

SCHS

THOUGHTWELL

2017

Welcome to the 2017 edition of the SCHS Thoughtwell. This publication has always been a spotlight for the wide variety of talented writers at our school. Two of our entries are by KatieAnne Cullen. In addition to being a talented writer, she also helped edit this year's edition.

It takes courage to write something and share it with the world. You put your thoughts, your words, your emotions on paper, and then willingly distribute them to the rest of the world. You open yourself to criticism, both real and imagined. Writing poetry is exposing your most intimate feelings to the world, and allowing it to judge them. Fiction is just as harsh; you're giving someone the chance to judge your imagination. To write successfully takes talent, time, and patience; but it also takes courage.

At least with poetry and fiction, you can disguise things a bit, by wrapping your feelings in imagery and metaphors, characters and situations that only partly reflect who you are. However, if you're writing nonfiction or academic essays, hiding yourself becomes far more difficult, and the author is put front and center.

This year's edition starts off with three academic essays. Mrs. Stephenson's seniors were asked to define something. What you will find defined are three heart-breaking scenarios that are made all the more real by the detail provided by the authors. They are reminders that while we may know everyone around us, we may never truly know what they are going through. However, if we take a step back and try to envision things from their perspective, we can make things better for everyone. As Harper Lee said (through Atticus Finch): "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

It's time to climb into someone else's skin and walk around for a little bit. Enjoy this year's Thoughtwell!

Sincerely,

Matt Donoho
Thoughtwell
Sponsor

Academic Essays

Racism
By
Zarak Islam

Each and every person has faced or witnessed racism at some point in their lives, whether it be by a first person experience or a form of social media. Racism is defined as the prejudicial treatment of certain races of people. Everyone understands the definition, but most the general population does not understand the feelings behind racism. They don't understand that reactions to racism are not just anger, vandalism, or protest. Racism has an emotional side that can make people feel lost, alone, and afraid for just being themselves.

Why do I feel like an outsider in the country I live? The Constitution that is the law of the land, in which I live, clearly states that the land I live on was made for everybody, and no one has the right to make another feel unwelcome. Despite this, people treat me like I am not human. This treatment isn't always noticeable, because the normality of it has made the public oblivious to it. The act of walking into a restaurant serves as a perfect example. To me, a simple trip out of my house can feel agonizing.

The racism starts when I walk in the door with my family. Immediately, everybody in the restaurant looks up to see who has come in. Their eyes linger on us for what seems like an eternity. They size us up to see what kind strange creature has walked in on their perfect little dinner. They almost act as if they are offended by our presence. Then, we have a short prayer before eating and begin to talk in our native language. They look at us as if we don't belong, like we don't deserve to eat in the same place as they. Situations like these are why people who face racism at a young age feel lost about who they are. Thankfully I grew out of this confusion because of the support system around me and I understand who I am, but others sometimes never do.

Those who lose their identities at a young age then begin to feel alone when they grow

older. Young people don't understand where to turn to, so they dive into their own world. They feel like they do not "fit in" any one group. Adults say these people need to be more social or show interest in activities, but why are they the ones who need to be acting differently? They have their own unique personalities that should not be hindered. Those in authority never encourage others to show an interest in the individuals who are suffering inside. The public needs to come to a realization of the point that those affected by racism may lose their identity. I have a friend who is in his senior year of high school, but aside from this, his situation is completely different from mine. He grew up in southern Illinois just like me. The difference is that he was one of the many young people who lost their way. He has grown up in predominantly white area where he is not sure whether to follow his own beliefs, or be shaped by the ridicule he has witnessed. He has no one to turn to and I sympathize with him because it is not his fault. Try to put into context that my friend is only one example from my personal experiences. The world encompasses thousands of other people just like him who deal with being alone. Try to fathom how many people that is, and then imagine how horrible they feel simply because they have no one to turn to.

The emotion of fear takes precedent over the ones described above. I feel fear everywhere, every time, at every place. The fear and anxiety can sometimes overwhelm me. Every moment I am outside of the comfort zone that my house has become, I am afraid someone will ridicule me for my customs or beliefs. This feeling is different than the ones mentioned because nobody can rise above this feeling. Many people don't understand how I can feel this way about everyone. They say that not everyone is bad. Not everyone wants to maliciously attack other humans. That is easy to say for someone who has never encountered racism in public. The fear of every individual does not stem from some personal vendetta. The fear of every individual comes from not knowing who will lash out. The act of racism is so

demoralizing it makes me want to never step outside. It has happened to me multiple times, but one memory in particular has driven this fear into me. I was on vacation with my parents in New York City. Vacation is a passive time in which people relax and forget about the tensions that surround them. To me, vacation is more time I have to be outside of my house, worrying about attacks from all directions. Up to a point, my trip to New York was like a typical vacation. Then the unexpected happened. A man walked out into the street and started berating my family and me about our religion and where we came from. The experience was horrendous. I could not understand what could make a person do something like this. It was so unexpected that I just was shocked for a few minutes. One second I felt perfectly relaxed and the next I was being ferociously attacked. The moment still sticks with me to this day. The experience constantly reminds me how I never can be sure when the next attack will come.

