is a gaping, bloody, red cut across his forehead. His hand lays across his chest, and though he was shot, though his face is streaked with dirt, and though his shirt is soaked with blood, his face is peaceful, and holds the smallest smile imaginable, more like the Chet I once knew.

*December 20, 1942*

I walk up the sidewalk I know so well, I see the gate with its peeling white paint, I even remember those blue Christmas lights that mother loved so much. I am home. After more than five months, it was still as I remembered it. I knock on the red door, I ring the yellow doorbell, they are still the same.

I hear a shout, a cry, running feet, and I am welcomed home. Mother comes running out sobbing, while my sister simply stands as if in shock, and says, "You came back." My heart is filled with overflowing love for my home, my family, and my friends.

Chet was buried in the military cemetery, near the battle ground. His death was recognized as a wound in the head. Whenever I think of him, my eyes fill with tears for my friend Chet, who saw life as a grand adventure, was cheerful and friendly to everyone, and was one of the bravest men I have ever known.

In a few short weeks I will be returning to the military. I was one of the lucky soldiers, who was able to be home for Christmas. And though war still continues to plague the nation, and Chet's death still fills my heart, I will face the battle inside, and out, with bravery, as I once learned to do.

## Snowflake Sees Snowflakes

By Evie Schuller, Grade 4

*Eagle View Elementary, Elko New Market*

One cold morning, Snowflake the polar bear went downstairs to eat breakfast. When she got downstairs, her dad was staring out the window.

"What are you doing?" asked Snowflake.

"I'm trying to find the first snowflake of winter. Can you do me a favor?" asked Snowflake's dad.

"What is it?" asked Snowflake. Her eyes were wide with curiosity.

"Well, I was wondering if you could go on an adventure for me to find the first snowflake of winter. Could you do that for me?" asked her dad.

"Okay, but I'm going to invite Icy the penguin to help me," Snowflake replied.

"Could you bring it back for me in this container?" asked her dad, as he handed her a small tube to catch the snowflake.

"Ok, Daddy," said Snowflake.

Snowflake put on her warmest winter jacket, her favorite hat and her mittens that have fur inside. Then she

grabbed her little red sled and hurried out the door. She walked to the house across the street, where Icy lived. Then, she rang the doorbell. Seconds later, Icy answered the door.

"I'm going to find the first snowflake of winter for my dad. Would you like to help me?" asked Snowflake.

"Sure! Just let me go get my snow gear," said Icy.

Then, the two of them took turns getting to go in the sled while they looked for the first snowflake of winter. The sled bumped along in the grass. They wished that there was snow to glide the sled more easily.

They went from house to house, asking the neighbors if they had seen the first snowflake of winter yet, but nobody had seen it. They were about to give up, when Icy spotted a small drop of something falling from the sky.

"It's a snowflake!" said Icy. Snowflake grabbed the container just in time and the snowflake landed in the little tube.

"Hooray!" yelled Snowflake and Icy at the same time.

Snowflake and Icy ran back to Snowflake's house. Snowflake looked inside the little container. When she saw what was inside, her heart sank. The snowflake had melted! Snowflake slowly walked inside to find her Dad. Her head was down.

"Dad, I found the first snowflake of winter, but it melted," said Snowflake, as she held up the tube so that he could see it.

"Snowflake, I knew it was going to melt. And I wanted it to melt! I've been collecting the first snowflake of winter for thirty years, and you have found the last one that I needed to finish the snow globe that I've been working on since I was your age!" said snowflake's dad.

Snowflake couldn't believe her ears! She had found the last snowflake that her dad had needed, and had fun doing it too!

## Fly

By Elizabeth Schulz, Grade 4

Lakeview Elementary, Albert Lea

I thought they were following me. I just kept running after what felt like forever. I had finally stopped running, nobody was behind me. I continued into the woods and was still scared. I reached my secret treehouse and went inside. After looking around I saw my friend Savanna writing something. Savanna had light blue eyes with blonde hair.

"I knew you knew how to write!" I excitedly said as I kept going through the treehouse.

"I don't Tess! I'm just working on something to help us build our first airplane. Did anyone follow you here?" She asked as I started working on my airplane.

"No, I don't think so," I replied as I continued working. "I ran here so they didn't see me! It was fun but my mom and dad wonder why I'm going over to your house so much."

"Well I think we're going to be okay, for now. But on the other hand, have you gotten that part made yet? We need it and you know that!" she argued.

"Yea, yea I got the part here," I added as I tossed Savanna the part. "So do you think the sketch I made last night will work?" I finished and gave her the picture.

