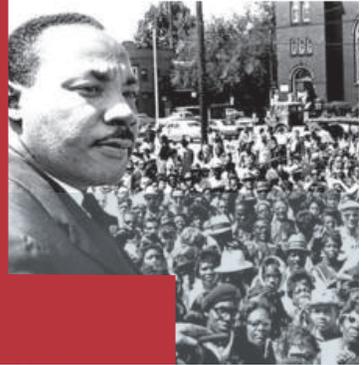
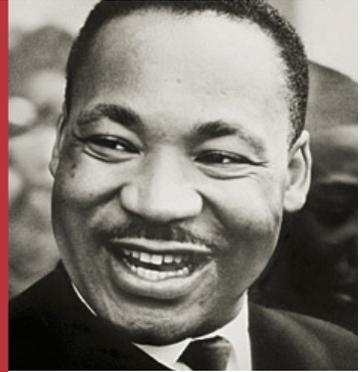


JANUARY 20, 2014



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DAY 2014

HONORABLE MENTIONS

THE TIME IS ALWAYS RIGHT TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT

Writing Awards Honorable Mentions

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

JANUARY 20, 2014

*Celebrating Excellence in Creative Writing and
the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Carnegie Mellon University

College

Honorable Mentions

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"DJ and I" by Sidharth S. Bhadauria

"My Ancestry, Rooted Under Occupied Soils" by Hadeel Salameh

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College

Cruel Irony

by Karen Ngyen | Carnegie Mellon University

I wish I could just peel my skin off.

Black, white, tan, blemished, scarred, smooth, fair... everything we are seems to be based on this shell. Even though like the shell of a piece of candy, an m&m, our sweetness is not in the shell, it's inside.

Bombarded by the world of what is the ideal beauty, I'm pretty sure I had a clear idea of what was beautiful from an early age. Snow White, of course. Cinderella. Sleeping Beauty. (I mean she was called Sleeping Beauty). Fair skin like Snow White, clear eyes like Cinderella and silky hair like Sleeping Beauty. It was clear as day.

September was in passing and I was in the fourth grade. We practiced multiplication, picked out chapter books from the library and spent recess chasing each other between swing sets and slides. Our shoes filled with wood chips and pants always a stained mess of dirt and grass. That was the innocence of childhood I remember. It was on a cloudy, gray day though. We were headed outside for our daily break when Sam confronted me.

He stared at me, with his head turned sideways for a moment, eyes squinting as if he was concentrating really hard.

"You know, I can't really tell what you are." His voice was tinged with iron.

"What do you mean what I am?" I was honestly confused at the time.

"You know, like where you came from," he insisted. "Are you Chinese?"

"I came from here," I firmly stated. "And I am not Chinese."

"Oh, well, I can't tell Asians apart. They're basically all the same anyway. I mean you just look Chinese because all Asians look the same, you know?"

No, Sam. I really don't know.

Sam's words could've been easy to simply forget, but I just couldn't. I began to scrutinize myself more closely. My black hair, my Asian features and dark eyes...was I just a similar reflection of millions of people out there? Could my reflection be as easily replaced by another person? From that day, I desperately strove to stand out and somehow prove to people that I was different from just another "Asian."

However, it became easy to grow resentful and pained. I was ashamed of myself and my Vietnamese heritage, as I drew deeper within my shell. I started hiding behind thick

sweatshirts. Even in the sweltering heat, sweatshirts would wrap all of my shame, and embarrassment and self-consciousness within. I brushed my hair over my face to hide. Black bangs would shield my eyes. I avoided mirrors. I didn't think I was beautiful. How could I be? Beauty is standing out, not looking like me, I thought.

It's funny because I couldn't even foresee the revelation I would soon experience.

It was warm. It always was. Palm trees swaying in the breeze an ocean away and of another time far different from my own. Her hair was light brown, the color of warm caramel, her skin clear and fair as porcelain. She stood apart from others. And that's exactly what she despised most about herself.

In Vietnam, a different standard of beauty was prized. In a country that was made up of homogeneity in features, a half-Caucasian with striking, light hair among bobbing heads of onyx would be shunned. And shunned she was.

They told her she was abnormal. Weird. Ugly. Society pointed the finger in her face. What you need to look like is like everyone else. Your face, your skin does not fit our beauty.

She was ostracized at school ever since the day she walked in. Ever since she was born. People shook their head at her down streets. People stared and whispered. Everyday of her life, like an item on display, a caged bird, people couldn't see past her shell to see her heart.

The girl would scrutinize her appearance, wondering why she was born this way. Despising her differences from everyone else, all she wanted was to be the same. She would dye her hair black to get rid of the lightness of it, only to have it turn an inky blue that clung stubbornly to her scalp. She would try to hide underneath oversized hats. She would shrink into herself, and it grew easy to become resentful and pained.

