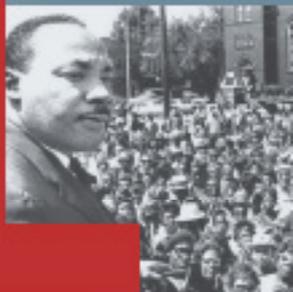


CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY PROUDLY PRESENTS



MLK

DAY 2014

**2014
WRITING
AWARDS**

Acknowledgments

The 2014 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Writing Awards are sponsored by the Carnegie Mellon English Department, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Office of the President. For their generosity, service, and support we thank President Subra Suresh; M. Shernell Smith, Assistant Director for Student Affairs; Kate Mashek, our research assistant, and the designer of this book; and the following members of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society, Jaime Fawcett, Laura Stiles, Sophie Wirt, and Von Wise, for their editing help. We also extend our deepest gratitude to the teachers who dedicated their time and energy to help students organize, revise, and submit writing for the contest. Without the unique voices of local students, this event would not be possible. Congratulations to every student who submitted work this year.

Jim Daniels and Richard Purcell, English Department faculty members

Writing Awards

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

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**To read both college and high school honorable mentions,
visit:** [http://www.cmu.edu/hss/english/courses/writing-awards/
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College: *Poetry*

They Ask and They Judge

by Iman Mazloum | Carnegie Mellon University

Whenever they see me they ask,
Where are you from?
No. Really. You can't be just Canadian.
What's your ethnic background?

I respond with the long answer.
My mom is Indian but born in Uganda.
My dad is Lebanese.
So I am mixed and multi-culti.

That's so cool, they reply.
I know, I smile.
But the assumption is always there.
Oh, are you Pakistani?

But its not as bad as France,
Where they say you are French, but if you are black...
They ask which country are you from.
Then they classify you as "something else."

They want to discuss my culture with me.
Which is something I've learned to appreciate.
And if they are Pakistani,
They want to make a friend who reminds them of home.

But its not as bad as India,
Where you are born into a caste.
They ask if you are an untouchable.
Then they judge your ability to be human.

Where are you really from?
China, I wish I could reply.
My parents tell me to say I'm from Timbuktu
I'd rather talk about Tim Hortons doughnuts.

But its not as bad as Russia,
Where they say you are all equal, but if you are a gypsy...
They ask you if you are orphaned.
Then they ignore you until you disappear.

I've got it good.
They want to know out of curiosity.
They want to know why I speak English well,
But look olive-ish brown.

Our diversity should be celebrated,
Even if we might just want to be a proud national.
Because we are global citizens.
And only education will heal our skin-caused wounds.

They Say I'm Something Ugly

by Vanessa Branch | Carnegie Mellon University

Say that you're black. Say that you're white. Say that somewhere down the line, someone was Native American. Read about Ancient Egypt and fall in love with Anubis. Say you're Egyptian. Now try to speak Spanish. Learn for eight years. *Dime un razón porque no hablas bien.* Now flatten out those syllables and clear your throat and speak English.

Look down at English papers riddled with red. Learn proper grammar. Learn to spell correctly. Cursive was a lie; only curl letters when signing your name. Eat a bag of Oreos and don't think you're related. Write red-boned than cross it out with three fat lines. Write yellow-boned and hear it from a hundred smiles, a thousand times.

Prejudgement

by Angela Kij | CCAC Allegheny Campus

This piece of cloth, right here that you see,
I wear to preserve my modesty.
Can you believe the controversy that it creates?
Just a few inches of material that covers my head and face?
Terrorist! This is America Bitch! We should kill you all!
Are just some of the words I hear ignorant assholes call.
All because they can't see what lies beneath?
Well I leave them no choice, but to get to really know me.
My heart and mind is all they can know.
But isn't that the most important though?
In a world where everyone judges what they see,
guess all you can do is judge me...well...for me.
A Muslim, a mother, a daughter, a sister, or how about just a
human being?
Who just like you loves, laughs, cries and yes sometimes lets
those negative words sting.
So I'm asking you to look back to what came to your mind,
when you looked at me for the very first time.
If it was something positive, then that means your heart and
mind must be open.
If it wasn't, then all I can say is I hope you've heard these
words that I've spoken.



College: *Prose*

Confucius Plays Dice in Flushing

by Jason Choi | Carnegie Mellon University

My father is telling me the story of when Ha-da-buh-jee first came the US.

“So he came here as a mechanic, which is funny because he was an accountant in Korea. And when we finally came to the US a year later, he was working as a janitor in Bensonhurst.”

We are driving to Flushing, and I feel pangs of *deja vu*. When I was a kid, he’d tell me these stories and it was like being trapped in a nightmare. I imagined Confucius flying around, yelling: “Be appreciative! Be appreciative!” The tips of his white mustache flapping like wings. His index finger, wagging up and down, like I should be ashamed for not wanting more. It’s different now though; getting older wakes you up to these kinds of notions, like feeling a pain in your lungs and then reading a cigarette warning label.

My father’s hair is greasy from work and his hat pins grayed strands to his temples. Otherwise he looks the same as he always has; the same glasses on the same sharp nose, the same light goatee that I’m waiting to inherit, the same eyes that choke under a big smile. Although his dimples are deeper, mingling with wrinkles.

We then talk briefly about my mother and sister; they have been in Taiwan for the past two years. My sister is there for

school, but in reality it's because young American girls can be so cruel nowadays, and mother is there because she can't stand Obama. My father and I are in the US. We keep in touch through Skype, which is hard because the connection gets spotty whenever there is a storm or an earthquake or a heatwave.

"When they are back, you'd better get ready to live in Texas," he says.

"You mean visit. And no I will not."

He scoffs "You'll come visit, I guarantee it."

"What makes you so sure?"

He laughs "Because I feed you."