The dreadful part is that these accounts are completely anecdotal. They are personal stories from the life of just one person. You may have forgotten that these are the feelings of just a single person out of many millions who deal with racism. We can solve this problem only if people understand the feelings that come with racism. It makes a person want to never come out of their house, never associate with anyone, or hate others for how they treat them.

Unconditional Love
By
Kiara McIntosh

Unconditional love is not something that can be defined with a short phrase in a dictionary, hidden by thousands of other words. It is a relatively abstract idea, with an infinite amount of ways to describe it. It cannot be held in the hands of someone who needs it or brought to the lips for a taste. Unconditional love appeals to the five senses in a way that is nothing like the traditional sense of the idea. Unconditional love is something that can be felt deep down in one's soul; it can be heard through the shared conversations between two people; it tastes almost exactly like lemonade on a hot summer day after swimming in the pool. Unconditional love can be an absolutely beautiful feeling, but I promise that's not always the case.

Unconditional love feels like the intense summer heat beating down on me because the windows of the car are rolled up as my mom drives to Wamac to "get medicine." It feels like the scorching leather seat beneath me as I go with her every time anyways because, at 7, I was the only one oblivious enough to the fact that her "medicine" was not medicine at all and instead whatever drug she was choosing that week. It feels like hardwood floors under me instead of a bed while I sleep because we moved, yet again. It feels like emptiness filling the holes in my room as well as my heart because we didn't save enough time to pack all of our belongings. It feels like cold air biting viciously at my bare arms as I walk to school because I missed the bus and don't know how to ask my mom for a ride. It feels like my fist hitting my open hand as I bargain with my sister through a game of Rock Paper Scissors on who was going to wake mom up because our pride had become far less important than the screams we would hear when we entered her room. Unconditional love feels like pain and anger and resentment bottled up with the cap on so tight that none of it can come out.

Unconditional love tastes like chicken, too much chicken, because that is the only thing at Mark's house. For the record, I don't even like chicken. It tastes like nothing, no food, no water because there is nothing in the house and my mom is doing weekends in jail. It tastes like blood pooling in my mouth after being thrown into the wall because our heat is off and I sat in front of the space heater for too long. It tastes like tears instead of pizza because there isn't enough for me and my sisters after my mom's friends have eaten what they want. It is letting my sisters have the last pieces anyways. Unconditional love tastes like only nice words to my mom coming out of my mouth regardless of all of this.

Unconditional love sounds like, "Don't come up here, we are taking care of adult business," and doors locking. It sounds like code words that my mom doesn't know I know for subjects that I certainly shouldn't know about. It sounds like my mom's friend waking her up in the middle of the night asking for drugs. Unconditional love sounds like doors slamming, and people laughing, and my heart thumping into my ears as I whisper to my baby sister, "Snug as a bug in a little tight rug," tucking her in and dreading the day when she would be able to understand what was going on in the room over.

Unconditional love looks like people with caved in cheeks and wired eyes coming in and out of my house and going straight to my mom's room. It looks like the back of my eyelids for 17 hours because I cannot stand the sight of my mom. It looks like all the words I could never say to her, but always wanted to, scribbled on a paper and thrown in the trash. It looks like my mom slumped down in my bathroom floor telling me she loves me but she has to go. It looks like me holding onto her and crying that "No, she can't!" and "I won't let her." It looks like the ground racing closer as I jump off the counter, hoping someone will come help me, hoping I might receive a little attention. It looks like nobody appearing in the doorway to rescue me and my hurt arm. Unconditional love looks like tears and bloodshot eyes and absentee moms, but it

also looks like smiles in family photos so nobody will know what happens when the camera turns off.

Unconditional love smells like propane, which, by the way, gives me an anxiety attack to this day. It smells like the ocean air as the cops quiz me on my mom and her abusive boyfriend. It smells like ammonia and all of the other smells that a 12 year old should never smell. It smells like Shana's home, a safe haven for me when my mom disappeared or went off the deep end. Unconditional love smells like fair food and carnivals that should be happy events but cannot be because my mom is noticeably high in public; it smells like denial and the gym in 7th grade when someone walked right up to me and said, "Isn't your mom on drugs or something?"

Unconditional love is still ten years later holding onto faith that my mom won't relapse. It is holding my crying 38-year old mother while I'm hurting instead of the other way around. It is telling her countless times that I forgive her for something that I'm not even sure I ever hated her for. It is anxiety attacks and depression. It is OCD and PTSD. Unconditional love is putting my mom first even though she never put me first. It is holding back tears and putting on a brave face through it all. It is screaming at the top of my lungs, but only when the house is empty so nobody will hear. Unconditional love is all of these words I never could say finally being said. And finally, unconditional love is knowing, without a doubt in my mind, that I will never let my mom read this essay. Even if, maybe, I think she should.

Regret

By

Zach Consolino

Regret is a feeling that is always in the back of our heads. It can surround someone's thoughts until they're drowning in self-doubt and anxiety. Some experience this more than others, like myself. I live with this feeling more than anyone I know.

Regret is being confined inside your brain because you are too afraid to say you need help. I never told my friends that I started to feel this way. My family invites me to go to eat with them, but I never go. My girlfriend can see that I am not the same, even when I tell her that nothing is wrong. School is a terrible experience filled with hormone-driven teenagers. Depression is what lead me to this never ending cycle of regret, and now I am eighteen and I have more regrets than I have ever had.

