

Adult Category

Rachel Corrie's Peace

*- Human shield, Gaza Strip,
March 16, 2003*

by Richard Downing

First Place (Tie)

She looks less dead in the photograph,
less still,

still the girl who wanted to be everything
from activist to astronaut but now,

not that many years removed
from fifth-grade dreams, lies

collapsed beneath a bulldozer intent
on collapsing less human houses,

her wall of flesh crushed, her blood spilled
to try to stop the spillage

that will be as it's always been absorbed
into the sacred sands that surround Rafah

where she stood,
where she fell, her bright orange

jacket disappearing beneath the machine,
flesh against moment and metal.

White Flag

by Sean McLain Brown

First Place (Tie)

A few hours after we bombed an artillery position outside Kuwait City, a whine rose in the distance and like small gnats, our Harriers returned, and we counted each one, as if they were sheep and we, shepherds. This wasn't the adventure it sounds. We were young men who questioned nothing—all action, no talk.

Hope's kind of like the coelacanth, the ancient fish thought extinct but discovered in shallow waters off the coast of South Africa. Hope's a last resort against the human condition, and today in the headlines I read, "Massacre in Iraq."

Soldiers are swallowed by the rhythm of blood; fear pumps through them, something primordial, something that crowds out reason and shouts "KILL THEM BEFORE THEY KILL YOU." It's the less publicized version of the Marine Corps Creed that says, "When you absolutely need something blown up over night, call the Marines." We do our job and we are exceedingly efficient.

I begin to suspect that I'm a criminal, though no court will ever convict me; who is responsible? I find myself staring at my hands for hours, the single flame that illuminates my thoughts—how many people did I help kill?

And what of faith? Strange to feel something stirring in my heart that asks me to stop running and give in to gravity. After watching Bedouins and their camels winding through the desert under a full moon, their trail curling like a long syllabic string of Sanskrit, I begin to believe in redemption; the kind that the thief on the cross experienced, but stories cannot silence the phantom shells exploding, or heal the aching disconnect in my shoulder. The metal pins holding me together feel like biting on tinfoil, and I wonder when it will end, this eternal surrender.

We brought our failures back with us, we buckled and yielded to their weight, their acrid taste, like gasoline, their smell, noxious as a terminal ward. But I remember Derek, the kid who refused to take part in the killing, even when he was beat by other Marines in our unit. While waiting for the MPs to haul him away, he opened the door to our hooch, let the wind wash his face, screamed a long guttural howl that raises the hair on my arms even now, a sound I recognize as everything I'd come so far to give away.

Youth (13-18) Category

MY MOTHER'S GARDEN

by Olivia Cole

First Place

my mother sits at the window staring
at the place her garden
used to be. the birdbath is empty
and dry like the flowerbeds. she
contemplates the grass,
how brown it has become,
and the pale hostas trouble her.

i look out the window too, but
at the city instead. I am ten
and want to change the world
and become president
and travel to third-world countries.
“somalia is starving,” I say.
and she says

“my garden is dying.”
i am ten and angry with her
for her lack of concern. I recite
facts about poverty, name
the wars that I’ve heard of.

my mother smiles as she always has
and turns back to the small universe
of her garden. “sasha, we have to start
somewhere,” she says, and on her grocery list
writes *flower seeds*.

My daughter, the past

by Emma Zeldin

Honorable Mention

History is growing
Strong and broad
And curved like moon-bone
Between my hips
Because that is where my power lies
The birthright to strength that so many women could not take advantage of
My heritage is traced in sand
Finger swept and loved
Rough skin turned black by numbers that don't add up
Memories of Germany
We don't talk about anymore
I am undernourished in my ancestry
Ribs visible beneath layers and layers of revised stories
Hidden like my grandmother's hair
Which smells faintly of the spices of the old country
My history lives in that smell
It traveled from Russia
Nearly jumped off the boat into the black waters where so many stories end up
Drowning
Mothers beneath the waves
Singing *Adonai Yis-ra-eil* as their names are forgotten
And their images lie dormant
But if history were my child
She would be born imperfect
Strong
Broad
And moon bone beautiful
Between my hips

Youth (12 - Under) Category

Guarding the Good

by Phoebe Arnold

First Place

I blow on my hands.
They grasp the feeble cardboard sign
I had made on a whim
earlier today:
Peace

*“I’m hungry,”
the boy informs his mother.
Not that it makes a difference*

The bridge is positioned
so the bitter wind
whips from the water
and snakes directly down my neck.

*“Papa?”
the girl cries.
It’s hard to see
when there’s ash in your eyes.*

A driver honks his horn.
I glimps his scowl and wonder
what he has against peace.

*“Puppy? Puppy? Wake up!”
The brown fur
takes on a reddish hue.*

My flimsy sign bends in half.
I reposition myself
so I can hold it straight
I stand here with frosty hands,
windblown hair,
my pathetic sign—
a tiny army
against indifference.

A Time for Everything, I Know
by Kamil Kisielewicz
Honorable Mention

I know
Mama always said
there's a time for everything
and I guess I'll have to wait,
like waiting for the seasons to change,
planting a seed and watching it grow, so hard, so long
starting summer, being patient, for what I want
in life that is, or today, tomorrow, just like yesterday,
it seems as if I can no longer understand time
till all the fighting will be done, forever
and I won't see lines of worry
on so many faces or, losses of hope
in the people I know, but I
do know
there is a
time
for
all
things
to
appear
and
maybe
it's time
I've planted an Olive tree