Ostracized, pointed at, glared at, laughed at, all because she looked different from the standard. Because she grew up half-Caucasian in an Asian country. She suffered. She felt ashamed. She felt a clinging resentment against her own reflection.

And she is my mother.

When my mom told me the stories of her life as a young, mixed girl in Vietnam, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that someone with her features could be shunned to the fringes of society.

"Black hair like yours is treasured in Vietnam," she told me.

However, I felt ashamed of the way I looked, my similarity towards other Asians, my features... I didn't want to look the same. I just wanted to feel different and unique, while all my mother wanted to feel was accepted by kids at school. All she wanted was to have darker hair like everyone else. Maybe that would stop the bullying. Maybe then she would feel less alone.

Her brown eyes brimmed with soft tears, as she held my hand tightly between hers. Her hands enwrapping mine like hot clods of baked clay."It's funny because I speak Vietnamese. I

gave everyone the right to trudge all over me, to rip me to pieces and treat me scornfully, like an oddity rather than a person."

My mother's story resonated through me. It invigorated me. I thought about how many times people on the street would never consider her Asian because she just didn't look it. I thought about how so many people saw past me as just another "Chinese" girl in a sea of other Asians without trying to dig deeper in than my shell. My mom's story didn't inspire me to be proud of the way I looked simply because my own features were the very features she desired so much. That was not why I am proud.

People had decided who we were. We didn't have a choice.

But now, I choose.

The clouds of that day in fourth grade cleared. And the floodgates broke through to release brilliant rays of sunlight onto my own outlook on life. I choose to be proud of myself regardless of how I don't fit in with the ideal. We shouldn't feel defined to live our lives chasing after the elusive approval of others. We shouldn't have to live each and every day seeking to prove our uniqueness to someone else. We shouldn't have to look in a mirror and be ashamed of what we see reflected back, whether in our face, our hair, our eyes, our race.

As a society, we have defined each other. And hurt each other. And bound each other with our words, our stereotypes.

How ridiculous.

I hope that in the future, we can reach a day where we realize how pointless separation by races was and is. I hope one day, we can look back at discrimination and segregation and hatred against one another and just laugh...Laugh and say, "How silly people used to be."

College Honorable Mention

DJ and I

by Sidharth S. Bhadauria

Education is the most important thing there is, a window to understanding the world that should transcend cultural differences. However, there's a certain paradox to teaching someone of a certain background, which I never appreciated until I came across it myself. Consider a person who has a distrust of authority. He's paired with a youth his own age who is supposed to be his mentor. He sees another kid his own age trying to serve as an authority figure, and he will not allow himself to submit to such a pecking order when he fails to accept adult authority either. A paradox that prevents you from reaching him because these two things can't exist at once: authority and peer mentoring. You can't teach him without seeming to be in a position of authority, and he won't accept a peer mentor or learn unless you aren't. The solution is a complex, but an essential one—born out of love and understanding, and most importantly, mutual respect.

The first day on the job was the worst. The assignment paper I received told me his name was DJ, and gave me a profile picture. In the picture, DJ was black, with very short hair, and I could tell he was wearing a white tank-top and a simple earring on his left ear. He was staring at the camera with a steeled expression. I looked up from the paper to DJ multiple times—the photo was pretty accurate, he was giving me the same intimidating glare he gave to the camera. I awkwardly looked around. Man, I hated this room. Its cracked and peeling walls were all white, and the only things in the room were a solid steel table and a harsh overhead light. I wasn't trying to interrogate the kid; I just wanted to mentor him a little. Now, the room added to the feel that I was the one who was being interrogated. I looked down at the picture and then back at DJ. The glare was still there. "Sooo... Umm. Let's get started. Got any homework?" I began, trying to avoid that glare.

"Nope."

"How do you not have any homework?"

He intensified his glare, "Teachers don't give me any." I looked back at his profile and flipped to the second page. His schedule was downright pathetic. He was in his sophomore year and he was in some unnamed Tech Prep math class, matching his English class. Biomedical Science was next, an elective, not a real science course. The rest were electives such as keyboarding. I didn't try to feign surprise; I knew it was going to be like this. This is the whole reason I signed up in the first place.

"Hey. DJ. We gotta talk about your course load here. You're not learning anything."

"Let me ask you a question first."

"All right. Sure."

"Are you paid to do this?" he asked seriously.

I quietly replied.

He then gruffly queried, "Do they give you anything?"

I shrugged a "no." DJ scoffed. He had a cagey smile as he mockingly inquired why I bothered donating my time. I thought about it for a while and responded with a straight face.