"Yes! But maybe a bit bigger on the wings," Savanna complained as she added the part in her sketch. "So, do you think this blueprint will work better than the last one?" Savanna asked.

"Maybe. I'll start trying just in case!" I beamed and started working. After a few minutes I finished the wings and started working on the body of the plane. After a half an hour I saw that I was making a boat not a plane!

"Hey Savanna, remember when we made that boat? Yea, I made a boat not the body of the plane, I guess I'm just used to the boat. It was really hard. After this what should we make? I wish we didn't have to do this in secret," I grumbled and started making the actual body of the plane.

"I don't know. I never thought that we would get this far really, and I agree but you know that everybody's

parents think girls can't do this stuff," Savanna replied.

One long hour later we thought we finally finished the plane. We tried to fly it when we got out in the open. Nobody was around so we quickly ran to a flat plain area, and we flew it up into the air. We flew it! We actually flew it! After we happily flew it, Savanna wanted to try and land it. So, she carefully tried but ended up smashing it into a tree.

"Oops, I guess we forgot the padding and the emergency landing button. Well let's go get it... well what's left of it. Then let's try again," Savanna urged as we got the plane and went back to the treehouse.

"So, what do you think the part was for? Remember the part was a button! Now we need to work for one more whole hour! But I need to get home by sunset," I quickly said and ran out of the treehouse and into my house that was not too far away.

When I was running home, I saw somebody standing still. They were as straight as a piece of wood on the sidewalk. I walked up to them to see if they needed anything.

"Hello?" I said when I was just behind them.

When I went in front of them, I saw that she was crying. "Are you ok?" I asked

"No, I want to join the robotics club, but nobody will let me in," she said sobbing.

"Oh, that's really sad. I don't know if I can help you. Do you want to meet me tomorrow here to see if we can come up with a plan to get you in that club? Oh, by the way what's your name? Mine is Tess."

"Oh, ok. My name is Ashley, but you can call me Ash. I'll see you tomorrow," Ash said back as she hopped away.

The next day Savanna and I decided we would let Ash join our group. So, I met her there after we made a sash for her.

"Hey Ash!" I excitedly said as we walked up to her. "Meet Savanna. We have an idea. We can't get you into the club but we can get you into our club!" I continued.

"Really? Thanks! I'd love to join your club. What type of club is it?" Ash asked

"It's a build, code, robotics club!" Savanna and I said at the same time.

"OK! I'd love, love, love to be in that! When do we meet? Can I tell my parents?" Ash sang.

"Well, we meet in the woods secretly and you can't tell your parents," Savanna murmured.

"Why?" Ash asked.

"Everybody's parents think girls can't be doing this stuff. We have to be brave and show them that we can do this just like the boys. Follow us, we're going to show you to the magic place through the woods!" Savanna shouted.

"The woods?" Ash said confused.

"I said the woods!" Savanna said again, as she pointed her finger in the air and started walking the opposite way.

"Um... isn't the woods the other way," I corrected her.

"Oops," Savanna yelped as she turned around.

When we got to the treehouse, we went in and gave Ash a tour.

"Wow! I really like it, what are you working on right now?" Ash said.

"An airplane!" Savanna told Ash.

"Wow! What do you want me to do first?" Ash asked again.

"Well you can start working on the body," I told her.

"OK! Where do I do that?" she asked. I pointed to the spot and she ran over to it.

"I'm going to start!"

"OK! We will just be sitting over here working on what we need to do!" I said to Ash.

"Hey, remember when I was writing in that book? Yeah, I finished. I was making a journal for everything we make! So far, I just got the boat! We can add more later."

"Looks nice! I think I'm going to keep working," I burst out.

"Ok!" Savanna said cheerfully.

After about three hours we were done and snuck out and into the open plain area.

"Ok I'll start, then Ash you can fly and Tess can land it ok?"

"Aye, aye captain!" Ash chirped.

When Savanna was done, Ash did it.



"Now move the joystick so it moves it in the air," I clarified.

"Like this?" Ash asked.

"Yes! You're doing it!" Savanna cheered.

When Ash was done, I got the controller.

"Ok, let me clarify, I click this button to land then carefully make it go down?" I asked.

"Yep!" Savanna said. I got it down and... We did it! We made an airplane!

"Go us!" we all yelled together.

One year later, we showed our parents what we were doing. "I'm sad that you never told us about this till right now," My mom argued.

"But you said girls weren't allowed to do that stuff!" I argued back.

