

Fishbone Hair

by Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner

Adult Category, First Place

I.

Inside my niece Bianca's old room I found two ziplocks stuffed. With rolls and rolls of hair.
Dead as a
doornail black as a tunnel hair thin. As strands of tumbling seaweed. Maybe it was my sister.
Who
stashed away Bianca's locks so no one would see trying to save that rootless hair. That hair
without a
home. It all
fell out.

II.

The marrow should have worked. They said she had six months to live.

III.

That's what doctors told the fishermen over 50 years ago while they were out at sea. Just miles
away from
Bikini. The day the sun exploded.

IV.

There is an old Chamorro legend that Guahan was once attacked. By a giant monster fish. The
women,
guided by their dreams, hacked off their hair. Wove their locks into a massive magical net. They
caught
the fish. They saved their islands.

V.

Thin, rootless

fishbone hair

black night sky

catch ash

catch moon

catch

stars

for you Bianca

for you

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What a Time to Be Alive

by Jocelyn Chambers

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

death taught me how to dress.

it says “not that one, these shoes instead, a little less vibrant and a little more docile, more humility, less confidence.”

death taught me not to wear hoodies, to keep my head uncovered, to wear light colors instead of dark because i am dark enough already

to buy a belt for every pair of pants i own, better yet, to not wear pants,

death taught me how to do my hair, it says “less coil, more common, straighter, longer, thinner,” it burns my scalp and hands me a comb and says “isn’t it nice to run your fingers through it now,”

death taught me who to like, what music to listen to, how to keep people comfortable, how to walk; “don’t limp, straight shoulders, but stay smaller than them,”

it taught me my vocabulary, all of the big words that earn me awards such as ‘articulate,’ ‘not like the rest of them,’ ‘a good one,’

death is always telling me to be less, less african, more american, a welcome addition, a token, to lay myself bare and strip myself of any weapons, any threats

death is an x-ray machine, and says if i do anything wrong, it will come as if i’m not dying to myself already

death says “what a time to be alive.”

because in this country, white is invisible.

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An incident at the bridge of no return

by John B. Lee

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

in an assignment
involving a clear view
the young lieutenant
was trimming a particular poplar tree
so the Americans
might observe without obstruction
the deployment and movement
of enemy guns, and
training his axe
on the aspen with its shivering leaf
looking north to the bridge of no return
he fell from a fatal blow to the brain from behind
the cold tool blunting his last thought
like the dark wedge
where the burnt Y of the barkless trunk
remains with its blackened knot
like a blind eye fastened at the fork
of two branches
it stands there
a scorched post crowned in rot
with us living on
in such a ridiculous world
in the sad significance of risible things
where what matters most
seems valued least
and what matters least
is conserved
in the chiseled knowing of stone

For Nyakier

by Allison Huang

Youth Category (13-18), First Place Tie

*“Even if you die in the water, it’s better to be killed by snakes or crocodiles than
by soldiers”*

- Nyakier Gatluak, *South Sudan* (from *NYT*)

On our way home, we roll over a hill & a deer
leaps in front of the car
loses its balance
gracefully, not unlike a man
heaves into a woman.

The corpse lists on the asphalt like
a body in a dark current, her belly still pulsing with
something warm & vaguely fawn-like.
A life within
a life.

I know children who leap into
crocodile-infested waters to keep
from knowing men. I know a boy
who was born against a field of red

petals,
himself opened up. Who could name
every curve of the gun, slept with it
under his neck, a clay reminder dissolving

the way a scream dissolves
into a current.

Tell me how to bring a child into a world where
the river claims the boy who would rather face
the teeth of a beast than face his older self.

The water swells over him
as a mother’s round stomach swells with a seed.

So many poppies
in the field, seeping against the blank
bits of sky,
poppies that are as dark
as mouths.