"Because I have to."

"No one would care or know if you didn't. I wouldn't."

"I would."

DJ leaned back in his chair, looking at the dark corner of the room. I wondered if I had passed the test. Suddenly, DJ leaned forward in his chair and smiled at me.

"Well, it's time to go outside for break."

I glanced at my watch. He was right. I couldn't believe I fell for that, it's not like these kids have too little time in the class room anyway. As he was opening the decaying wooden door to go outside, I flashed him a glance and said, "Fool me once." He just smiled in return and walked out of the door.

I followed him, holding my hand up to block the intense glare of the sun. The first thing I saw looked like a cracked, gray concrete pathway leading to an old concrete area with two half-broken basketball goals. The concrete area was encircled with a chain link fence, and to the right, a small, rusted playground and a swampy, wet playground resided. Along the pathway, a white, peeling shed with a bunch of bicycles in it, some of them plain, some of them broken, some of them shiny and colorful, lay on top of the sparse grass. I followed DJ to the concrete area; we were the only ones out here since the others had gone on a trip to the zoo. He took a faded basketball out of a gray bin of various playthings and began bouncing it. I took out a ball too. Basketball was never my forte; I would have preferred playing catch with a football, but maybe I'd get some one on one time with him this way. According to his file, he was on probation for possession of marijuana. I thought I was going to approach the topic lightly, but I surprised myself.

"Why do you smoke?"

DJ paused in the middle of lining up his shot. He then shot it, nothing but net. "You wouldn't understand."

"I might."

"Nah. You ain't got nothin' to run from." DJ retrieved the ball, and shot again. Bank off of the rim. I took a shot too. My ball passed under the rim.

"Well, when I feel like I do, I can watch a movie, or read, or play a video game. Like most people."

"Most people you know. Where am I gonna get video games? The movies they have here are for little kids. I hate reading."

"What about art?" I said, remembering the transcript. "You into that stuff?"

"Yeah."

"So?"

"I can't draw."

"How it looks doesn't really matter..."

"No man, I can't draw. Every time I try, I can't. Don't know what to draw. It's like some kind of flurry, and it makes me angry. The only time I can really draw is when..."
He didn't finish. I didn't need him to. It was hot out here, the air started to wave above the black concrete. I sat down on the wooden bench inside the concrete area. DJ seemed to be completely focused on the hoop.

"You know, I've always wondered how social life works at the home. Are you allowed to have visitors besides mentors inside the actual building? Can you go to someone else's house?"

"I don't really have a social life."

For some reason, this surprised me. "Why not?"

DJ caught the rebound and turned to face me, ball on his hip. "To be honest, it's cause people don't like how I am. They say I'm too blunt. My teacher says I have no 'filter' between my brain and my mouth. Really, it's just that I don't care either way. Am I gonna care about you in a couple of weeks, or whenever you decide you wanna quit volunteering? Everyone goes, man. The only people who stick with you are your blood. That's the only thing that matters."

"What about a close friend?"

DJ turned away, and shot a basket again. It was an airball. "At that point, they're family."

"That seems a little counter-intuitive doesn't it? I mean, if you push everyone away because you think everyone's transitory, then how is someone supposed to get close enough to actually form a close relationship with you?"

DJ caught the ball for a moment and paused. I paused too, fingering the ball in thought. How does a man whose family has left him have that kind of philosophy? How can you keep faith in family when they abused you and themselves? Suddenly, all of the little quarrels I had

with my dad seemed so stupid I wanted to laugh out loud. DJ turned to me. "It should be around time to head inside."

I smiled. "Let's go then."

DJ and I were standing in front of the residential cottage. The building was fairly small, a little more than half the size of my house. There was a small porch area in front, and DJ was sitting in the rocking chair, wearing an orange shirt, a white cap, and jeans. I was leaning against one of the pillars.

"Well, that was productive," I remarked.

"Yeah, you'd think after a month and a half of doing this crap you'd be somewhat effective at least. Somewhat," DJ replied with a grin.

"You're not exactly the easiest kid to work with."

"Yeah, yeah, sucks to deal with Mr. Pessimistic."

"More like Mr. Cynical, but you get the idea."

"And you're the bleeding heart idealist. I'd rather be practical."

"Optimists live longer," I countered. DJ tipped his cap to me in concession. I took an over exaggerated bow. We stood and sat in silence for a while, me waiting for my mom to come and pick me up, DJ not having anything else to do. "Oh! Almost forgot, how'd the Algebra II test do?" I asked.

"Pssh. I got a 90," he replied with a wave of his hand.

"All right, all right. Just don't get cocky. What about Chemistry?"