"Fine, I guess I did say that," mom said while calming down. "You may continue having that club," Mom added.

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" I shouted to mom when I was running out the door, and into the woods.

"Do you think we can start on something else now?" Savanna asked.

"I think so," Ash added

"Well what should we start on? A pair of wings that you can put on your shoulders?"

"Yeah! I think we can handle that!" Savanna and Ash said in unison.

"Ok, so Savanna you make the leather wings and Ash you do the coding part ok?"

"OK!" they said together again.

When we started my mom and dad came barging in.

"Wow! You guys really did work hard on everything," my mom said proudly to us.

"Thanks Mom," I replied with a smile.

Then they left.

"Let's keep going on the project," I added.

Within a month we made it. I said I would test the thing. After we did a test, we were pretty confident it would work.

"I'm pretty sure that we did it. Put the wings on me!" I told them. Then they placed our creation on me. We went to the open plain area and I climbed up a tree and jumped.

I was flying! I was actually flying! I thought I was flying, when a huge gust of wind came and I started to go even higher and higher. But then I came down really steep. Lucky, they caught me.

Twenty years later...

"Do you think our new build will work?" I asked.

"Yep," Savanna said. And our first big plane flew through the air.

## A Summer Adventure

By Rohan Sharma, Grade 4

*Bridges Community School, North Mankato*

I checked out the new swim trunks my friend Jack was showing me as we sat in the back seat of the car. They were a cool blue with a Pokémon picture on the back and a neat zipper pocket. The radio in the car was tuned to the news channel. There was talk about the chances of flash floods, then the upcoming elections and another kidnapping in our neighboring state. This was the second one we had heard about in the past few days! Well, I think our town was fairly safe.

Anyway, school had just ended for the summer. It was just a great time to be outside, not worrying about homework, math, schoolwork and assignments. I love the vacations, the long walks with my family, the little hikes with my dad and brother (who is sometimes really annoying though).

My mom had agreed to the swim lessons that my friend Jack and I wanted to take this summer. It was going to be great fun. Summer is also soccer time with my dad, who is usually busy, but he and I love playing soccer, so he tries to take time off for this. I could feel that this summer was going to be great! However, as usual, I didn't have a clue about what lay ahead!

Well, swim lessons started with a bang! Our instructor was great! Jack and I were in different groups. Our lessons got over about 15 minutes apart, so my mom would drop us off for class and Jack's mom, or his cousin would pick us up.

Today, Jack's cousin Harry was going to pick us up. He was in college but visited during summers. Harry was great to be with. He knew a lot of fun facts about little robotic projects and fun science experiments. Jack and I always looked forward to his visits. My mom had told me that Jack's mom had informed her that Harry would come to pick us up.

"See ya boys," said my mom as she dropped us off. "Enjoy and be careful!"

Well, I was all done and changed wondering what was taking these guys so long, when I heard my name being called. I turned to see a stranger coming towards me. I felt a little scared. He said he was George, Harry's friend. I knew Harry had a friend, who lived close by. He had mentioned his name, but I wasn't sure he'd come pick us up out of the blue. He said Harry had had a little accident and had gone to the hospital and sent him instead.

Well, I thought if that was the case why didn't Jack's mom come or my mom? I was hesitant to go along. He pointed to Jack in the back seat of his car. I felt a little reassured seeing Jack.

"Come on, I'll pick you up and then just check on Harry. We could just pick him up from the hospital if he is done."

I went ahead reluctantly. As I sat in the car, I called out to Jack, but he was fast asleep! That was unusual. I noticed a strange smell in the car. I tried lightly pinching Jack to startle him and wake him up for fun, but it had no effect. The car had started but this wasn't the usual route.

"I am taking a shortcut," George explained when I pointed this out.

We turned down an alley, and he stopped the car mumbling something about checking something out. I don't know whether it was the effect of the recent Hardy Boys I'd read or the other mystery books I keep reading, or the morning news I'd heard, but something in me sensed, we were being kidnapped. Jack wasn't asleep. He'd probably been drugged. I soon would be too.

I could feel my heart beat faster. I'd like to say I stayed calm and did not panic, but that would be a lie. I was scared and in a panic. Then I saw George getting out of the car. He had a white cloth in his hand and there seemed to be a small bottle peeping out of his pocket. The next thing I knew, his hand with the cloth was coming over my nose and mouth.

I held my breath and pretended to struggle. I knew I could hold my breath under water for almost a minute. I imagined I was underwater. Just as I thought I could hold no more, the hand was removed. I pretended to be asleep and slumped down on the seat.