I can't argue with this point. "Well, what happens if they stay another year?"

His mood changes, like I've stolen the laugh. He says "I don't know. We'll figure it out then."

The answer hasn't changed from when I asked him half a year ago. Which is fine because I know that even though he's hurting, he still needs to be my father, the stone wall. We are the closest we've ever been, but we are still, the distance between college and home, father and son, apart.

"Anyways, what made you guys even want leave Korea?"

“Well, Jumbo, back then the US was like a heaven, Korea was so poor. I mean think about how scary too, the war had ended only twenty years ago, and everyone thought it would break out again.

When I was in kindergarten, we even had to take an anti-communism class. They showed videos that were like Dumbo, except it wasn’t a flappy-eared elephant, it was a seven-year-old you. Instead of a circus, it was a band of devil-horned communists. They wanted you hating communists the earliest you could.”

My father tells me he used to play by a river bank, where he picked up bent pieces of wood and pretended to fire them like rifles. Later, he found out that the scraps he played with and the sand he stood in had been a blown-up bridge and a beach where men fought and died.

“Jesus,” I say. “Did you ever see bones?”

“No, nothing like that. Although my Keun-ah-buh-jee, your grand-uncle, fought in the war. He was in the thick of things.”

“Really? Did you ever ask him about it?”

“No, never. You don’t talk about that kind of stuff. You want to hear something crazy?” He says it like the set-up of a joke.

“Yeah, of course.”

“Okay so, during the Korean War, North Korea was trying to

recruit people. So they'd gather a whole bunch of people to watch a movie. Then they would take them all, forcing them to fight or be executed. It was like Hansel and Gretel.

So your Ha-da-buh-jee actually went to see one of these movies. And by some miracle, right when the North Koreans started rounding people up, it started pouring rain, like a monsoon, and Ha-da-buh-jee and everyone else escaped."

I laugh, uneasily, like maybe I should rethink complaining about the rain.

We cross the Whitestone bridge. The New York skyline is shoved against the East river, a plane rumbles overhead. Once we pass the bridge, my father pulls up an exit ramp and I know we're in Flushing because the signs have ceased to be in English. Instead Chinese and Korean flash on giant LED signs; perfect-skinned beauties smile next to cosmetic miracles in plastic bottles, on large billboards.

Flushing reminds me of another nightmare. In them, I'm at an airport in Asia and they ban me coming home to the US. Then they perform surgery to make my eyes bigger, plastering me on billboards next to weird drinks that "will make your child grow!" To clarify, I should mention that I'm 6'9, and there, I would be a red-wood amongst ferns, and I already know what that's like, especially in the Chinese restaurants where the waitresses gawk at my height and can't help but whisper "What a waste," when I tell them I don't play basketball.

"So what's the story with Ha-dah-buh-jee and the mafia?" I ask.

“You mean, Steve?”

“I don’t know, I just remember you telling me about some guy robbing you who was in the mob.”

“No no. The story is that Ha-da-buh-jee wasn’t making enough money as a janitor and decided that he had to look for a business. He looked for awhile and eventually he found this grocery store, which the owner was selling at a huge loss. He was a Korean too. The only thing was, Ha-da-buh-jee had to buy it immediately because the owner was leaving in two weeks.

He took the chance.

So now we had this store, and it was right next to this luncheonette, which was owned by this big mean Italian guy—forearms as big as your thigh. And he sold cigarettes and newspapers, which your Ha-Da-Buh-jee decided not to sell because he didn’t want to be competition—you have your business, I have mine. Because of that gesture, immediately this guy liked Ha-da-buh-jee very much. They shook hands and he introduced himself: I’m Steve, You have any problems, let me know.

So everything was great for a while. Steve would bring around his wife, and she’d give us a trays of lasagna and stuff like that. He helped us out a lot.

Anyways, we came to find out, that Steve was fighting with the previous owner of the grocery store. And one day, these two guys came in, put a gun right to that guy’s head, and said:

Come with us to the car. They told him that if he didn't leave within two weeks then he'd be dead. Hence, why he was in such a rush to get out of there."

I laugh again, and it's the same uneasy laugh. Like, how different might my life be, had a one specific mobster woken up on the wrong side of the bed, one particular morning in 1974?

We pass by a Korean church and a ramen place attached at the hip. My father says, "I wonder if Jesus Christ ever imagined his words being preached next to Asian people slurping noodles."

"I bet he'd be shocked and wonder how the hell it happened," I say, thinking of Sleepy Hollow, where my father lives now.

There, across the brick train-station, is the Hudson River. Rich apartments line the front and a massive hut sells locally sourced ice-cream and Colombian coffee. Marble fountains, of the naked baby variety, vomit water indefinitely.

On the other side of the station, over the ramp, sheltering a basketball court, is an inclined road called Van Cortlandt Ave. Hispanic men wait outside of convenience stores watching the mornings go by, empanadas tan under hot lamps while Spanish women and their kids buy detergent, and if the kids are lucky, yellow Fantas for later. There is a Thai Restaurant, on the window are pictures of Asian food in spring colors and an autographed picture of Ernie Anestos, a Fox news anchor,

who's got that same car-salesman smile, as if he froze the expression in carbonite and painted the color to his face.

Eventually the road breaks onto Beekman Ave. There is a bait and gun store owned by a German. An Italian and Asian family run their respective delivery dynasties along a block of stores, which also includes a cheap furniture place and a dollar store with towers of calling cards and plastic sunglasses. Then, there is Greene County, where my father is getting ready for the high-school lunch rush, he's toasting bread in preparation.

I imagine all the fathers in all these different stores, with all their different stories from generations past to present. It's like a convention for miracles. Sleepy Hollow shocks me and makes me wonder how the hell it happened.