"Haven't missed a single assignment this month."

"That's 'cause you got me doing all of it for you," I said with a smile. Eventually, my mom's car pulled up. We both know we won't see each other for a long time, with me going off to the Governor's School. I scratched the back of my head, unsure of what to do on an occasion like this. DJ simply held out his hand. Smiling, I took it. "I'm proud of you, man," I said, my voice choking.

"Couldn't have done it without a mentor. Come visit on those long-weekend things, aight? You know how dang boring it is over here."

I nodded. I was about to turn to walk away, but I decided to stay a moment longer. "And DJ. Thanks. For all the crap you taught me. Be good."

DJ gave me that half-mocking smile he gave me that first day of the Mentorship

program. Except this time he had a hint of sadness in his eyes.

“Try to make some friends over there,” he replied.

“Who needs friends when you got family?”

“What about best buds?”

I looked at DJ with a half-smile and gave him a final clap on the shoulder. “At that point, they are family.”

My Ancestry, Rooted Under Occupied Soils

by Hadeel Salameh

I'm Palestinian. All my life I've wondered what that meant; I've searched for that identity. Growing up in America, I've had a very difficult time finding evidence to the existence of a land called Palestine. The Holy Land I call home has been under the control of the Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate, and Israel, but never in the control of Palestinians. I know this, yet—I'm not Ottoman, British, or Israeli. I still identify myself as a Palestinian whose roots have sprouted from a lineage of occupied soils.

Researching for evidence of my existence as a Palestinian has always been a struggle, but I've grown to know that truth isn't always what the majority declares it to be, and power isn't always aided to truth. Experiences have also taught me that passion and ambition define a person's perception of truth, and as a result, lies can always hold truth and truth can always be distorted.

I've sat with family members to hear their stories about what they may remember their ancestors telling them about life in Palestine, however far back they could share with me. Since the family I know doesn't extend past my grandparents and my grandparents remember little to no stories about their parents and grandparents.

Before discussing the stories of my family during and after the time of the British Mandate, I'll first briefly overview the time previous to that, the time of the first World War, which ranged from 1914 to 1918. Palestine was under the ruling of the Ottoman Empire. Because of the bad treatment the Palestinian and other Arab people had been experiencing from the Ottoman Turks, they were in support with the French and British. King Hussein, at the time was the leader of the Arabs during WWI; he had allied with the French and British against the Ottoman Turks and had had a deal with them, the Arab's support towards the French and British in return for some land. After the war, his family had been placed in several parts of the world—a son in Iraq, a son in Syria, which was divided into another part, Lebanon. And Hussein was also granted Trans-Jordan, which was three-fourths of Palestine. The other one-fourth, however, was split for the Jewish settling immigrants and to the Arabs of Palestine in May of 1948 when the United Nations approved UNSCOP's plan to partition Palestine into two parts—present day Jordan, and modern day Israel, which was further divided into Israel for the Jewish settlers and the West Bank and Gaza for the Palestinian Arabs of the time.

The Palestinian people were neither satisfied with the bargain Hussein and the British had made, nor with the favor the British looked towards in the establishment of a Jewish homeland for they feared their siding with the British would result in only leaving them under a different occupation.

In 1948, when Israel was recognized as a sovereign state and parts of Palestine had divided, Palestinian suffering due to settlers increased at high levels. As my grandfather put it,

there was a diminishing sense of identity across the Palestinian cities, towns, and villages, and diminishing sense of hope of Palestinian freedom.

My grandfather from my father's side, Abd-Alsalam Salameh, was born in 1929. He grew up during the time that Palestine was under the control of the British, and when the country was divided into a Palestine and a Jordan. He remembers kibbutz, Jewish settlement homes, being built around the Mediterranean shores, including Haifa and neighboring cities and how they formed as results of trade—Arab farmers would sell their land to Jewish settlers early on. Over the years, however, there were overwhelmingly high numbers of illegal Jewish settlers coming for the land, and when the Arabs started refusing to sell out of fear of becoming minority, much of the land was taken by force. Over the years, my grandfather saw there was a rapid expansion of Jewish settlements along the shores, as well as towards the West Bank and neighboring villages.

He remembers, during the late 1940s through the 1950s, many cases in which villagers would refuse to sell their land to settlers, and how in many cases violence would arise as a result of the refusals. He didn't understand back then what was going on, why people were arguing over land and fighting over homes that people were already living in. My grandfather remembers massacres that occurred in these villages, where some Palestinians would attempt defending their land against Jewish settlers and British soldiers, only to lose due to little, weak, or no weaponry verses the weaponry of the other armies.