There was someone else who joined George in the car and sat in front with him. "This one was easy," I heard him say to his friend.

My body felt numb, but my mind was racing to get out of this mess. I stole a glance at Jack, but he was still out. No hope of help from him. I almost jumped out of my skin at the harsh tone of the mobile. I heard somebody say that they would be at Matt's Storage at 5:30 p.m. with the "stuff, 100 pounds."

Whatever was the "stuff?" Drugs, kids, chloroform? Were they pharmacists or traffickers? I came out of my musings with a start as I heard the other man say that they were low on gas and must pick up food from a store that was out of the way and should hide before the word of the missing SUV and the kids was out.

George looked back and said, "The boys are still lost to the world."

Before getting out of the car he threw a rug over us. I spied the sign on the store "Closed." George and the other man whom George called Andy were discussing how to pay for the gas. They went out and I slipped quietly out of the car and ran for cover behind the huge garbage cans. I never prayed so fiercely as now for the car to move out. After filling gas, they drove away.

This particular area was less frequented, but my feverish mind forbid me to go to the main road and wait

for some help as the kidnappers might find that I had escaped, and they would come looking for me. My heart was pounding, my nerves were tingling and yet my mind was rushing to find help to save my friend.

Fear and panic slowly started creeping from the corners of my mind. I pushed them away and looked around to find out where I was. Oh yes, the ravine behind me was familiar. It ran behind my house and during the fall, my father, my younger brother and I had often trekked to the Kwik Trip store on the opposite side. I looked at my watch. It was 4.30 p.m.

Without giving a second thought I rushed down the ravine, falling through thick green foliage, tumbling, tripping over the brush and sweating profusely until I touched solid ground. Since it was summer the creek was in full spate.

I rushed into the cold knee-deep water and struggled hard to cross it. With great effort I reached the other side. I pulled myself out. This seemed to be the last straw. My body gave up and I fell down completely exhausted. My heart cried out for my friend, but I could not move my numb body. Unfortunately for me, but fortunately for Jack, while falling down I had disturbed a nest of bees or maybe wasps which were now swarming over me and stinging me.

Suddenly my legs had a mind of their own. They got up and ran to save themselves. In no time, I burst out of the ravine and reached the backside of the store where a trash can had tumbled over. I rushed into it and slammed the lid. Yuck, the smell! But the choice was between the devil and the deep blue sea, so I decided to choose the deep sea of smells.

Oh, I felt nauseated from all the yucky odors! I remembered my younger brother had once challenged me to be inside a trash can and he would give me a hundred dollars. I had said there was no way I would do it even for a thousand dollars and here I was, feeling safe and secure in a trash can! Now I had won the dare by default. After what seemed an eternity, I peered out and saw the devil had moved away. I ran out to reach the front of the store bursting in shouting, "911...911..."

Rain drops! When I opened my eyes, I was surrounded by the reassuring faces of the police. The big clock in the store showed 5:10 p.m. I blurted out about the kidnapping and Jack and of course the storage facility where the kidnappers were heading to receive the stuff at 5:30 p.m. All of a sudden, there was activity all around me, and the police were firing instructions about the SUV, and the address.

When I woke up, I was in the hospital, surrounded by my family and my little pesky brother. Oh, how happy I was to see him. There seemed to be some unfamiliar faces; press and police had come to interview me.

I always dreamt of being on TV but not like this! My lips were swollen, I had a black eye and the other eye was twice its size all due to the bee stings. There was a deep gash on my cheek. They asked me many questions but due to my swollen lips they could only understand some of it. Very generously, my little pesky brother decided to be the interpreter, hogging the lime light and adding imaginary details to my struggles.

Mom told me that the kidnappers' car had broken down and they asked Harry to give them a ride. Harry told them that he had to pick me up and after dropping us at class, would drop them at their destination. On a lonely stretch, they drugged Jack and Harry. They hid Harry in the bushes and came to pick me up to buy more time thinking I might call up home or raise an alarm if nobody came to pick me up.

My parents told me that they were truly proud of me. I was really brave and showed great courage. Well, I told them that while all this was happening, I was scared, panic stricken and worried about my friend's life. My parents beamed and said that through all this I made great choices to fight danger and this spirit is courage. I asked them whether fear, panic and worry were directly proportional to courage or vice versa. Well I don't remember all that they said but I dozed off hearing mom's reassuring voice zzzzzzzzzzz!