We finally get into the thick of Flushing and my father says, "Damn, we should have come earlier, there's no parking. Looks like we're walking, Jumbo." He says this with a glee, because he knows how much I dislike walking—another thing about visiting Asia; all the things you'd want to see involve a lot of walking.

There are thousands of people walking around, faces like mine, except some of them are covered, as if SARS is still a thing.

The throngs of people remind me of the Science Channel, Morgan Freeman, wearing a sly smile, asking "What is the meaning of chaos?"

I think of the many places where people try to find the answer to this question. My own mother visited a fortune teller on top of a tall mountain recently, and he foretold my marriage to someone from my village by the turn of 30. She was really happy about that.

My father notices something that I don't, and a smile creeps on his face, choked eyes and all, like he's Indiana Jones spotting a hidden exit in some hopeless temple. My father parks, ferociously, in an oasis of a spot.

I look over to my father and then the rear-view mirror. And in that moment I realize my place—where the answer to the meaning of chaos is found.

It's in this Honda Pilot. In the space between the driver's seat and the passenger's seat and the backseat. My father and I are there, but so are my mother and sister. We are here in Flushing, New York, looking for parking. My sister is trying to get my mother to say Igloo, because she pronounces it "Iga-roo." She does, and although it's mean to do so, we all laugh, even my father. My mother then insists that she has perfect pronunciation, which makes it even more funny, so we laugh even harder. And suddenly the meaning of chaos is there in plain sight. It was once a seed called luck, and before, a speck of chaos floating in the universe. Except this seed has been growing—through monsoons, Ha-da-buh-jee, Steve, Sleepy Hollow, my father, even the communists—to this moment, whereupon, its leaves are beautiful and clear and vibrant as my sister's laughter. And soon we stop laughing and the meaning of chaos fades away, growing on through memories, stories,

communities, the whole of our worlds, entrenching its roots in all of us.

In this moment I understand you now, Confucius. You meant to say, “Be appreciative! Be appreciative! of how damn lucky you are.”

My father and I step out of the car and he says “Looks like we don’t have to walk anymore Jumbo, you lucked out. ”

“Yeah, Daddy. I guess I did.”

Destiny in Dirt

by Alysa Landry | Chatham University

It's March of 2013 and I'm living in Pittsburgh when my Navajo dad calls to say he has prostate cancer. I'm enrolled in a graduate creative writing program – something I wanted for a decade – but suddenly it feels elite and arrogant. Back home on the Navajo Nation, the largest American Indian reservation, Eugene prepares for surgery.

As we talk, I imagine him on a plastic chair in his front yard: an acre of dirt sectioned off from a landscape that is only dirt as far as the eye can see. He wears sandals, a plaid shirt with fancy stitching and shiny snaps, and a pair of light blue Levi's his wife hemmed to fit his 5-foot-6-inch frame. A wide red bandana is tied around his head and wisps of graying hair pull free from his long ponytail and catch at the corners of his mouth. He strums a guitar and sings John Denver or Creedence Clearwater Revival: tunes popular when he was a teenager 50 years ago.

At 64, Eugene is 30 years my senior. He lives in two worlds, straddling the line between ancient and modern, a line that is pronounced in the reservation town of Shiprock, New Mexico, where racial tensions with nearby Farmington taint everyday life. Eugene asked me to be his daughter before I left the only place that ever felt like home and moved to the East Coast.

"We can get a medicine man to do a ceremony," he said, "but that's just a formality."

I accept, choosing the budding yet familiar bond with Eugene over the strained relationship with my own dad. For five years I worked as a newspaper reporter on this reservation. I wrote about discrimination, hate crimes and intergenerational trauma. I wrote about civil rights and fancied myself a crusader for the oppressed. As I wrote, I grew angrier with my real dad, who once told me he never met anyone without a car or health insurance. Eugene adopted me when I told him I was leaving to go back to school.

“I’ll be your Navajo papa,” he said.

On the phone, he greets me in Navajo: “Ya’at’eeh, little one.” He reprimands me when my grasp on the language reaches its limits, teases me when I miss the reservation, reminds me he needs me there.

“Come home,” he says. “We need you. I need you. Your heart is here.”

I ask him to send me some of the earth, the red or orange sand. He calls me *Leezh*, the Navajo word for dirt. He tells me he loves me in a voice so effortless with affection I wonder why my real dad struggles so hard to say the same thing.

I’m home in Pittsburgh when Eugene calls to tell me he’s having surgery on his prostate. My house is 83 years old, reachable only by descending two flights of wooden steps from the street above. Stairs are rare in Shiprock where buildings stretch outward instead of upward, where air, dirt and sky are taken for granted.

Eugene calls every day with updates: doctor appointments, blood work and medical procedures. He says he's in his front yard, watching the cavity at the base of a tree fill with water from the hose. Dogs roam through the yard, fighting for shade under the trees Eugene planted 15 years ago when he settled down, got married and put down roots in this land where the sun shines 350 days a year. He's a renowned artist, a contemporary sand painter with work in galleries across the Southwest, but he's a family man now. He's not on the road anymore. Life has slowed down. He's home.

"I'm scheduling my surgery," he tells me. "They say it might take three months to recover."

"Should I come and visit?" I ask. "Feed you mutton stew?"

"If you do, I'll be on the roof," he says. "I'm going to move my rocking chair up there to recover."

On the surface, he's making jokes, but there's fear underneath. Eugene's first language was Navajo, and those words still come to the surface. "Lood doo na'ziihii," means cancer, or "the sore that does not heal." On the Navajo Nation, a man with prostate cancer does not recover. As we talk, I recognize a similar fear in my chest. More than 1,750 miles separate us. I might never see him again. I picture the last time I saw him, six months earlier, in his kitchen.