My father and his family grew up in the town of Bidya. During the time of the British Mandate, my grandfather told my father and I how there was much internal struggle built between Bidya and neighboring villages in Palestine. Towns and villages would be detained together and closed off from the rest of the country. During these sieges, nobody in these villages was allowed in or out of the borders created by the British army. British occupation on the land created difficulty for those villagers and internal struggle between many tribes within the villages.

When my father was growing up in Bidya, he had always dreamt of leaving—not because he didn't love his country, but because he felt saddened by its defeat. He told himself that he'd leave after college, and aspired early on to dedicate his life to becoming a doctor and continuing his residency after college in either Europe or the United States.

In 1983, my father graduated from college in Amman, Jordan and did a one-year rotation in Amman in hopes to later specialize in internal medicine. He spent some time in preparation for required exams, such as the TOEFEL, ECFMG, and FMGS. In 1984 and in 1985 he took those exams and sent out applications the United State Medical schools. Feeling like he would be waiting a while for responses, he went back to Palestine, where he was offered a position as the Arab board's chief resident in the internal medical department of Makassed Hospital in Jerusalem.

During his time spent in Makassed Hospital, my father witnessed much suffering towards the Palestinian people, which only added to him wanting to leave the depressed atmosphere of a divided and conflicted country in search of a more accepting opportunity to thrive in helping others, without the fear of someday needing help of his own. He felt living in

Palestine, as an Arab Palestinian could be dangerous, especially during the time of the First Intifada. When the Intifada up rose in late 1987 to 1988, my father was working at Makassed. He had been treating patients with severe traumatic injuries. He says some of their injuries were so severe that even after seven years of medical preparation and training, he had been overwhelmed.

One night, he remembers Israeli forces seized a refugee camp about ten miles from Jerusalem. They had "taken all the males above the age of sixteen to a secluded area in front of an old school, tied their hands and started beating them with sticks and metallic rods," one of the patients described to my father as he was examining the injuries. Most of the trauma was focused on the limbs, the average male having two to three bone fractures and some in need of urgent surgery or transfer to other kinds of more serious care. The hospital was crowded that night as my father remembers there were around sixty patients receiving care that night at Makassed Hospital.

My father had been a witness to other anguish, patients who have bled from rubber bullets, then, later in 1988, to bullets that would fragment into smaller pieces once they had torn through the layers of flesh in the human body, causing severe trauma and in many cases permanent destruction to internal organs. He had cared for many of those patients throughout his four years in Jerusalem and the plight of distress they were going through put my father in a position where he felt he could no longer stay in Palestine and watch, he couldn't stand the sight of what Israeli settlers and soldiers were doing to his neighbors and brothers.

In 1987, my dad met a man who was able to make his dream to come to the United States a reality. Dr. Horton, a plastic surgeon was part of Physicians for Peace, a group which dealt with promoting peace throughout the Middle East by touring countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine to participate in free medical care for injured patients. Upon the group's one-week visit to Palestine, my father had the opportunity to work with Dr. Horton at Makassed. After being invited to dinner with the Physicians for Peace group, my father was asked about his career path, and plans to study abroad. After discussion about how my father hasn't yet received official acceptance to the Medical programs in the United States, and therefore, cannot yet be applicable for a VISA, Dr. Horton told my father he would consider their discussion an interview for a position as a resident, and assured him a spot in a medical school program. Although my father was flattered by the man's promise, he did not expect him to follow through. In January of 1988, my father received a call from the Medical University of Eastern Virginia. Dr. Horton had followed through with his word and my dad was set to leave for America that July.

When my father prepared to leave Bidya, Palestine to go to America, he experienced difficulty crossing the borders to Jordan. There was an Israeli siege on the town and the borders were closed off. Life in Palestine became "impossible to get past," my father said. In the last summer days my father spent in Palestine he remembers how traveling from one town to another, which would usually take around half an hour, would take around four hours to get from checkpoint to checkpoint, with about two to three checkpoints to pass. The checkpoints are what delayed the movement. He, along with the other Palestinian travelers, had to exit their cars, stand on one leg for however long it took the soldiers to search their cars. Then, they were allowed to get back in and make way to the other checkpoints, only to get out and stand in

humiliation for another hour or so. Finally, in late July, he made it to Norfolk, Virginia, where he joined the medical department and started his residency. Here, my parents planned to lead their children into a brighter future, one where new beginnings could be made and rights could be practiced without the worry of occupation.