## Little Red

By Adelina Sifers Clements, Grade 4  
*Roosevelt Elementary, Mankato*

Once upon a time there was a very smart girl. Her name was Red. But she was so short everyone called her Little Red. She had a beautiful hoverboard. Ok. Back to the story. She had to go to her grandma's house, so she packed her magic bag. In her magic bag she packed two muffins, one poisoned muffin and one un-poisoned muffin.

Little Red set out on her journey. On her way she met a kind wolf. But she knew that wolves are not supposed to be nice. So she said nothing. She gave it a muffin and then she started walking faster and faster until she broke into a run. She jumped onto her hoverboard. She finally got to her grandma's house. Just as Little Red got to her grandma's house the wolf dropped unconscious at her grandma's door.

"Ah! Food for dinner! Thank you Little Red!" Her grandma said.

"Uh...Um...But...Heh, heh...Yeah! You're welcome..." Red replied.

At 5:30 p.m. Red and her grandma cooked up the wolf's tail. But they let the still-live-wolf back into the wild.

"Good thing these wolves can re-grow their tails!" Red's grandma said.

"Yeah..."

Little Red was very brave that day. Her grandma made wolf-tail soup that night and Red had a sleepover at her Grandma's house. They watched a whole season of *Larvae*, a TV show, and stayed up until 10 p.m.

## My Sister Clara

By Cecily Winterfeldt, Grade 6  
*St. Peter Middle School, St. Peter*

It was midnight when I heard the sirens blaring outside of my bedroom window. I raced to the window to see what was happening. There was an ambulance parked outside of my house and paramedics rushing into my house. I ran out of my room and into our long hallway. I dashed into my twin sister's room and screamed her name.

"Clara!" I screamed. "Clara!" Clara did not answer me. I pulled all of the covers off of her bed and found that she wasn't lying in it. I started crying. My heart was pounding so hard that I was sure that it would explode. My dad hurried into the room.

"Audrey, it's going to be alright," said Dad as he hugged me.

"Dad? Take me to the hospital right now!" I begged.

"No, honey, Mom's already there. You can't see her until tomorrow. I want you to get some sleep." Dad tried his best to comfort me, but I was still worried about Clara.

My sister has leukemia. She went to a check-up a couple of months ago, and the doctors said she had a couple of months left to live. Since she only had a little while longer to live, the doctors let her come home. My family knew that around the time that she was expected to die, she would have to be sent back to the hospital. My parents have given up on trying to save Clara. She has had leukemia for two and a half years, and now my parents are so worn out from all of the chemotherapy and medical bills.

My parents started to homeschool Clara and me four months ago. I have been to too many therapy sessions to count. I go to therapy because my parents would find me in my bedroom at night, crying. They figured out soon enough that I was worried about Clara. I didn't want her to die!

It was seven o'clock in the morning. I finally fell asleep at three o'clock because my dad gave me a sleeping vitamin called melatonin. I was ready to go and see my sister at the hospital. I was too anxious to eat, so I put on my lime-green tennis shoes and climbed in the car with Dad.

"We are going to stop at the store to get Clara a little gift before we go to the hospital," Dad told me.

"Ok," was all I managed to say.

We drove to the store and I picked out a giant teddy bear and headed to the hospital. When we got there, Mom's mascara was all smeared from crying and her hair was a mess. I ran over to hug her, and we started crying together.

"I don't want Clara to die," I whispered in her ear.

"I know," she said.

After blotting my face with a tissue, I was ready to go see Clara. I slowly tiptoed into her hospital room with the obnoxiously huge teddy bear in my arms. I saw Clara in her hospital bed with tubes connected to her. She was lying down, but not sleeping. I ran over to her and sat down in the chair by her bed. The first time I visited Clara in her hospital bed when she first got sick, I ran over and hugged her. The doctors came in and stopped me immediately. They were worried that I would hurt Clara.

I sat there in silence with Clara while we held hands. After a while, Clara spoke up. "Audrey," she said in a raspy voice. "It's going to be alright."

I knew she was trying to comfort me. Clara is the bravest person I have ever met. She always seemed fine that she had leukemia. Clara was always there for me. She would always hug me during scary movies. She would hold my hand when we were on rollercoasters. She would cheer me on at my tennis matches. Clara was my best friend. We even had matching bracelets.

"Goodbye, Audrey Gale," she said.

"Goodbye, Clara Rose," I responded.

I sat there the rest of the day while she slept. At five o'clock, mom made me leave so Clara could have some alone time. I knew Clara didn't want me there anymore, so I willingly got into the car and drove home.