Personally, "family" isn't a comfortable word. My mother is much more loving than my father, but I know that they want the best for me. My brothers, who are younger, are eager to play. I brush them off and stay in my room. Right now, they are probably sitting outside wondering why I prefer isolation in my room over sports. And finally, my father. The two of us never really clicked. I consider him one of the main reasons I have been so upset for this long. As a boy, I constantly wanted his approval, and he was not generous. He never took time out of his busy schedule to pay attention to me, and I resent him for it. They do love me though, and I regret pushing them away. Every person deserves a family who loves them, and they should help their child when they are in need. I know that my family would help me if I spoke of my problems, but I never do. I regret this.

Perhaps a happier part of my life is my girlfriend, Jordan. I love absolutely

everything about her, her smile, her beautiful blue eyes, and the dimples that form when she laughs. While I do love these traits, I regret not cherishing the moments I have with her. For so long I have sat next to her in silence, not really contributing to the conversations. When she asks me what is wrong, I just say that I am fine and that she is overthinking it. Every day is the same. We hangout, fight, and I keep all my thoughts to myself. The thoughts of depression creep into my brain as if they are trying to sneak by when I obviously know they're there. She loves me more than I could ever imagine, and yet, I am perplexed by the hesitation I have to speak my mind. I regret this.

When I am not busy avoiding Jordan and all the questions she has, I am keeping an eye out for Jason. He is constantly calling me names, ganging up on me with his friends, and stealing my clothes. I know that he is just having fun and making jokes, but at whose expense? I laugh it off and ask for my belongings, but he doesn't know that I become sick when I think about school. That each time I receive a shoulder bump or glare in the hallway I am reminded why I hate this life and why I want to give up. The overwhelming sense of desperation to feel anything but pain is too much for me, for anyone. I could tell a teacher, a counselor, or even my parents, but I don't. I regret this.


At night, I lay in bed with the door closed and lights off. I bring the covers up and pull the pillows close, knowing full well that there will be no sleep again tonight. The thoughts in my head don't turn off when it's time to sleep. There are no breaks. There is always that voice in my head that tells me to stop cutting, to stop hurting myself and find help, but it is too far to hear. My parents are just across the hall. I know they would hate to see me in this much pain. My mother would cringe if she knew what her baby was thinking all day. My father would tell me to suck it up or forget about it, and that would only add to the insanity. My brothers are downstairs asleep, unbeknownst to

them their older brother is in his room crying his eyes out wondering where everything went wrong. I always wondered if everyone else thought the way I do, but I guess I will never find out. I could call someone or find help, but I don't. I regret this.

One Monday morning my mother came to my room to wake me up as per usual. She greeted me with the same "Get up honey, it's time for school," as she does every school day. Only this time, I did not sluggishly slide out of bed and begin dressing. I lay there--cold, completely still, pale faced. My mother soon realized that I was not waking up, and when she came to check on me, she knew. I did not wake up as she hugged me, slapped me, cried in agonizing sorrow over me. The night prior to my mom finding me, I overdosed on my antidepressants. My dad soon accompanied and did not seem to fully understand what happened. My dad picked up the empty pill bottle and clenched with excruciating pain and remorse. The realization that my parents' first-born is no longer with them trickled into their brains, and they would have to live with my death forever. I regret this.

My funeral was hard on everyone who attended. My decision to end my life affected more people than I thought imaginable. My mom ached in pain. My brothers' eyes swelled with tears. My friends from school all came. I saw all the love and hope there was for me. I realized that Jordan and I will never marry, I'll never have kids, we will never move into an apartment. My brothers will not have an older brother to look up to, to ask for advice on a first date or love. And, they will always remember me as I was in pain and sorrow. My parents will never see their baby boy grow up into an independent, young man. I hurt so many people unintentionally. All of what I regretted when I was alive, I'd never be able to make it right. I regret a lot of decisions in my life, but most of all, I regret this.

Poetry



"Usually, she's the angel and he's the
devil,
But this poem has a twist.
With one look in her eyes,
She'll become the heist of your life.
The devil was once an angel,
That's why you got caught in her storm.
She showed you her halo before her
horns."

- Katie Cullen

"She was a flower, an amaryllis. He swore to the heavens that he loved them. That he loved her. But he was winter. He was cold and horrid, nothing but destruction. He claimed to love her but yet he took her life. He swept it away with each harsh wind. He disheveled all her beautiful petals, the ones she worked so hard for. She grew morbid. The only part of her that remained were her roots. Winter eventually left. When he did, she transformed again. She was afraid it was going to be more devastating than he was. But she had nothing to fear. She grew strong again. Her petals bloomed beautifully. They were more extravagant than before. She then realized that sometimes, things must destroy us, in order for us to start again and grow stronger than before."

- Katie Cullen

The following two poems are inspired by Walt Whitman's classic "I Hear America Singing." Juniors study this poem, and then write what they hear of their America singing.