Overreacting

by Jacqueline Barnes

It isn't just a word. It isn't just yelling nigger at the people who differ from you by just a shade. It isn't just an action. It isn't just the burning of a cross on the lawn of a black family who were just having dinner. These things do not happen without context, and the context is this. It is you standing by when a girl your age but not your color gets kicked out of a store for looking "suspicious"; it's when a young boy of the same color is ostracized in class and left to fail because he doesn't learn the way you do. It's being treated like a dog in front of the many, and them letting it happen, but later telling you "they wished they had done something". It's living and not being labeled as an other when you walk into the room. It's being treated as a second species for running in the only direction they give you out. It's agreeing with the dominant in order to not be stepped on yourself. It's sharing a greeting with a neighbor only to be ignored at the doorstep. It's making sure all of your actions in a store are clear and without question so people won't think you stole anything. It's making your footsteps louder so people in front of you won't be surprised and afraid when you pass them.

It's the whisper and the lash, set upon the bleak and the hopeful, the thread that connects the darker peoples to each other regardless of where they came from.

No I'm not overreacting, I'm reacting. To a world that says bow when you dare to stand, don't think for a second that your words will make me stoop lower.



High School

High School Poetry Honorable Mention

Words

by Maya Best

I am wrapped in fleece blankets,
My tomato cheeks pressed against her neck
On those creaky wooden stairs
As she feeds me cheerios smothered in yogurt.
Words flow from her lips,
Mishti Mei, my sweet girl,
Bangla words she taught me when I could barely walk.
Oma, who draws Lokkhi Thakur's feet in every doorway,
Her wrinkled fingers dabbing across the floor,
White rice powder,
Champa incense fluttering through the house.
Oma, who should be called Didima or Thakurma,
But chose the name her German grandchildren gave her.

I am older and Mom wraps me in her old sari
Patterned in gold flowers,
Pushes the bangles onto my hands,
Strings a necklace across my chest.
Autumn's scent brushes at our heels,
The wheels scrape against the concrete
As Mom pushes her through the temple doors.
And for a moment, she is back home
Where Bangla rolls off their tongues and into her.
Oma, whose hair was once a blend of charcoal and swan feathers,
Until the feathers took over.

Oma, who writes across sheets of printer paper,
Shaky and slanted on the page.
And she knows I can't read those Bangla letters.
I am lost in their complex curves.
And she knows she'll never return to the bustling streets of Kolkata.
Oma, who now rides a chairlift and scrapes her walker
Across the floorboards.
Oma, whose mishti mei I am, hopes I won't forget
Her words when she fades away.

High School Poetry Honorable Mention

Wanna Be Barbie

by Maya Best

I'm a plain Jane girl,
in a Barbie world.

Barbie
Barbie
That's what I want to be
Mattel is my maker
I can barely move my knees.

Perfect is my goal.
Perfect eyebrows, perfect nose.
Perfect lips, perfect hips.
Perfect square nails, quaint white tips.

Perfect big round eyes,
like a doe or a deer.
Skinny start, with a dip
Skinny waist, plump rear

Paper white teeth
A career in every field
Everyone spends on me,
because I have so much appeal.

Rose cheeks on my white skin,
I never lose. I always win
I'm plastic so I can't break
I'm just perfect for goodness sakes!

Perfect hair,
Just wake up and go!
Come in my Barbie car
Vamanos!

I'm a Barbie girl,
but in a Barbie world.

High School Poetry Honorable Mention

Color is Not Me

by Taylor James

Yeah, I know that.
18 years in the making of me.
I think I know my ethnicity by now.

But...

I don't think I'm white.
I know I'm black.
But I've never gone to a school in the hood.
So why wouldn't I have white friends?

And you taught me that the streets are dangerous.
That the people out there aren't necessarily trustworthy.
And they people out there are mostly black.

Asking for a pony is completely normal.

If you're a little girl
That wants to be a princess.
You can't be a princess without a pony.

And Alaska doesn't seem too bad.

I'm trying to expand,
Travel just a little,

You know you're black, right?

But you don't act like it.
What do you mean?
I mean, you don't act like it.
Most of your friends are white.
You're always askin' for crazy stuff.
Like a pony.
What black girl asks for a pony,
Or to go to Alaska?
Black people don't like the snow!
And very rarely to you speak slang.

But you think you're white.

But we live in the hood.

If you're white.

To you,
Because you're tryin' to be white.

See the world.
Don't you think that seeing something new
Could maybe be fun?

You taught me to speak like this.
You made me this way.

Well...
I don't know how to not act like me.

Do you hear yourself pronouncing all
of the g's?

I'm your mother.
Not only did I give birth to a black girl,
But I raised one too.
Why don't you start actin' like one?