Eugene heats oil in a pan. He's helping his wife make fry bread, the staple of the traditional Navajo diet. It stems from the Long Walk of 1864, when 9,000 Navajos were removed from

their homes and held captive for four years in an internment camp. There, they cooked from rations of flour, dried milk and lard – ingredients still kept in traditional Navajo homes. As they cook, Eugene and Barbara drift seamlessly between Navajo and English in the eternal language of intimacy. The tender language of marriage is cradled by the beauty of native words. Barbara serves fry bread wrapped in paper towels to absorb the grease. I eat slowly, copying the movements of Eugene's two children and two adult stepsons. Although I have a place in this home, it's hard not to be conscious of skin color. I am white, pasty, privileged. My Navajo family lives in poverty, in a home heated by coal, at times surviving on fry bread alone. Most Navajo live on dirt roads that become impassable during winter storms or in the deep mud after a thaw. Hot in pursuit of a newspaper story in 2008, I arrived on the doorstep of a one-armed Navajo man with nothing but mustard in his fridge. Like many Navajo living deep in the reservation, he was born at home. He had no record of his birth, official birthdate or Social Security number. Through an interpreter, he told me his horses froze to death and he had no way of going for provisions. At another house, a family moved a herd of 17 sheep inside the one-room home to shield them from below-zero temperatures. When I arrived, four of the sheep were lying dead on the floor. Eugene avoids this kind of poverty by selling his sand paintings at trading posts. His workshop is a converted bedroom, its window facing the front of the house. Hundreds of white plastic boxes are stacked along the edges of a plywood desk, each filled with a different color of sand. There's black from nearby coal mines, orange from the shores of Lake Powell, red from Sedona, Arizona, and white from the Bisti Badlands. If there isn't sand to be collected, he grinds rocks into sand. Eugene sits in

this crowded workshop and talks to his ancestors. He draws portraits or traditional designs on plywood then paints with a solution of Elmer's glue before sprinkling colored sand into the shapes with a practiced hand.

"It's like paint by number," he tells me when I ask about the craft.

In my upper-middle-class snobbery, in my privileged life as an educated daughter of educated parents, I once believed a room without books was worthless. There are no books in Eugene's workshop. He didn't go to art school or college. He didn't finish high school. Like most Navajos of his age, Eugene went to boarding school. Treaties with the federal government required all children to be educated by white teachers and taught to be civilized. His hair was chopped off and his silver and turquoise jewelry was confiscated. His mouth was washed out with soap if he uttered a Navajo word.

By ninth grade, Eugene had developed a temper. A white teacher, a "big, mean, Irish man," intent on teaching Indians lessons in punctuality, stood by the classroom door and counted down the seconds until class started. Racing against time, Eugene ran toward the door, only to have the teacher slam it in his face. Eugene knocked on the door, blood gushing from a broken nose.

The teacher opened it. "What the hell are you doing here?" he barked.

Eugene grabbed the teacher by the collar, and pulled his face

down so the two were eye to eye. Decades later, when Eugene tells me this story, he leaves out most of the details, saying vaguely that he “roughed the teacher up.” Eugene was expelled. He never returned.

Eugene sometimes reminds me of these stories over the phone. By April, the daily calls are more desperate. He’s canceling everything. He’s boxing up his sand, glue, brushes and boards already cut to size. He’s calling off classes he teaches at nearby schools. He’s canceling lessons he gives to elementary school students about honoring their backgrounds while simultaneously seeking a modern education. He’s closing books and postponing meetings. He’s calling me, his adopted white daughter, his bilagáana daughter, to say he’s having prostate surgery. He’s not saying he won’t recover, but I hear that in his voice. He’s afraid.

The average Indian man will live to be 71, while the average life span of a white man is 78. Eugene knows this: it’s one of many statistics that haunt people in this isolated place.

“You need to recover,” I say. “I need you to live to be a hundred.”

“I’m old,” he argues. “I’m one of the elders now.”

“I don’t want you to be old,” I counter, and what I’m really saying is this: It’s not fair that you worked hard your whole life and you’re still chopping wood and shoveling coal to heat your house, or that your life expectancy is seven years less than a white man. It’s not fair that my real father has savings

and retirement plans and redundant health care options and timeshares and you don't, and I love you more. It's not fair that cancer might kill you.

By May, Eugene's doctors say he may not need surgery. They postpone it for three months, then six months. I decide to visit Eugene. He takes me to the top of a mesa, hands me a paintbrush and tells me to draw a circle in the sand. Eugene drew a circle here when he was a child, before the landscape shifted with the addition of power lines, dirt roads and the cell phone tower.

"Once you draw a circle, this is where you return when you need clarity, or when you want to feel grounded," he says. "Inside this circle is where your destiny is."

The wind tangles my hair. I hesitate. I was naïve when I moved to the Navajo Nation, thinking I could make a difference and change the course of history. I believed I could use words to heal the past and usher in a kinder future. As Eugene waits for me to draw a circle, I think about his life and struggles. I think about the cancer in his body and about the thousands of other Navajo I can't save – not with my presence, not with my compassion, not with my words. The burden is heavy. The futility is overwhelming. I don't draw a circle because I believe I failed. It's November of 2013, almost a year since Eugene first told me he had cancer. His phone calls are less frequent, but just as intimate.

"No surgery yet," he says. "Your papa's getting old, but I guess I'll live."

I continue writing about the Navajo and publish news articles from the East Coast. I drive to Washington, D.C. for interviews. I follow legislation through Congress. I track cases through the Supreme Court. When I think of Eugene now, I picture him with a steel file, grinding his rocks into sand. I imagine generations of pain and injustice are rocks that also can be crushed, that my words can grind them down until they lose their power.

When Eugene calls, I answer in Navajo.

“Ya’at’eeh, shizhé’é,” I say. Hello, dad.

“Did you draw your circle yet?” he asks.

“Not yet,” I say. “But I think I found my destiny.”