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
The singing of the birds in the tree tops
The leaves rattling back and forth
The tractor cutting down the crops
Parents talking back and forth
The tv playing movies
The animals ballin for feed
The cars driving on the road
Students talking down the hallways
Teachers teaching the class
Workers working hard

-Andrew Inlow

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear.

The padding of a toddler singing as they learn to take their first steps.

The beating of a 7 year old singing as they run to get the ball.

The tapping of teenagers singing as they get absorbed in their phones.

The singing of the music as those newly 21 year olds party legally for the first time.

The sound of working hands cracking singing as the teenagers parents finally start to grow up.

Newly grandparents singing with elation and love.

The squeezing of wheels singing as the nursing homes finally go to bed.

I hear the singing of everyone's hearts beating vibrantly, and harmoniously.

And then I hear the silence singing, as they lay the dead to bed.

-Diamond Phillips

loving you was like falling in love with a new season. it started out as
spring where everything

was new and our hearts would blossom like the flowers from the fresh
rain. it took time to grow

into something better. realizing that i was in love with you was like
summer. everything was

passionate and refreshing like when you'd take a dive into the pool on a
scorching hot day.

looking at you was like gazing at the stars. my eyes would get lost in
yours trying to find the same

constellations i once found in the night sky. having doubts was like the
transition into fall.

everything started to change, and the bright warm colors that once
described our moods turned

dull like the leaves that fell from the trees. we became distant and the
warmth between us

eventually left. and the cold air came and brought winter upon us. the
frigid breeze blew away

the thought of us and all of a sudden i was alone in the falling snow with
only the memories of us

for my shaking hands to hold on to.

-Jennifer Hays

You

By: Tiarra Kincheloe

When I see you,
My heart sings.
When I see you,
You give my heart wings.
Every time I hear your voice,
I fall to pieces.
Cuz when I'm with you,
You're all of my completions.
I love you so.
To the moon.
And in the ocean far below.
No one can compare to what I feel now.
Cuz baby.
We're meant to be until the last bow.

Therians

By: *Tiarra Kincheloe*

We hold our heads high.
Nothing can take away our pride.
We are not to be feared.
We are who we are.
And it won't change.
Whether we run in packs,
Or we stand alone,
We are who we are.
Not to be feared.
We are
Therians.



Wolf Therians

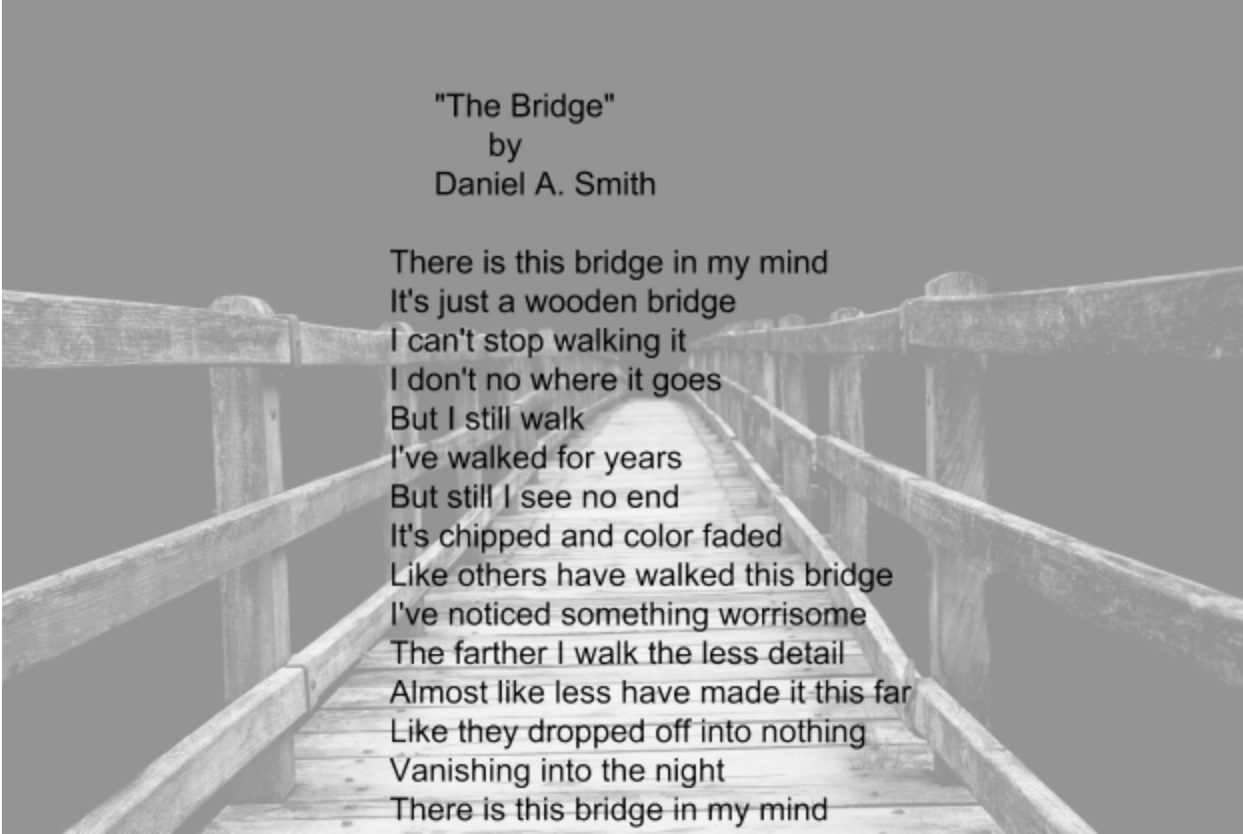
By: *Tiarra Kincheloe*

We are who we are
In a pack
From afar.
We are one
Having fun
Under the sun.
With our heads held high,
We let out a cry
To another pack,
With another try.
We join each other
Sister and brother.
We run together,
Through the woods,
Running away from reality,
Towards all of the goods.
We are all for one track,
One family.
One pack.
We are who we are.
Therians are back.
Not to be feared.
We are who we are.
Therians are back.