An Open Letter to the Bullet That Shot My Brother

by Matthan Sutton

Youth Category (13-18), First Place Tie

Dear Bullet,

You are not to blame, and it took me time to see but the way that you
Scream through the air is similar to the way that he
Screamed as the man in green pulled the trigger:
Involuntarily.

And your life must not have been easy either, a raindrop of molten
Metal pounded to proliferate Man's purpose in the world through
Tightly packed and popped pistols in dark alleys and
War valleys and demonstration rallies in countries where people are silenced
Through violence and, to be the toy Men use when they
Don't get their money or their oil or their way in the world they built themselves. It
Must be hard to fly for them. To stream through the sky only to
Fall with the body you killed for them.

When my brother came home he was
Zipped up in a bag built for bodies and I find it funny that the zipper sealing
Him in was made from the same metal as the object that
Sealed his fate. And I find it funny that you were blamed when the zipper did just
As much to hold him in the grips of sleep.

I think, Bullet, that we hate you because blaming ourselves is too
Hard to do. Because bullets flying are the justification for more bullets and if we blame the
Object we can ignore the push. If we blame the bullet. The Barrel. The powder. The hammer.
The trigger. The soldier. The war. The government. The "Man".
If we blame the fire we can ignore the match: our hate.

I forgive you, even though you have nothing to apologize for,
And even though I never actually met my brother
And even though I never knew his name
And even though he was American and I am Iranian
I forgive you Bullet, for screaming.

Me and You

by Kiran Treacy-Hind

Youth Category (12 and Under), First Place

The world talks to me in my head and birds chirping in the wind and the sun shining on my face.
Dogs looking for their bones, while I see beauty in every face.

The world brings us together,
it moves as slow as a sloth.

People live in different ways, treat them the same way.

The world has so many mysteries
that no one knows and may not find.

We all have two shadows inside us, but it helps us, it finds who we are, in this place where
people live and die, and will never find why they were born.

The world brings us together, like a mother and her child.

It moves us, helps us, and cares for us. So why are we killing the earth, if we help it,
it will grow so we can grow.

We may feel helpful to poor children,
We may be helpful to people that
have been bullied and all sadness all
hate will wash away, as the sun shines
on the water, as the birds fly in the
wind and never stop seeing beauty.

I Remember

by Inica Kotasthane

Youth Category (12 and Under), Honorable Mention

I remember those days,
When I was a young, innocent child.
I never had understood what was going on,
For those long, dark six years.

It first started with the radio,
My parents chatting nervously,
While rushed reports were heard on
That old 'speaking box.'

Then, the noises came.
They would awake me in the middle of the night.
The whooshing of airplanes flying overhead,
And mother closing those dark curtains.

Those days father refused for mother and I
To go outside onto the streets.
I used to be so happy because I wouldn't go to school,
But little did I know about the real reason.

When dinner was scarce,
And I ate every last crumb of bread.
When I looked out the window to see
Poor humans being beat to death.

I remember those days not as clearly,
As I did back then.
And even after all these years,
I still wonder why a person would do that to another.

Why do we do this to one another,
Are we animals: predators and prey?
We must find a way to get together,
And see where peace has gone.

Goka O Mita,* The Tour Guide Gives an Interpretative Account
by Patricia Sheppard
Adult Category, First Place

From the one river, seven rivers flow
to the Inland Sea. There were many bridges,
big and small over the rivers.
The city hung upside down

in the seven rivers like the spirit
of Mokuren's dead mother when he saw her
in a dream. Distended at high tide,
the day started with no hope of clouds.

Monday morning.
An air raid alarm earlier when a B-san
flew over. Then, back to normal.
People were on the streets, on the bridges,

catching the trolleys into town,
schoolchildren, businessmen, visitors
to the city. It was the season of Obon
of feeding the hungry spirits of the dead.

A pink and blue light flickered
and the sun exploded.
Rising dragon vortex,
no music, only wind rushing.

I ran with the others toward the rivers.
We were like birds buffeted by the wind.
I tasted blood in my mouth.
The fire was catching up.