College Third Place: Prose

Before I was Pretty

by Jacqueline Barnes | Carnegie Mellon University

Before I was pretty, I was black.

Before I was born, the world had already passed judgment on me.

I would be black, I would be a woman, and I would not have straight hair.

At the age of 10 my rite of passage would come, and a lily white queen would make me pretty. My hair would become like everyone else's she promised.

She had promised so much.

But I was still not pretty. "too dark, and weird hair!" decried by the sharp tongues of the little lucky ones who supposedly didn't know any better, but they knew enough having had second hand words passed down from the ivory lips that declared me one of "those people," "urban looking," "wild hair."

To be tame to be boxed up and shipped "back to where we came from".

The white Queen promised me pretty, but had given me addiction, to the smooth strands, the lack of wandering hands, the small feeling of fitting in, the divorce of me from myself.

She counted her payment of coils and kinks and I was left with constant need.

I wasn't the only one she had knighted.

Our ticking time bombs were our heads and the new growth was our enzyme. Middle school was the alkaline equalizer, the hot comb and blow dryer our weapons against the kink and the coil that dared reemerge. US dark knights were not the first of our kind, for generations we were bred and trained to dodge the sun, the rain, the heavens themselves to keep ourselves "not pretty enough," but better off than those who had stayed free.

We dark knights, because dark was bad and she told us it was, and the chorus of school cafeterias, ladies rooms and hallways confirmed it.

She did everything, but lift me up.

Maybe that's why when a darker queen called, said that I was good enough, that I was beautiful, that I did not believe her. Not at first. The black Queen soothed by burnt scalp, she told me it was okay to see the queen, that she just wanted my happiness. But, what was beauty? Was it like pretty? She laughed and told me no. Beauty was the sun dancing on your cheeks, and bouncing off your smile; it was the rain fueling your embrace, it was the way you loved and laughed. Beauty was not your face or your hair or your skin; it was the pleasure of your own existence. Pretty had never had anything on beauty.

We had never been allowed to include it in our vocabulary for it

had a power unimaginable.

It had the power to free us.

There was never anything wrong. Pretty was simply unfit to define your ebony and it can never do you justice.

The black queen had always been mine; I became myself for the first time in 8 years. She knighted me with kink curl and coil three, she said she would serve me for as long as I lived. I was a dark knight, dark no longer a connotation of evil and hate, but of my queen, of my love.

Find your black queen and love her till the world can't help but be in awe, for it is the hardest of things, but it is also the most Beautiful.



High School: *Poetry*

High School First Place: Poetry

The Woman, the Paradigm

by Deborah Monti | Taylor Allderdice

Skin starts crinkling
As my arms start peeling and my hips start widening
And my freckles begin disintegrating as my face morphs
Into a soft-cheeked big lipped paradigm
Of the Hispanic women society has made me out to be.
Until my hair turns a jet black shade
My eyes an almond brown and my skin a deep cocoa
I cannot speak Spanish
They see that I am pale and lanky and sheltered
And until I crack with Hispanic features
They will not believe my native tongue.
I too had a dream
But it was of sweet bonbons and the local radio station
The chain linked fences and cheap fireworks
Grandmother's sweet kisses.
With a tattooed back, a lip pierced, and a faint accent
I've signed my life to be a Latina teen from Queens
Well I might be
Because that's the only Hispanic woman portrayed on T.V.

High School Second Place: Poetry

Give

by Alexis Payne | Pittsburgh CAPA

My father's eyes become wide sometimes
when he cries

for his people and the lost years

language

the breathless beaten
stripped and whipped
men who look like him.

my father's eyes are brown like his skin
like his scarred hands that screw screws into

metal studs. the nail gun
pops and sputters.

why does my father cry?
as he begs me to take this world
and make something
more than his tools

as he stretches the tape measure
across the window frame and
adds in his head

as he pops the chalk box on the drywall
and cuts with his utility knife
perfect lines and angles

as he leaves for work every morning
at 5 am with his eyes tired,
his knees pained
his back sore
carpenter. proud.
he writes his name on everything
he owns. why does my father cry?
when the men at the site
think he's a laborer because
his skin is brown like his eyes.

he teaches me
to ensure trim on doorways
and lay hardwood floors.
he teaches me to be strong.
and proud.

he tells me that the world is mine

my father's eyes are brown like his skin
like his arms that reach around me and hug

like his tears that burn his cheeks
like sulfur or acid.
why does my father cry?

because his hands are all he has to give

not a language or a culture but his hands
with their lines that I've memorized
like a poem

his hands

my father grits his teeth
and blinks.

pluck him out and in a different
time, my father would scream,
my father would kill.
he would smash glass and break wood

but here my father cries.
he cries
tears into his hands
and they run down the lines
like rivers.

High School Third Place: Poetry

The Diary of a Suspected Terrorist

by Bani Randhawa | Taylor Alderdice

i am the seventeen years of removing the shoes from my feet
the phone from my pocket
the brown from my skin
as i stand in airport security,
the red hot shame that fills my throat to a close as the
officer swabs my father's turban for explosives.

i am the pungent turmeric that stains the pots in my mother's
kitchen,
its smell lingering in the wool of my sweaters and the strands of
my hair.
i am the summation of all of the times i have stood and recited
the pledge of allegiance
in school, hand over my heart, the taste of last night's aloo matar
still lingering on my lips

my mother places her rough hand over mine, aged from the
hours spent
chopping onions for masala and massaging coconut oil into her
thick black hair.
her servile eyes turn down, away from the bright blue ones that
glare at her
"yes sir, you may pat me down," she whispers.
yes sir, to the man who hears her thick accent and pulls her
aside.

yes sir, to the man who pulls open her empty pockets and
shakes out her shoes.

yes sir. yes sir. yes sir.

i walk through the metal detector next to my mother but not
with her,

for she is the fourteen hour plane rides that span the eight
thousand miles between

her house and her true home,

the yellow ambassador cabs on the streets of kolkata that honk
away the hours of the night,

the muffled long-distance phone calls she makes that reduce her
voice to the faintest of whispers.

my father is defeated as he sits to retie his shoes.

perhaps it his silent demeanor and blank eyes

that he has while being patted down that say more
than his empty answers to the officers.

i watch the triumph diminish from his tired eyes as

he questions the american flag on his lapel,

the hamburger in his belly, the

United States of America.