High School Prose Honorable Mention

A Chained Dream

by William Gardner

When autumn comes to Ligonier, it comes silently, with a leaf that has changed a darker shade of red or a morning that is a few degrees cooler than it was a day before. It is a slow change, and for most residents, they go about their days as usual, rushing off to work or to school, but never once stopping to examine the few leaves that have turned. As for myself, I have always noticed, for when the sun peaks above the eastern ridge and the shadows of the trees grow thinner and thinner, the farms start up their tractors, and they roar through the fields until the sun is low in the west and the shadows are long, reaching out towards the night sky that seems to roll over the earth like an ocean's tide.

On one of these days in early autumn, just as the sun shone off the tip of the weather vane that sits perched on top of town hall, my mother was driving me and my brothers through the quiet streets of Ligonier, and I was not happy. My unhappiness could be attributed to a few reasons, one being that my mother woke me up so early, and the other being the dog—an old beagle from across the street that kept me up well into the night with her long agonizing howls that echoed across the valley, rising and falling without the slightest pause in-between. Ever since I was a child I've had a growing dislike for that dog, and it probably wasn't too fond of me either, but then again, I guess I would be pretty upset too if I was chained to a tree all day.

My mother wasn't in the greatest mood, and even through I was only ten, I had no trouble noticing. This might have been because of the dog, but most likely it was because she was taking three boys to get their haircut. It never has been an easy chore for my mother, and that day she wasn't in the mood for any arguments, so she kept glancing back at us as if at any moment we were prone to go off, which made us think that any moment she was prone to go off, so we decided to keep quiet. I wasn't interest in any quarrels with my brothers anyway; instead I watched the few people that walked a long the street in their puffy black jackets; most of them dressed for winter that than the fall. The townsfolk have always had faint hearts when it comes to the weather, throwing aside tank tops and t-shirts for ski jackets and trench coats with even the slightest drop in temperature. I was no exception, and would have gladly worn a ski jacket or a winter coat, but unfortunately I had left them at home, and now I was suffering for it.

I volunteered to go first when we finally arrived at the barber shop and got my usual: two inches off the top and the back cut short. After examining myself in the mirror for a few minutes, I asked my mother if I could go to the coffee shop next door. She hesitated—as all mothers do when such questions are asked—but eventually agreed, as long as I brought her something to drink.

It was growing warmer outside; patches of sunlight that had managed to find their way in-between the branches lay unevenly across the street as store owners began flipping CLOSED signs to OPEN. I stepped out onto the sidewalk and walked a ways until I reached the dingy little café on the corner, then ducked inside.

A few stragglers sat at the tables, silently sipping coffee as they poured over their newspapers. I went up to the counter and bought a hot chocolate for myself and a cup of coffee for my mother, then sat down at the nearest table and began drinking; feeling its effects instantly as warmth surged through my body. There were voices behind me, talking quietly about football teams and the upcoming basketball season. I ignored them as best as I could, but couldn't quite drone them out. Then one of the voices caught me off guard.

"You know what the problem is with our cities?" The comment came out of nowhere, and I couldn't help but turn and look over my shoulder. There were five of them, each from the local high school, wearing black and red letterman's jackets with the team's name embroidered on the front. There was a brief pause, and then I heard the boy speak again, this time a little softer, "Ni**ers"

A snicker rose from the table and then another boy spoke up, his voice a little higher than the first's, "I wish they would all go back to the South where they came from."

I sat there for a while, listening as their laughter died down, then stood and walked out, dropping my change in the tip jar as I passed by. I looked back at the boys and saw that they were staring at me. One of them waved but I just ignored him. My initial reaction was to be angry, but I was also a little shocked. Ligonier had always been an accepting little town, and of all the places to find racism, it was the one that I least expected. But there it was, showing its ugly face even in the little café on the corner of Main Street. I knew that there were more than just those few boys. They were popular kids, and what they said would resonate throughout a substantial chunk of the populace that made up Ligonier's student body. I went back into the barber shop with my mother's coffee, and when we finally left it was on a bitter note.

The drive home was silent. I spotted a few more red and black letterman's jackets and accused them all of being racist, but I knew this was unjust. The little conversation I overheard at the coffee shop had put me in a worse mood than I was before, and now everything was subjected to my allegations. This was one of the first times in my life when I realized that, while in some places Martin Luther King's dream is free, there are others where it still tugs at the chains that bind it: the chains of oppression and hate. I understand that these chains will never be fully severed, but too often have I heard that wretched word whispered by other or sung in songs. We cannot take a step forward without moving back to help those who have fallen behind. I realize that when a whole nation tries to sing in harmony there will always be those who fall out of tune, but when such words of hate are passed from ear to ear, there is a problem, and that problem needs to be solved.

This problem is not only present in the white communities, however: I have also heard such racial slurs that uttered by African Americans. Sometimes they are thrown around jokingly, but too often have jokes become insults and insults become hate. When I think of Dr. King's dream, I do not think of a nation split by words that we can and cannot say according to the color of our skin, but a nation where those words do not exist, a nation where we live without them.