FORGET IT ALL

By: *Tiarra Kincheloe*

A happy, kind girl she was.
Never thought of anything bad.
Never thought of harm, sadness, or depression.
But that changed the moment he had broken up with her
The one who was always playing girls.
*He told her how **fat** he thought she was.*
She *hated* him.
She went five years in depression...
But then He came along..
Him.
The boy that was said to have dominated many football games.
The one she could talk to freely without a thought about it.
She told him everything *He* had done.
The hurt.
Guilt.
Pain.
Depression.
Everything He'd done to her.
He hugged her.
"Forget it all.."
He said,
The words like nothing she'd ever heard before.
"Forget it all.."
He repeated.
She lived with happiness as soon as she heard those words.
She lived with a knowing that *He* would never hurt her again..
And that He would be caring forever.



"The Bridge"
by
Daniel A. Smith

There is this bridge in my mind
It's just a wooden bridge
I can't stop walking it
I don't no where it goes
But I still walk
I've walked for years
But still I see no end
It's chipped and color faded
Like others have walked this bridge
I've noticed something worrisome
The farther I walk the less detail
Almost like less have made it this far
Like they dropped off into nothing
Vanishing into the night
There is this bridge in my mind

"True Beauty"
by
Daniel A. Smith

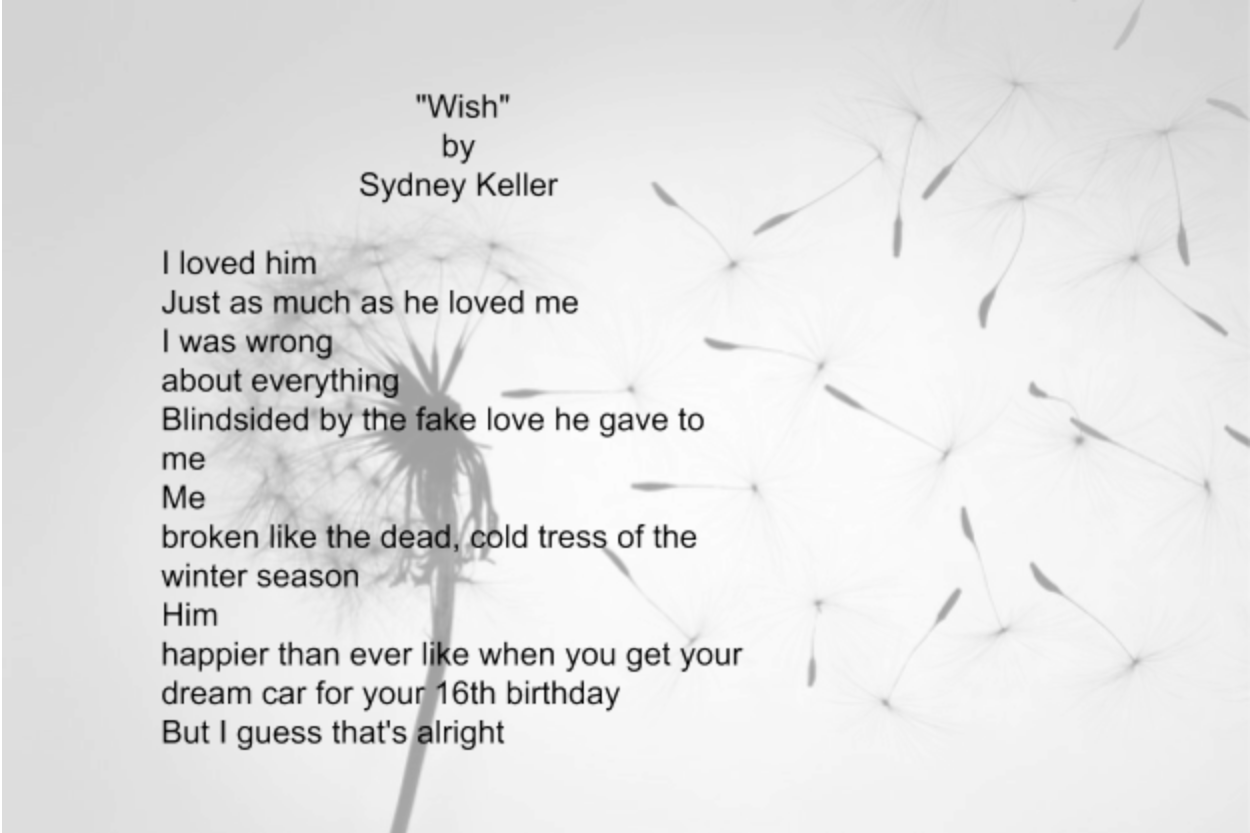
Her beauty wasn't decided by how
she looked
Not by her figure
Not by how much makeup she put
on her face
Not by what she wore or how her
hair looked
But it's decided by her eyes
Because they are a doorway
That leads to her heart
Where her true beauty hides
Like a sunrise on a dark night
Her beauty shines
even if unnoticed by those around
Her greatest feature lies unseen
untouched by sins of this
generation
The most pure feature isn't easily
changed by worldly views
That's why eyes are the most
beautiful thing on a women