High School: *Prose*

High School First Place: Prose

Sunrise Boulevard

by Donovan Petri | Pittsburgh CAPA

The air fumed with prejudice on both sides. Sunrise Boulevard was the foundation on which it was built. Across the road, near Vasco Beach a bunch of older boys were kicking around a hacky sack.

You could hear them from across the road, singing, pretending that the hacky sack was a little black boy's head, or heart, and that they were soldiers in the civil war.

It was obvious these kids had never read a lick about the civil war.

They couldn't have been older than fourteen. One of them was short with large black-rimmed glasses that made him look owl-eyed. He was singing loudest.

I watched from the other side of Sunrise Boulevard, the side closer to the city, where the streets cracked, and dogs barked, and people sold dope out of Camaros across the strip. It was an urban hell in which life seemed to thrive. In its own special way. I was with CD, and Rob. We grew up together on the border of Sunrise, wise enough to know that on the beach a fair skin tone spoke louder than words, pictures, even money was worth less than skin.

A year or two back a man from the Sunrise was put in jail for fighting a group of boys at the Vasco Beach. He gave one of them a bloody nose, and the two others got concussions from when he bonked their heads together. He was sentenced to fifteen years, parole in ten. For a damn bloody nose. On the other side of the beach they burn posters of Nelson Mandela. I overheard some of them one night, and I could see the orange flame reflect off the deep blue waters.

“Dumb nigger,” they were saying, almost singing, as they often did by Vasco Beach, “should have just kept his lips shut!”

The boys at the beach continued singing. A boy from Sunrise appeared in a doorway on our side of the boulevard. Deyvon. Deyvon was eight. He had a thin build and a shaved head. Today he only wore a pair of swim trunks, spotted with Power Rangers.

Deyvon was an excellent swimmer. In the Sunrise he was known to be able to outswim sharks that sometimes show up at Vasco Beach. Today he was going to build a sandcastle. The boys by the beach saw him simultaneously, and stopped kicking around the hacky sack.

When Deyvon crossed the street, the boys started chasing him, yelling and swearing at him all the way; by the time CD spoke up they were already halfway down the street.

“Swear, if those little punks come back here I’ll...”

Madam Christile appeared at the door. She was holding her palm flat to her head, like a visor, looking for Deyvon, her grandson, who had been chased off just moments before.

“Deyvon!” she called. Her suspicion was raised after she couldn’t spot him at the beach from her fifth-story window view of Vasco Beach. “Deyvon,” she called again.

The problem with Sunrise Boulevard is that it’s too divided. On one side we have beachside resorts, tall condominiums built for wealthy college students on vacation, or long time visitors; across Sunrise is an urban jungle, complete with decay, rust, and crime.

No one from one side can understand where the other is coming from. So the rich side is prejudiced against the poor side because they’re lazy and spoiling the view, and the poor side is prejudiced against the rich side because they have all this stuff that they want. The problem with Sunrise Boulevard is that people tag a skin color to a class. If your black you live on the poor side, if your white you live on the beach side. Of course, CD is a white man, Rob is a white man, I am a white man. We all live on Sunrise Boulevard. Race ain’t got nothing to do with it.

Madam Christile, she is a black woman, but she is also a French alien. She has been living in the United States for twenty five years now, no papers. I suppose no one ever bothered to ask her about them. She speaks in English but she admits to thinking and dreaming in French.

“You boys see Deyvon run either way now?” she said, in an

accent that sounded heavily Jamacian, but we knew better, it was the accent of an African woman, who grew up in Parisian slums.

“A bunch of boys chased him off down that way,” Rob said, pointing nonchalantly down Sunrise. Madam Christile huffed for sometime, then took a drag of a long cigarette none of us had noticed was between her stubby fingers. Salem 200’s, menthol.

“When he gets back you tell him I got chicken waiting in the oven, y (she said this as a habit from her French) that I am at the cinema. Would you tell him that?” She looked directly at Rob. Madam Christile trusted him most. He had taken a few years of French in grade school; Madam Christile respected him endlessly for it.

“Who knew Bonjour could be such a pick up line,” CD said jokingly to Rob. Still, Rob blushed.

It was almost an hour later that Deyvon came walking back up Sunrise. He was soaking wet, his swim trunks were still squirting water out of their pockets. He had a single cut on the top of his head, and single drop of red blood that followed the ridges of his cheeks, all the way down to the start of his chin, where it rhythmically dropped onto the concrete. I could see the rage start to build in CD’s eyes. If those boys had come back, and continued singing songs, I would have lost another friend to prison. That I can be certain of. CD is too good of a man to let things like that slide. Nothing happened. The singing boys were caught, they were jailed, five years, up for parole in two. Aggravated assault.

High School First Place: Prose

Shy, Bi, and Ready to Cry

by Clara Dregalla | Pittsburgh CAPA

Over the past few years I've progressed through a long series of self-given labels. From straight 100% heterosexual, heteroromantic I-am-a-girl-who-likes-boys; to lesbian 100% homosexual homoromantic I-am-a-girl-who-likes-girls; to bisexual-but-I-really-have-no-idea-anymore; to pansexual-yeah-it-is-a-thing-look-it-up-you-scum-bisexuals-are-cisnormative-jerks; to bisexual-yeah-it-actually-doesn't-have-anything-to-do-with-binary-gender-sorry-i-was-wrong. And all the while I was trying to decide if I was transgender, agender, or genderqueer. I've settled on queer- it's a very broad umbrella term with lots of space.