I visited Clara every day. Clara had been in the hospital for two months now. One night, my mom came into my bedroom. "Audrey," she whispered. "Clara can come back home now."

When she said that, I jumped out of my bed and hugged Mom. Clara could finally come back home! The doctors said that her leukemia has gone away!

The night that Clara came back was full of rejoicing. Even my teenage brother, Ronny, came down to celebrate. I walked over to Clara and whispered in her ear, "Clara, you are the bravest person I have ever met."

## NONFICTION

### Bounce Up Fall Down

By Nika Hirsch, Grade 3

*Greenvale Park Elementary, Northfield*

In second grade my school, for a fundraiser, raised enough money to get an obstacle course bouncy house! I have anxiety, so I was terrified to go on it! When my eyes set on it, I cried.

Then I heard my mom come and say, "Let's do it together, come on!"

So, I did. It was the worst thing I'd ever done!

Now I'm taking anxiety pills, so I loved doing it this year! The pills are tiny green things. When I got to the bouncy house, I took a deep breath. 3, 2, 1, Go!

I raced my friend Jayda first. I lost but it was so fun! I beat my friend LuzElena twice! I was a little scared at first, but I loved it so much!

I hope we get it next year in fourth grade! If we don't it was incredible this year!

## Finding My Voice

By Nika Hirsch, Grade 3

*Greenvale Park Elementary, Northfield*

I can't remember a time I wasn't afraid. Ever since I was a baby, I was afraid of boxelder bugs, babysitters, tomatoes, spinach, tricycles and the balance beam at my gymnastics class. But do you know what I was most afraid of? Even more than a haunted house? It was... TALKING IN FRONT OF PEOPLE!

I know, it sounds weird, because it's easy for most people but when I had to do it, it felt so scary that it felt like 999,999 snakes being dumped on my head! My heart raced, and my throat closed up. I tried to talk, and no sound would come out.

We found out I had selective mutism. That means even though you can talk, your brain tells you not to talk. I couldn't raise my hand in class. I couldn't ask my friends if I could play with them even though I really wanted to play. But one day somebody named Nick asked me if I could be his friend. I said yes. On the outside I was like, "sure" but on the inside, I was having a party! It felt so exciting to have a friend.

It took a lot of work to get better. My family and I did brave challenges. I would have to order my own food at a restaurant, and I had to ask cashiers questions at the mall. One time after I had practiced a lot, I had to speak to a group of about 70 people! It was really scary!

Then, I was asked if I would like to take medicine that would help my selective mutism. I said yes. It took a while for it to help but now when I talk to people, I feel kind of scared, but mostly normal.

I don't think being brave means never being scared. I think it means, being afraid and doing it anyway.

## Brain Damage Both Ways

By Sasha Jakovich, Grade 7

*Dakota Meadows Middle School, Mankato*

Everything was fine – until the accident. An unforgettable event could potentially interfere with your life, if you let it. Concussions are Traumatic Brain Injuries that are usually caused by a blow to the head. There is no specific cure for concussions, but rest allows the brain to recover. I got my concussion from sledding at Sibley Park, on my final time going down the hill. For a couple months, I had to stop all activities, even going to school. Once I finally got better, I was able to return to school. Then, a stressful event happened to my sister, which caused me great anxiety, and like a musical coda; I repeated the healing process all over again.

Another trauma will most likely cause permanent damage to the brain, even death. Knowing this will make anyone fear getting out of bed in the morning. One can get into a car accident, one can fall down the stairs, one can get pushed around in the crowded hallway, and, I haven't even mentioned playing hockey yet. All of this syncopation would give anyone enough mental torture for a second concussion!

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it," said Nelson Mandela once. I realized that I would never get better if I stayed in this ruminating circuit. Just like a depressing minor tune. A jazz vamp created by me. My own musical melody that keeps repeating itself without anyone courageous enough to stop it. I desperately needed to end this tune.

Going back to the accident, it changes your life by teaching you things you would never know otherwise. Only you can make this change to be positive or negative, both ways, during your journey through life. With your new knowledge, you can adapt your laws of life to cope with the changes. My sad melody with its coda and jazz vamp could finally be "AL FINE" (or "all fine")!

Using courage, I get out of bed and I walk to my window, because only in the darkness I can see the stars, briefly forgetting my injury and keep on going with my life. Leave everything behind, and keep moving forward, until I fall again. Both mentally and physically, I get up.

Does a person with brain damage know that she has brain damage? Back to worries. Give up or keep on going? Not again! But I am the conductor of my life. This time I know I can stop my own vamp. My adapted law of life now is "Seize the day – Carpe Diem." Horace figured it out, so have I. Maybe he had a concussion too...