Under the bridge, bodies clogged the rivers.
No one is writing this down. No one
is feeding the dead in Hiroshima,
white flower of ash.

* *Goka O Mita*: The translation of the Japanese phrase is "unforgettable fire." In the poem, some images and phrasing are taken from *Unforgettable Fire, Pictures Drawn by Atomic Bomb Survivors*, edited by NHK, Nippon Hoso Shuppan Kyokai, [Japanese Broadcasting Corporation] (Tokyo 1977).

Peace

by William A. Carpenter

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

My fist opens
in a blossom of fingers
palm exposed
its five petals
no longer a hammer
or a club
but a cup
or a bowl
or if joined
with another
a link
in a chain
of connectedness
that the fist
only wishes
it could break.

Discovery

by Kristin Van Tassel

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

My son holds a machine gun,

the body black plastic, handle orange, excavated
from the lower strata of a waiting room toy box.

“What’s this, Mama?” he asks, his round belly

a reminder of his still recent toddlerhood. Here,
between *Good Housekeeping* and the artificial

banana plant, rising cobra-like, a rhetorical challenge:

and how might I serve the taxonomy of weapons
technology, of killing made ever-more convenient?

“What do you think?” I ask, finally. He frowns,

rotating his find, feeling its molded parts, pausing
with the orange handle on top, barrel pointed down.

“Toucan,” he pronounces, with a scholar’s confidence.

And there it is. Not the phoenix or ethereal dove,
but a wild bird, alive with tropical color, its neon

beak almost touching my son’s juicy, sun-ripened cheek.

Instructions for How to Prepare My Corpse

by Eli Adams

Youth Category (13-18), First Place

When I die, fold my hands together
The way children fold their hands behind their necks,
Playing dead beside bloody boots
Until bombs stop dropping.

When I die, don't tell anyone my name.
Reduce me to a decimal, a dot in a numerical
reduction you can deliver straight-faced through television screens.
Add mine to a stack of unnamed bodies
With clipped wings and gags between our canines
Because your western tongue twists when trying to pronounce my name.
Peel away my humanity so your conscience can carry on.

When I die, send my corpse to Congress
With a note that says, "You took too long,"
Signed by all six-hundred-thousand of us.

When I die, be sure to say it was my fault
Loud and clear.
Treat me like a criminal, an undeserving animal,
Tattoo slurs across my skin
With a needle sharpened sloppily by the dog teeth of intolerance,
Mix your inky black beast in with my innocent blood
To turn it dark purple and paint me like I'm poison.

When I die, put me in your pocket,
Wear me like a blanket,
Tuck my name between the creases of your hands
Lift my ghost up when you raise two fingers or one fist,
When you salute the tender touch of peace
Use me as your excuse.

When I die leave my eyes open
So I can watch you all march.

Mango Tree

by Emily Sun

Youth Category (13-18), Honorable Mention

“Mr. Lal found his daughter, 12, close to dawn. She and her cousin...were hanging by their scarves from a mango tree...Relatives insisted that the bodies hang there for 12 hours because they wanted outsiders to see how the girls had been found.” ~New York Times, June 2014

the day you and eddy saw
two girls hanging limp from my branches
eddy staring at a river of hair
you wanting to cut a piece
mam plunged your hands in rice
to stop the shivering
gloved her hands like birds
you and eddy once named after stars
and buried in the well

someone must grieve for them, mam says,
cracks my spine in half

by night,
you, mam, eddy a pile
splashing blue tv light on your cheeks
windows wide open sweet mango pit air
mam saying turn it off when I fall
asleep you pretending to snore
she pinching your ear would you want to
die like this
with the tv on

morning you wipe the ring of sap
from her eyes

Do You Know How They Catch Monkeys in Africa?

by Caroline Waring

Youth Category (13-18), Honorable Mention

The tips of his shoes dug into the rubble
Body twisting through the adobe maze
A mouse trapped by walls on all sides
The stings of rubber bullets pellet flesh
Intricate bruises cloak the body like paint.