Hatred that Runs Deep

BRANDON
BRAGG

The hatred most have is an unbelievable feel
Though I may not think it is real
Hate runs deep through the veins
As it causes many different pains
The lives it devours, as it strives for many hours
Like a stinging bee
It will badly hurt thee
Hatred will corrupt my life goal
It can and will take its toll
Hate will put down its wrath
If I happen to follow its path
Why hold in hate?
It will choose my fate



"Wish"
by
Sydney Keller

I loved him
Just as much as he loved me
I was wrong
about everything
Blindsided by the fake love he gave to
me
Me
broken like the dead, cold tress of the
winter season
Him
happier than ever like when you get your
dream car for your 16th birthday
But I guess that's alright

Bullet
by
Payne Barbee

"I'd take a bullet for you,"
Like that's easy to do.
Would someone take one for you?
Will they make a sacrifice,
When the pressure's as tight as a vice?
We hope no one will say "prove it"
So we won't have to do it.
But for you,
My friend,
I really would.
If the time arose,
You, death chose,
I would offer myself,
Rather than be put on a shelf,
For someone else to take.
If I die, you stay awake.
Until night.
When I have already given myself.
The darkness will hold you tight.
But do not worry,
My friend, for that shadow is me.
And together, we will be free.



Short

fiction

A short story excerpt

by

Tiarra Kincheloe

Axel was a happy child, always smiling and enjoying life. Sitting in the living room one day, he played with his toy cars. He could hear his mom and dad fighting in the kitchen.

"The bills *aren't* paid, Kaitlyn!" His father yelled, obviously angry and frustrated. "Without jobs, we *can't* feed Axel! We barely even eat *ourselves*, Dakota!" His mother yelled back. Axel sighed and played with his cars. He tried not to listen in on their conversation. He made car noises with his car.

His mother walked into the living room with tears streaming down her face. "Could you go get shoes on, sweetie." She asked softly.

Axel nodded and left his cars, going to his room to get his shoes on. He sat on his bed and tied his tennis shoes, going back downstairs to his mom. His dad stood at the door, holding the car keys. He took his mother's hand and walked with her to the car, confused. He stayed silent. He got in and bucked up, his mom shutting the door.

His mom got in the passenger seat and buckled up, his father getting in the driver seat and buckling, starting the car. His father pulled out of the driveway and drove, staying silent.

"Momma.. Where are we going?" Axel asked softly.

His mom stayed silent, tears streaming down her face. "Axel.. Sweetheart.. Please try to understand.." She said as they pulled into the parking lot of the local orphanage. His parents got out of the car, his father coming around to get Axel out. He opened the door.

Axel's eyes widened, tears welling up in his eyes. "Wha... Momma.. Why." He asked in a whisper, tears streaming down his face. He unbuckled and backed up, not wanting to go. His father sighed and gently reached in, grabbing him. He pulled him out and held him close. "Axel.. Bud, stop.. Please." He said softly, trying to hide his tears.

"No! How could you?!" Axel yelled, struggling.

His mom turned away, getting back in the car. She cried. His father carried him into the orphanage and set him down in front of the nun at the front desk, holding his crying son close.

"Name please?" She asked in a sweet, gentle voice.

"Axel Bern McCarthy." His father said. She nodded and typed it into the computer. "Dorm 152. Sister Martha will show you your roommate and your dorm.." She said and smiled gently, a young nun coming up to them. "Please follow me.." She said and smiled softly, leading them to Axel's dorm.

Axel cried, upset and hurt that his parents would do that.

His father carried him and followed Sister Martha.

Sister Martha stopped at the end of the hallway and turned to them, smiling softly. "This is your dorm. Your roommate is very nice.. Daniel is a bit shy and doesn't

talk, but he is very sweet and kind.." She said. "He can be a bit stubborn at first.. He'll soften up once he gets to know you better.."

His father set him down, kneeling down until he was eye level. "Me and mommy are going to need you to be a big boy until we can get enough money.. Can you be brave and strong for us?" He asked softly.

Axel nodded a bit and sniffled, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"That's my brave soldier.. We'll be back before you know it.. We love you, Axel.."
He said, gently wiping his tears away.

Axel hugged him. "I love you, daddy.. I love mommy too.." He said quietly, sniffling.

His father kissed his head and let him go, standing. He left.

Axel looked down held back tears, trying to be brave and strong like his father said. He looked up at Sister Martha when he heard a soft bell ring through the orphanage.