## Bittersweet Sugar

By Amelia Lawver, Grade 10

*Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial, Lake Crystal*

Bravery isn't just reserved for humans. There are many stories of people's cats saving them from carbon-monoxide or dogs saving their owners from bears, but my story is a much simpler one. A story of a white mutt named Sugar demonstrating joy and love despite the odds.

She was just a cute, normal, white little puppy, with a brown, heart shaped spot on her back when I first met her. How could an animal loving, twelve-year-old girl resist rescuing such an adorable puppy from a shelter?

She came with us in the car and my mom suggested the name Sugar. I fell in love with the name, and from then on that's what we called her. The only problem with the name is that my grandma liked to use it as a replacement swear word when something went wrong. We joked about how if grandma used the word anymore the puppy would come running over and jump on her! She didn't like that.

As I grew older, so did Sugar. About a year after running around the farm, chasing cats and digging up flower beds, we discovered a swollen bone in Sugar's back leg. She was fine for a couple of weeks, but soon she couldn't use it anymore and was limping around the farm. Despite the extreme pain she was in, she would cuddle up to you if you were crying and always pay attention to you first before herself.

After many visits to the vet we had two options, amputate her back leg or put her to sleep. We looked at Sugar's sweet face, with all its love and decided she still had life in her eyes. The vet amputated her leg and after much TLC, she made a full recovery.

Sugar was just as she had been before except instead of four legs, she had three. Running and jumping over snow piles, chasing behind the snowmobiles, and cuddling up with the cats. I was so happy with the decision we had made. That year at the county fair, Sugar and I received grand champion at the annual dog show. Sugar had overcome her hardships and had joy in her eyes just as before.

Unfortunately, our happiness did not last long. A year after Sugar's amputation we noticed she was having some stomach pain and her stomach was hard to the touch. It felt like stone, and you could see the pain had returned to her eyes as much as she tried to cover it up.

We visited the vet and after a couple weeks of trying different medicines, we determined that whatever was in Sugar's leg the year before had returned in her stomach. Despite her pain she still showed joy and tried to participate in all the activities she normally did. She always noticed when we were crying and would hobble over and cuddle with us.

In the end, we decided that Sugar was in so much pain it would be better to put her to sleep. She showed us love up until her last moments and I will never forget how much joy, love, and bravery she showed us in her life. She gave us an example to follow, to be kind, think of others first, and never let obstacles get in the way of enjoying the life you have been given.

## The Day the Earth Shook

By Amelia Lawver, Grade 10

*Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial, Lake Crystal*

On May 12, 2008 a trembling experience changed my life. I was a mere five years old when the Sichuan Earthquake of 2008 rocked my building and my future. I was sitting with my siblings in the living room when my mom yelled at us to get under the table. I was unaware of what was happening and listened to what she said. In about 20 seconds my mother, two siblings, and I were huddled underneath the dining room table while a 7.9 magnitude earthquake shook our eleven-story apartment building back and forth.

It was like our building was a piece of jello being shaken on a plate by a four-year-old on a hot summer day. My mother cradled us three children and prayed over us, that we would be spared and protected by the Lord. My younger sister and I were crying hysterically, and ironically my brother was screaming at the building to stop shaking

with all the bravery and confidence that he could muster. He truly believed he could control a natural disaster.

After two minutes of petrifying shaking, the initial earthquake was over. The building was still standing. My mother had no idea how long it would stay that way. The building could give way in a matter of minutes and everything inside would be crushed, including us.

My siblings and I started to put our shoes on, but mom decided we were too slow. She whisked us out the door and we started our descent down 11 flights of stairs barefoot. The stairs were covered in glass and debris so without shoes, the progress was slow going. My mom had my three-year-old brother and one-year-old sister propped up on her hips when she made the decision to tell me to run ahead without them in case the building collapsed.

I ran into the courtyard and anxiously waited for my mom and siblings to join me. Together we walked to the most open space we could, because if the buildings fell, we wanted to be as far away as possible. All around us, people we knew and didn't know were crying and hugging their loved ones.

As soon as my mother made sure we were okay, she tried to call my dad who was on the other side of the city. She had no luck, as all the phone lines were down and plugged up from everyone in the city of 10 million trying to contact their families to make sure they were alive.