It's one-two: breathe in, breathe out
Right foot forward, left foot higher
Playing parkour in the Gaza Strip.

Where boys find themselves reduced to
Throwing rocks, an exercise in desperation
Clad in Keffiyehs, and rough fingertips.

Where armored soldiers gather at every corner
A threat in constancy, a restriction of movement
A boy tied to a jeep windshield like a buffer.

Where at the very least one may receive
A phone call before a life is ended
or a neighborhood burned to the ground.

“Hello, I’m Yosef, an officer with the IDF
In five minutes we will blow up your home.”
“How did you get this number?”

There flies feathered doves, coupled
Over graffiti-laden walls and mangled fences,
strung in wire, as blockades, those guardians of poverty.

He leaves footprints in the dirt, perpetually fleeing
He stretches muddied, clipped fingernails
Against the clear blue sky, swimming in clouds
because this crowded, crumbling, clay prison
Is his home.

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Sweet Memories

by Rachel Liu

Youth Category (12 and Under), First Place

I still remember that dark, gloomy day.
The creamy, white envelope from the government,
Seemed so harmless at first,
But when my mother started sobbing out my brother's name,
My blood ran cold, and I knew.

Now, as I stand here, dressed in a formal gown,
Black as the midnight sky, and so tight that I can barely breathe,
I recall those sweet memories, of my big brother.

The time when he taught me to ride a bicycle,
But I teetered and tottered, and tumbled to the ground.
It hurt, but I shed no tears that day,
Because my big brother was there.

The time when he brought me to Mitch's house,
And his snake reared up, and hissed straight at me,
Glaring and glowering in furious anger,
I couldn't help letting out a terrified squeal.
It was horribly frightening, but the snake calmed down,
And I was no longer scared,
Because my big brother was there.

The time when my soccer team lost an important final,
And I cried and cried, utterly crushed.
But I still got up in perseverance,
Because my big brother was there.

Questions swirl through my thoughts.
Why can't people just live in peace?
Why does this world have to be so violent?

Those sweet memories, of my big brother,
When he was still here, are only faraway dreams,
Ones that will never come true.
Even so, I wish that my big brother were here.

In the Year of the Drone

by Devreaux Baker

Adult Category, First Place

Hurry, you have to tell them.

A girl is walking down the street
hand in hand with her mother
coming or going to a wedding or a birth.
There is the sound of celebration in the air,
the smell of spice on their hair and fingers.

You have to warn them.

The vendors are setting up carts
at the edges of the street.
A woman carries her baby in her arms,
a man lifts his son onto his shoulders
for a better view of our world.

Somewhere miles and lifetimes away
men sit in a room lit by screens,
dead light is trapped against their forms.
You know how this will end.

You have to warn them.

When Cortés burned the aviaries
he chose to destroy what was innocent,
what was precious to the people.
He chose to wage war by first putting to flame
great blue herons, snowy egrets
spring tanagers and hummingbirds.

You have to go now.

A burning coin has been tossed in the air.
There are faces lit by dead light
watching from miles and lifetimes away.

Vietnam: January 28, 1973

by Sophia Marusic

Youth Category (13-18), First Place

I cannot tell you anything of guns--
other than,
in the slick sunrise like a peeled peach,
they've been muzzled
and the crack of black pepper bullets

has stuttered to a halt.

I hold my breath as the dawn washes in like a dusty song
that's been scrubbed fresh. My fingers pluck the tune
from the creases in my blanket.

The word *ceasefire* is both too soft and too sharp,
a rounded lull swaying into a revived fury.

awkward english in my native tongue.
It flows from my father's lips
like the way he whispers my mother's name
when he comes home from the fields.

There is still shrapnel here,
in foundations of my village,
in the mutilated leg of my brother,
in the way my grandmother cries at midday, when a door closing
could be an explosion and another goodbye.