Sister Martha gently took his hand. "It's the supper bell. Wanna go and eat something?" She asked softly,, her smile sweet and gentle.He nodded softly, holding her hand.She led him to the mess hall for supper, smiling softly.

"What's your favorite color, Axel?" Sister Martha asked softly.

"Blue.." He said softly, walking with her. "What about you?"

"Mine lavender.." She said and smiled. She walked into the mess hall and smiled softly, a place already set for him at the table. She led him to his seat and pulled the chair out for him, smiling softly.

"Thank you.." He said softly, sitting down.

She smiled and scooted him in. "You're welcome.." She said and smiled. She went to go get the food to serve as kids filed in, each one taking their seats at their spot.

>>after supper<<

Sister Martha led Axel to his dorm again, smiling softly. Axel walked with her, holding her hand.

Sister Martha stopped at his door and opened it for him, smiling softly. "Lights out at 7:45.." She said.. "Daniel will be here in a few minutes." She said and left.

Axel nodded and went in, shutting the door behind him. He looked around the room. The beds were on opposite sides of the room, each of them having white sheets, sky blue comforters, a power blue pillow, and an extra blanket at the foot of the bed. The floor was a soft, beige carpet. There were clothes in a closet, two racks holding the clothes, one for Daniel and one for him. He jumped when he heard the door open and shut. He looked at the boy.

He had feathery and soft, but shaggy, blonde hair, apart of his hair covering a part of his bright green eyes. He had softly tanned skin and a few freckles around his face.

The boy blinked. "Who are you?" He asked, curious and a bit confused.

"I'm Axel. I got here before supper.. Sister Martha said this was my dorm.. Are you Daniel?" He asked softly.

The boy nodded and went to the bed on the right, taking his shoes off and putting them aside. He sat on his bed and looked at him. "Your bed is the other one.. My clothes are on the top rack.." He said quietly.

Axel nodded and sat on his own bed, taking his shoes off. "Okay.. Thank you.."
He said softly.

Daniel just nodded and got up, getting his pajamas on.

Axel looked at his rack of clothes, getting a pair of pajamas and putting them on. He went back to his bed and lay down.

>>a few weeks later<<

Axel and Daniel had become friends the second day Axel was there. He played with some cars with Daniel, smiling a bit. They raced the little toy cars around, smiling. Sister Martha came up to them.

"Er.. Excuse me.." She said softly. Axel and Daniel stopped and looked at her. "May I borrow Axel for a moment?" She asked. Axel nodded and Daniel went back to playing.

Sister Martha led Axel a few feet away from the rest of the kids, stopping by the far wall. "Axel.. I need to tell you something.." She said softly, hurt and sorrow in her eyes.

Axel looked at her, confused. "What's wrong? Is it mommy and daddy coming?" He asked softly.

Sister Martha looked at him and hold back tears, hurting when she saw how excited he was when he asked about his parents. "No, sweetie.. You mommy and daddy..aren't coming.." She said quietly, a tear slipping down her face. "They died in a car accident.."

Axel looked at her with wide eyes, tears streaming down his face. "I don't believe you!" He shrieked, crying.Sister Martha watched him, trying to hold back tears.Daniel looked up at them, seeing Axel crying. He stood and left the toy cars, going to him. He hugged him, trying to calm him down. "It's okay.." He said softly.

Axel cried, upset.

Axel couldn't believe his parents were gone. He didn't want to. He didn't want to hear the words again.

Daniel held him. "I'll take Axel to the room.." He said softly to Sister Martha.Sister Martha nodded softly. "Be back for supper.." She said softly and stood, leaving.

Daniel gently led Axel their dorm, holding him close. He opened the door and went in with him, shutting the door behind him. He hugged him. "It'll be okay.." He said softly.

Axel cried. "How could they do this to me?" He sobbed, upset.

"It was an accident.. It wasn't meant to happen.." Daniel soothed, rubbing his back and holding him close. "My parents gave me here when I was only two years old.. You had more time with them than I did.. My parents didn't want me anymore.." He said softly.

Axel sniffled and looked at him, tears glistening in his eyes. "You were that bad?" He asked quietly.

Daniel nodded and smiled. "I was *horrible*.." He said and smiled, looking at him.

Axel smiled a bit, letting out a giggle. "Daniel was bad.." He said and giggled, smiling wider.

Daniel smiled. "I was so bad that I should-" He was interrupted by a loud bang and then screaming. He looked at the door, holding Axel. He silently got a backpack out and put food, clothes, a small first aid kit, and some water in the backpack. He put his shoes on, silently instructing Axel to do the same as he heard more bangs and screams.

Axel trembled in fear, putting his shoes on and tying them up. Daniel stood and grabbed Axel's hand, running to the window. He unlocked it and opened the window, going out the window. He held his hands out to help Axel out, lifting him out of the window and setting him down. He grabbed his hand and ran towards the cover of the forest surrounding the orphanage.

Axel ran with him, afraid. He didn't want to look back, afraid of tripping and falling if he did. He ran.

Daniel ran through the trees, taking Axel with him.

The bangs and screams died away as they went deeper into the forest, away from another human being.

Cabhan's Story
by
Lyndsey Easley

This story starts with a young dragon named Cabhan. Cabhan was a black dragon with cyan wings, cyan spikes towards the bottom of his body going down his bright cyan tail. His eyes were a bright oceanic blue with sharp white teeth. Scales as large as large as basketballs.