This happened almost a decade ago now, but there are still some places in our country where dreams have turned bitter, and when hearing about these places, I cannot help but think back to the beagle that lives along my street. She howls and whines and moans, but no one hears her; she's nothing but another dead voice in the night. The dream that Martin Luther King had

years ago, the dream that rang so proudly above the Lincoln memorial that glorious day in August, is also a dead voice in some places, and even though it desperately tries to break away from the chains that hold it back, they remain firm, so all it can do is whine and moan, hoping one day someone will hear it. I don't blame that dream, or the people who cry with it. I'd be pretty upset too if I was chained to a tree all day.

High School Prose Honorable Mention

BMX Race

by Odell Minniefield

September 2, 2010 was the day, the day of glory it was supposed to be. I finally made it to the grand nationals, as a rookie. Louisville, Kentucky, the bluegrass BMX track, today is going to be great. Firsts, seconds, thirds, and fourths, that's how I qualified for nationals. But, it seemed like it was just my family and another family with color. All season long if it was only us, and nobody else with color. I only saw a few other families with color but that was a lot less than I expected. Especially because of the fact that it was the national championship.

My races were tough, I was matched up with some of the best in my class. My first Moto was a success, second place, which was a surprise to me. The second Moto was also pretty good, third place. My confidence went up significantly and those who I raced went down. Their confidence went down so much that I could see the concern and fear in their eyes. I also noticed more of their parents coming over and talking to them. Most of their parents were male and all of them were white. First, I paid no attention, but some things they said just didn't sound right, so as I was waiting for my third Moto to be called, I heard parents talking about crashing me and taking me out. I heard stuff like "Take the little black kid out, you can't let him win... He can't win." That made me furious and eager to race. That third race, I blew the competition away and captured first place.

As I was on my way over to my family to celebrate, an older white male and I assumed his son (who I raced) walked past me. I said, "Good racing" to the kid and he said thanks, which I thought was ordinary conversation. But, his dad came over, told him "Lets go" and before they walked completely past me the dad said, loud enough for me to hear, "There's starting to be more and more blacks around here, time to get the shotguns out." I was so shocked and appalled that I never celebrated; I just didn't say anything for the rest of the day.

The next day which were the semi-finals and finals, and I seized the day with more anger and rage than I had ever had in my life. I got 4th place in the semifinals, qualifying for the main. In the main I unfortunately captured 7th place, which also clinch 7th in the country. Gaining that 7 place made me forget about everything. But that one moment, I will remember for the rest of my life, for as long as I live.

High School Prose Honorable Mention

Dr. King Reflections

by Dennis Briggs

There aren't many people who look like me here. The few tend to be my best friends. I can count them on my hands. People tend to think that we all hang out together simply because we are black, and they tell us this, most times in a nice way but still out of ignorance. Some typical comments; why do you guys always sit together? Are you guys related? Teachers, as intelligent and genuine as they can be, often confuse us with one another. I don't take it to heart; but I think it's pretty obvious, our differences.

Just yesterday my best friend Tyrel, an African-American, went to buy a book from the Tuckshop, a bookstore within our school, and the lady handling the purchase almost charged the account of a black student that graduated last year. I mean the kid who she confused him with was far more light-skinned and far taller than Tyrel. I found it pretty amusing honestly. However, in retrospect, it's not because she didn't realize what she was doing until we informed her. The lady is a wonderful person despite the fact.

I'm a senior now, so at this point in my high school career, I'm much more understanding, and confident in myself. So when students and teachers here fail to understand me, I don't take it to heart anymore; and I tend to know how to control my emotions and feeling. But when I came here, it was a different story.

We have a rule at my school that all boys must be clean shaven. Freshman year, I was further developed than most and had facial hair. I ended up shaving my face because a coach whom I respected a lot suggested I do so. However what people at my school, teachers specifically don't understand is that often, when we shave, we meaning black men, the skin underneath tends to break out. This is not to say it doesn't happen to Caucasians as well; I'm just speaking from experience.

Now I want to stop reflecting on the negative experiences I've had here, because there have been worse. I am truly blessed as a result of the efforts of Dr. King. I think about the brutal fact that 70 years ago, my ancestors weren't allowed to drink from the same fountains as whites; but today I go to one of the top private institutions in America with mostly white students.

As most, I probably don't know as much I want to about Dr. King, but every day I wake, I experience to positive outcome of his fatal efforts for equality of all Americans. I am truly thankful to God first, but to doctor king as well. Without his true bravery and care for equality, the course of my entire life would be changed, probably for the worse.