Some people will say that labels are restrictive, but I strongly disagree. When you give them to yourself, labels can help you define an aspect of yourself that, in the case of gender or sexuality, is really really complicated. When you're twelve and only just now realizing that there is a whole different way to be human that is actually real, that isn't just you being a freak, sometimes you need a word to type into Wikipedia.

These words are precious to me. They can never be extracted from the reason they were created- they belong to people, they are people.

D-Y-K-E is a person, T-R-A-N-N-Y is a person, F-A-G is a person. These words are many people.

So here I am, young Q-U-E-E-R sitting in class, trying to make a modern history timeline and doing actually really well thank you very much, and the person next to me laughs and says something cruel.

That's so queer haha.

I want to puke. Rage rises into my throat, obviously, and I want to punch the guy that said it, I'd like to stand up for myself and for anyone else in the room who might've heard and then felt bad but do you know what I do?

I do nothing.

The more I write about it, the more shameful it is. I can't make it anything else. I shudder to think of any other non-straight or non-cisgender students that might've heard and might've thought, just as I was, he's getting away with it. Some jerk is going to make me feel awful because I just want to get my work done, and I'm letting him do it. I'm letting this happen. I look around and nobody else says anything. We're all trying to do our work. We're all just trying to get through the class and get through the day. It's understandable, of course it is. We don't want to make a huge deal for some guy who said something awful because in the end it's just a word, we'll be out of class and we won't have to deal with it anymore, it'll be over, no big deal.

But when will we be able to tell the boring, stupid jerks from the people that are willing to bully, attack and kill queers, dykes, trannies and fags? When does it stop being a word and become violence?

violence?

Here's the preachy bit because there's a lesson to be learned from this: if you call somebody a tranny, imagine yourself brutally murdering that person. After all, you're using the same words as someone who has crushed someone's windpipe or beat them to death. You have something in common. Maybe you've never felt someone's neck break under your hands, but you've shouted the same words as someone who has. When do you stop being a boring, stupid jerk and become someone who is willing to bully, attack, and kill?

When do I stop being a tired, shy high school student who just wants to get through the day and become someone who's paralyzed by fear? I definitely care; I wouldn't be shaking in my desk if I didn't care. But caring's easy. Putting yourself out there, taking a risk, saying "I won't let this happen"- that's hard. That's really hard, but someday it might not be words, it might be fist and knives. I have to ask myself, would I step in? The thought of standing by and watching someone, anyone, get hurt makes me physically ill, but I have to ask it again-when do words become violence?

It's a matter of degrees in the end.

Co-ed

by Briget Re | Winchester Thurston

Mud is splashed all over my teammates as they come off the field smiling. We have just won against one of our biggest rivals, and are moving onto the next round of playoffs. With a shortness of breath, everyone talks about the great plays of the game and how utterly exhausted they are. But all I can say is how tired my hand is from filling up water bottles for an hour. I am the only girl on our school's "co-ed" varsity soccer team. As I continue to commit my time and heart to this team, I become anxious waiting every game for my coach to call my name and tell me it's my time to play. But each time I find my hopes dashed as the buzzer goes off signaling the end of yet another game. Whenever I talk to my coach about soccer and the lack of time I get on the field he tells me, "You're going to get a lot more playing coming up soon." Yet continuously I find myself on the bench, with that empty promise ringing through my ears. Nonstop I wonder why I never get played. Is it because I'm not good enough, even though my coach tells me that I'm "a huge asset to the team," or is it because I am a girl? My mind settles on the latter, and I feel even more ostracized by my "team."

I remember at the end of one game the two teams lined up to shake hands, and even though I had not played I stood in line too. I was used to getting odd looks during lineups like a rare breed of animal on display at a zoo. But this time as I walked through hearing the echo of "good game...good game," my ears perked up in surprise to hear one boy blurt out "ooh

hello cutie!” My mind froze at first out of disbelief. Once my shock subsided, a snowball effect took place inside my head conjuring up ideas as to why he had said that. I was jolted out of my trance when I heard my friend behind me crack up laughing and I decided to laugh to hid the discomfort I felt inside. However, feeling subjected to this stranger’s lewd comment, I subconsciously crossed my arms over my chest and looked down at the ground determined not to make eye contact with anyone. I felt ashamed. Who was I to think that I could actually play on an all-boys team?

After this incident, I became more aware that I was a girl encroaching in on a male team. No longer could I pretend that I was acknowledged as just “one of the guys.” All of a sudden, I became aware of the wandering, degrading stares I got as I bent down to stretch along with my teammates which made me disgracefully take a place in the back of the line—hoping to go unnoticed. I became aware of the offensive sexual comments they made on the bus rides home from games which made me yearn to become invisible. I became aware of what they said about me. I became aware that I was not played because I’m a girl.

Then the day came where I could no longer take it. After sitting on the bench during yet another game, I walked up to one of my best friends on the team and started to cry—a very girlish thing to do. Nonetheless he listened as I vented to him about how I didn’t feel I was good enough to play on the team and in turn replied by telling my how much I gave to the team only to get nothing back. He kept on telling me over and over again that I should switch to field hockey because I would “get more out of being on an all-girls team.” “Great,” I thought to myself. Even

of being on an all-girls team.” “Great,” I thought to myself. Even my best friend noticed that I was a fox in the hen house. I was used to these comments though it still hurt me that he wanted me gone as well. It wasn’t the first time someone told me I should switch to an all-girls team instead of being with the boys. I think they believe I’m not capable of playing with boys twice my size. They also don’t want to see a girl get hurt or knocked around. I used to be determined to show all of those people that I was going to stick with soccer and not give into sexism. But discouraged from never being played, I stopped caring about something that was once a passion. The next year when fall sports came around, I begrudgingly decided to play field hockey, recognizing that prejudice had won.