Cabhan lived in a cave above the clouds on a mountain. The mountains dark with smog and black as a starless night sky. The sun never showed; just grey and blackness all around him. Cabhan was out run from the herb; being known as a rogue dragon. He was kicked out for

helping animals too much. He never wanted to hurt or kill, in fact, he was a vegetarian!

Cabhan sat at the edge of his cave, wings tucked and looking around the darkness around him. He slowly stood and opened his wings, flying down to the sunshine and green grass. He landed by a raspberry bush and started to munch on raspberries, the bush gone

within a few minutes.

A small duckling watched the large dragon, brown eyes gleaming with curiosity. The duckling waddled over. "Quack!" She meekly said, Cabhan looked down at the duckling.

"Shoo! Go back to your mother, duckling." Cabhan hissed, the duckling watched him, quacking to Annoy him. Cabhan huffed, pushing

the duckling away. The duckling kept bothering him till he gave up.

"Fine!! What's your name?" He asked.

"My name is Allis." She said, he blinked, watching the small duck. The dragon huffed.

"I'm Cabhan. Where are your parents?" Cabhan Asked.

"My parents were killed by poachers." She said sadly, he watched her, sad now.

"I'm sorry young one. Can you take care of yourself?" He asked, the duckling looked down. She shook her head 'no'. He was shocked, but yet, not. She was young, maybe still after a few days of Hatching.

"Well.... I guess, I can care for you." He said, Cabhan carried her back to his cave. Allis was a bit scared of where he lived at first, but once she saw his spacious cave and large moss bed, her small tail wagged. Cabhan made a small moss bed for her and fed her.

After a few years, Cabhan felt like a father for Allis, he taught her to fly and get her own food and how a proper duck swims. Cabhan was growing old. He couldn't see properly and smell right. His flying was off also. Allis was worried for Cabhan. One day the two were out flying, Allis guiding him through the air. A hunter watched.

"What a great kill!" He said to himself, getting his gun ready and

aiming.

Two shots were fired, the duck and the dragon fell to the ground. Allis crawled over to Cabhan, scared. "I'm scared, Cabhan.."
She breathed, Cabhan looked at her. "We belong to the sky young one...." He whispered, their breathing stopped and their eyes closed.
The hunter, content with his kill, but two lives lost.

The End

Short fiction excerpt
by
Brooke Hays

Her mother stood beside her wearing a smile, genuinely happy, instead of all those times she had plastered faux elation onto her face to save her daughter from the depression and bleakness of the working world. Her mother regularly scavenged the streets of the higher-classed citizens for housework. They reluctantly hired her to take care of the errands, and ended up paying her far below the wages she deserved. You can't really blame them though, since everyone in this rugged society was barely scraping by at it is, and her family just happened to have found their spot at the bottom of the food chain. Her father disappeared one day while he was working out in the orchards of their rural village, and never returned to their home. Some of his fellow workers said that he was killed by the Overseers, others claimed that he managed to escape into the woods, or that he was taken.

All three options seemed unfathomable for her. Her father was not a fighter. He didn't have a wisp of rebellion in him, so why would the Overseers choose to do away with him? He was well-built, yes, and a hard worker who never complained about the labor. If they truly wanted the job done, then they wouldn't choose such a good man to bring out of the line of workers.

Escaping to the forest was out of the question. Period. She didn't even consider it. Her father may have worked in the orchards, but he had no idea how to care for himself out in the wild. He couldn't tell poisonous plants from harmless ones, and he was so kind that he wouldn't be able to kill an animal if it tried to attack him. He had too big of a heart. And with the threat of contaminated water, in all honesty, he wouldn't last two weeks out there.

It's true that they will occasionally take elders or middle-aged men and women, but the occurrence is very rare. The Overseers' main choice of prey are young adults and children. They take at random and bring them back to wherever it is they hide. No one knows where they reside or what they do to those they take, but one can assume that it isn't quite pleasant.

The girl snapped out of her thoughts just as her mother and younger brother of only seven years of age finish the birthday song they were singing. They can't afford a cake, so they lit a match and put it on a loaf of bread. She had survived seventeen years in this barbaric society. The age to be taken usually topped out around twenty-three, so if she could only make it through these last few years, she would have a significantly higher chance of having a long life. She hugged her brother and mother in thanks, and went in with the small celebration.

Once the sun started to set the small family of three made their way outside to see the stars slowly arrive for the night shift in the sky. The clouds were tinted an angry red, as if they knew trouble was nigh. Aircraft flooded the evening sky and nets started capturing adolescents off the ground and hoisting them into the air. It was like shooting fish in a barrel, the Overseers didn't have to search much to find a child to take. They wouldn't have the luxury to ride in the aircraft either, oh no. They simply dangled in the air, suspended under the craft, secure in their makeshift prisons.

She looked up and saw one coming straight for her. She pushed her brother and mother out of reach and started to flee, but soon found herself tangled in the mesh of rope. Slowly, she was lifted off the ground and flown away, with the image of her mother clutching her brother and sobbing burned into her brain before she blacked out.

The

End