My dad, across the city, was working at his language center when the quake hit. Every day he would ride his bike to work and back, so as soon as the quake was over, he had to try and bike through a city in complete chaos. He saw people everywhere. Hospitals being emptied, patients on beds, cracks in the concrete buildings, and all the intersections were blocked with cars and people. My father was very lucky to be on a bike or else he would have never made it back to us as soon as he did.

We were sitting in the courtyard for about 40 minutes praying with my mom, praying that our dad would be okay. We had no clue if he was alive or if he was killed in the quake. The one thing that I remember very clearly is that our family was oddly at peace and had confidence that the Lord would bring our dad home safe. Most everyone else around us, who didn't know the Lord, didn't seem to have as much peace in their hearts as we did.

Then out of the crowds of people we saw him. Our dad was alive, tired from biking so hard across the city, but alive. He ran to us and picked us three up kids up, and we just hugged for a very long time. Even as a five-year-old, I knew I would never be more grateful than I was in that moment, knowing my entire family was alive.

## Bravery

By Rohan Sharma, Grade 4

Bridges Community School, North Mankato

*This nation will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave – Elmer Davis*

The thought that comes to my mind when we say "bravery" is that of soldiers fighting in the battlefield, facing the enemy with undoubting courage, firefighters fighting a raging fire, or police personnel following hard core criminals. But there is more to bravery than that.

*Bravery is the capacity to perform properly even when scared half to death – Omar N. Bradley*

I love to read, and I realize that everyday acts we perform that may be difficult or dangerous, can be called acts of bravery. For instance, trying to fight back your tears and put up a calm front just before the nurse pokes the needle for the vaccination is also an act of bravery for a nine-year-old!

George Herbert, in his poem *The Pulley*, explains that when God made mankind, He was so happy that He decided to pour all His blessings on His finest creation. One of the first blessings was strength or bravery or courage of mind and spirit. We perform many acts every day and often fail. We make many mistakes. Failure challenges us. We learn to overcome these difficulties with a will to be better every moment. We are brave enough to realize that man



does not fail; it is the ways and means he uses to overcome difficulties that fail. With a strong will he makes other plans and succeeds. This is courage of convictions.

A favorite poem of mine is Casabianca by Felicia Dorothea Hemans. Casabianca was asked by his captain not to leave his post until he was given the order. He stood bravely on the burning deck waiting for his orders. Everyone told him to desert his post, but he gave up his life to fulfill his promise.

The courage of non-violence is really impressive. One has to rise above one's own prejudices and work hard to reach out to the better instincts of our challenger. Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King taught us to love our worst enemy in order to make our opponents think about the right way of conduct.

One of the most difficult things is to fight against our own people. The bravery of Abraham Lincoln and common foot soldiers during the American Civil War is mind boggling. They fought against the concept of slavery. They believed fearlessly in the essential equality of all human beings. They lost their lives to set right the wrong done by their own people.

I salute the pioneering spirit of all the explorers who bravely fought all difficulties, natural and manmade, to find new worlds. Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, Captain James Cook, Vasco da Gama and Neil Armstrong led great expeditions. Columbus was considered mad by his people for propagating the idea that the Earth was round. Their courage, strength and indomitable spirit discovered new worlds.

Mother Teresa and Florence Nightingale are other true examples of bravery. They left their comfortable life and worked for the dignity of the wounded and sick.

How can we forget bravery of the research scholars in various fields? They may fail again and again but never say die. Alva Edison, Marie Curie, Timothy Berners, Stephen Hawking and many more made this world a better place to live. How many challenges they had to face, how many difficulties they overcame, how many times they must have decided to give up, we don't know. What we know is that they defeated their challenges and came out victorious.

Bravery is also the courage of cancer survivors. They face the side effects of cancer treatment with a brave attitude. Their positive thinking helps them become examples to others.

Soldiers who fight in other countries than their own to save the innocent people from injustice are true warriors. To give one's life for the downtrodden and weak is noble to say the least.

We see bravery even in the animal kingdom. A mother deer charges at a predator to save her fawn. A cat or a dog attacks a human or another animal while guarding their offspring. Horses and dogs have given up their own lives to save their masters.

Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita says that the most ferocious battles are fought in our minds. We have evil thoughts which make us do evil things and we have sane thoughts that make us correct our evil thoughts. We are at war with ourselves and it is our soul that guides us through this battle.

In the end, I think all of us are brave enough to wake up every day in the morning and come out of our safe homes to do our duty with determination, courage and hope that we can make a difference.



South Central Service Cooperative  
2075 Lookout Drive  
North Mankato, MN 56003  
[www.mnscsc.org](http://www.mnscsc.org)