There is still shrapnel here and more shrapnel will come
shiny, azure scarabs that will wriggle beneath our skin,
but like the grass growing on graves,
life will build around it.

The clouds button and unbutton.
The tattered trees splay toward a pale sun.
Somewhere, the faded melody becomes a slow waltz.

Free

by Alice Yanhong Lu

Youth Category (13-18), Honorable Mention

We used to imagine we would always be a kind of free,
barefoot summers, playing warriors and princesses
in that flower garden.

You know, we called it our secret garden,
but it was only a patch of grass behind a rusty shed
that Farmer Zheng used to keep his cats in.

And everything grew heartily there in that secret garden,
even you, and I, two chaotic and muddy daughters
stranded in the years between seven and thirteen.

After the war, your father never came home. The Japanese left and
you would say to me: "He'll come back next summer."
I believed you until we turned fifteen.

A thousand miles from seawater,
we could still feel it in our skins, the summer the ocean dried out;
there was this melancholy laughter in the air. The joke was on us:

Our secret garden had never been secret and it had never been
ours and we would never be any kind of free. That summer,
we became a number: two unwanted girls in a country of one point three billion.

When they shipwrecked us in the land of fifteen,
you breathed saltwater into your lungs
and I suffocated with oxygen.

There is now too much salt in your veins
and your words have begun to sound foreign to me -
s-t-o-p, we can no longer understand each other.

Soil Soul

by Leila Metres

Youth Category (12 and Under), First Place

One day my
father met
a man
he said
we were
going to
get a
pear tree
so I waited
and waited
and waited
and it's
all because
the ground
never snoozed
it always
became the
spirit of
the world
some thing
we could
never live
without I
love the
ground.

A Child Hibakusha

--Hiroshima 1947

by Yuko Taniguchi

Adult Category, First Place

My mother

When my hair began falling out, my mother got down on her knees and picked up one hair at a time. My hair was everywhere--under the hospital bed, inside my sleeves, on the white wall.

My mother would sweep the floor, press my hair into a black ball between her hands and put it inside her apron's pocket. Even after I became bald, the hairs continued to well up

like spring water in the mountain. When the wind came through the window, my hairs moved like worms on the wet ground. This morning, my hair was inside my mother's

noodle soup. She filled her mouth with my hair and noodles and swallowed them all at once.

My brother

My brother pushed my swing, and I went up high.
When I came down and passed him, he said he could see the top of my head, bare, full, and smooth like the belly of a pregnant woman.

My grandmother

Thousands of pieces
of glass flew into my grandmother's head
like bees into a hive.

After she lost all of her hair, she died.
Inside the coffin, my grandmother's head shone
as if the stars were buried underneath her skin.

My River

River, I'm going to die soon. My grandmother, Cousin Toshi and Mrs. Kamata in the next village all died when they lost their hair.

You keep moving onto the next village, to the ocean and to the rivers in another country. It would take you one hundred years to come back to Hiroshima again.

You won't find a bald girl like me.

Morning's Long Argument of Crows

By Shawn Pittard

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

"And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." Genesis 22:10

When you called last night, your voice
was a sad guitar, telling me your son had left for war.

He'd pressed an open hand
against the Greyhound's yellowed window.

Low morning fog held you in its silence.

Crows passed over my house before daylight.
I joined them from my restless dreams.

We were a squadron, flying in loos formation
over barren treetops, empty streets.

Our black eyes scanned the rooflines.

We were Abraham's obedient knife,
raised high above the city's sleeping children.

Floodlings

By Aubrey Ryan

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

We all sing oldies: lyricless and strange: the songs before
the saints, before the sky
was scraped, and red-winged birds fell down

in flocks. Some songs are low and break the singer
double like a shift of land, and some
so high—a keening whipped against coyotes

keening back. We sing and draw the milk
down from the mothers. We sing and seed our valleys
gut-deep. We sunburn

gold and umber, brick brown, so
dark we are begun again. Our clothes are webbed; we leap
clean from them and follow down

to where the river was.