In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.” Dr. King was trying to convey the idea that when you treat someone as an outsider, you end up promoting separation and prejudice. The lives of all people are entangled and influenced by each other; therefore injustice to an individual threatens justice for everybody. One might believe that any act of injustice that happens to someone else will not affect them, but in the long run it does. My story may be small on the scale of sexism; however I regret my decision in switching because I now realize that I was only aiding the enemy. Due to my inability to speak up, I was unable to stop the prejudice that surrounded me. I was tempted by the easy way out not realizing that I was aiding a bigger cause than just my lack of field time. For that I will always be remorseful.

High School Third Place: Prose

A Different Perspective

by Austin Singh Mann | Kiski

“Here we are,” my mother expressed with glee as she pushed the double doors of the restaurant open. My vision was immediately flooded with flashing bright lights and dancing that replaced the dull and dark backseat of my car; my only memory of the journey had been an occasional flash of a street lamp passing by like a flashlight peaking in to make sure that I hadn’t fallen asleep. I could hear the rumble of the bass from the high paced song playing behind the large wooden door, but upon its opening the music changed outwards, exploding through the doorway and the otherwise dark and deserted parking lot with loud and ear drum ringing Punjabi music. Bright lights sporadically shout out in multiple directions, filling the darkened room with rays of colorful light that would occasionally morph into specific shapes and dance on the ceiling and walls alongside the participants of the party. The smell of spiced chicken makhani radiated in my nose, as it was easily my favorite Indian dish, and was soon followed by a scent of mangos and other fruity perfume smells that women smother themselves with for such festive occasions, no matter what ethnicity they are. This was the typical Punjabi party. As my mother and I ventured forward with my grandparents in close pursuit, we found ourselves overwhelmed with familiar faces and families making their way over to welcome us to the occasion. My distant cousin was celebrating a birthday today, and as a true Indian family, we’d traveled the five hours by car to Virginia to congratulate him and join in the festivities. My father couldn’t join us because of work,

and my younger brother wasn't even born yet. I was about eight or nine myself. As we ventured deeper into the party I separated myself from my family as most children do and decided that I wanted to go exploring, or see what the party had in store for me.

I soon found myself in a back hallway, the music now suppressed behind a wall that separated me from the party. This wasn't where the party was supposed to be happening. I narrowed my eyes as I spotted a room further down the hall where I heard voices, children's voices. I approached it and entered without much of a second thought, and immediately found myself in quite an odd situation.

"Why are you here?" they asked me, their dark brown eyes scanning over my white skin. I didn't really know what to say as I found myself encircled by a gang of three boys, all of them pureblood Indian with dark skin and slight accents to prove it. I didn't recognize them; they were extended family that travelled all the way from Florida for the party. I looked to just be a young pale white kid with an American accent and jeans. Jeans are surprisingly what give us Americans away the most. To them I was an outsider, a "gora" as white men are called in our language of Punjabi. Yes, I was indeed half white, but I had spent most if not all my life in an Indian household, being raised by an Indian family. I furrowed my brow and offered them each a questioning look, though I didn't respond. They started speaking in our native language, speaking about me as if I wasn't even there. "How did a white kid get into here? Do you think he's lost?" Of course, I could understand all of this, which only amounted to more confusion being piled upon my nine-year-old brain. Before I could dwell on their behavior for too much longer,

brain. Before I could dwell on their behavior for too much longer, and before they could realize that I was in fact not an outsider, my younger cousin appeared behind me and grabbed me by the arm, dragging me off to show me something back at the party. The feeling still lingered, as if I had overstepped my boundaries, as if there was something about me that was different. I didn't understand back then.

What I didn't understand was the animosity spread by different cultural groups that don't get along with each other. The white men of Great Britain had conquered India in the 19th century, forcing the natives to modernize and pay taxes to the mother country. It wasn't until Gandhi broke the chains of England's grip in 1947 that India finally gained its independence. Before departing, Great Britain split India into three separate countries, two for the Islamic population and one for everybody else. Chaos soon followed, as Hindu, Sikh, Muslims fought over the border and attempted to shove the opposing religious group across it, at any cost. My grandfather explained it to me in great detail since he was a part of it. He lived on a wealthy farm in what today is Pakistan, and was forced to march in the 100 miles to India with the rest of his family once England drew the lines for the new countries. He was only eight, some of the other members of his family pushing sixty or even seventy years of age. He told me about stepping over the decaying dead bodies, having to carry his younger brother who was on the verge of dying of disease. He told me about having to hide from the bands of raiders who roamed the countryside, pillaging towns and villages to get resources for themselves. He told me about the distant fires you could see at night, those distant red flares which signified

a country that was being set on fire by his own inhabitants. And for what? Because we pray to a different god? Because we follow a different book? Because our skin tones don't match? Racism stems from hatred, and hatred is universal.

When my cousin dragged me back into the main room of the party, I found myself again engulfed by the booming bass, the dancing crowd, and the scent of my favorite foods. I only caught a few brief glimpses of the boys who had questioned me, and didn't even bring the issue up with my mother once we got back into the car to go home. I was young but I wasn't stupid; I realized what was wrong. I looked white. Now I accept who I am, and in fact embrace it. When someone asks me who I am, I tell them "I am half Indian, and half White."

Hate has brought upon humanity deep scars that perhaps will never truly heal. The crimes committed in the name of hate are too numerous to name, and we have all fallen victim to its unforgiving flames. The sooner we learn how to overcome the irrational judgment of another simply because of their outer appearances or beliefs, the sooner humanity will be able to push forward and progress into something spectacular without the burden of having its population separated by social boundaries. Love doesn't have to replace these negative feelings, however, there is something that must: Tolerance.