Our children open mouths
Like murky ponds. Our black-eyed newborns hum.

We know the water will come
over the lip of the land: rising and grey as a cast-iron
wing. The gods we cage inside our ribs say: look

and see. They tell the men: you're mountains:
stand. They tell the women: you
are arks: hold out your hands.

A Necessary Poetry

by Hayun Cho

Youth Category (13-18), First Place

The approach of holiness
peace is the open mouth
in a field of silence that mirrors our souls
blue green lips rain words scatter
the old lands awakening the old graves

every day is the anniversary of a war
the children still whine their heartfelt songs
the trees do not suddenly fall
the traffic does not stop
and the graves are still still soft
the dead cannot remind
there is a hush and history turns its tangled head
it is always right to remember

where are the bones browning the sad womb of the earth
illuminate the bones that are ourselves
for peace is revolution

the hope shout of dawn
the frenzy of souls going somewhere
more human than ever
revolution is loving the ghosts
it is seeing a lantern in the night and knowing
the world is still moving still speaking
full of a necessary poetry
despite the darkness.

Trust in Peace

by Leila Grant

Youth Category (13-18), Honorable Mention

And I look on to see my own children come visit me with kind eyes but iphones always in hand.

And I look on to see my wife's heart give out as she lays resting in the circle of my arms, heavenly morning light streaming in, calling her away.

And I look on to see millions and millions of videos screaming of bombs and destruction float on the web.

And I look to see Mother Nature's toads and flamingoes and polar bears and lions and walruses die off in the hot wars until only a few are left.

But as I sit and close my eyes, rocking on the creaky porch of my children's children's summer home, acutely feeling the empty space or my wife next to me, I wonder why I am not giving up.

And I think about my great granddaughter's yellow curls scrunched together in a clump on her chubby pink head.

And I think about the sprouts in my garden pushing their way out of the wet earth.

And I think about the ecologists and environmentalists holding up signs of protest at the National mall to protest all the different—same wars.

And I think about the soldiers stopping to dream of clouds floating in a not gray sky.

So at that moment, resting in my rocking chair, as I feel my mind and heart slip out from beneath me,

I know I am not giving up.

I know that I am not leaving this world without a legacy, I am simply leaving.

Leaving and trusting that my granddaughter's granddaughter will live in a better and healthier world than I did.

I am leaving to join the billions who have trusted too.

Reach Out

by Pratyush Muthukumar

Youth Category (12 and Under), First Place

A woman helping a baby chimpanzee in need
Two boys helping a seal, tangled in a forest of weed
A policeman buying a shoe for a homeless man
Two friends building a snowman
Peace

This is peace
Don't you think?
This is all that peace is about
For if you turn the peace sign upside down, it is a hand reaching out

***Their Grandmother's Palm
(Pantoum for Palestine)***

by Carla S. Schick

Adult Category, First Place

Children throw rocks to defend the land
soldiers shoot exploding bullets
from the dunes beyond the refugee camps
blood drains into sand filled streets

Soldiers shoot exploding bullets.
Flares in the night reveal decaying bodies
blood drains into sand filled streets
a collection of worn shoes and garbage

Flares in the night reveal decaying bodies
gaping holes in the walls of refugee homes
a collection of worn shoes and garbage
an elderly woman picks through the stones that were her home

Gaping holes in the walls of refugee homes
mothers cook over wood splintered by a bomb
an elderly woman picks through the stones that were her home
a ceiling fan hangs from what is left of a roof

Mothers cook over wood splintered by a bomb
children move between the shadows of tanks and gunfire
a ceiling fan hangs from what is left of a roof
a truck flattened by a tank bursts into flames

Children move between the shadows of tank and gunfire
pick up stones to defend the memory of their ancestral land
a truck flattened by a tank bursts into flames
families are forced to flee or be murdered

Pick up stones to defend the memory of their ancestral land
Their grandmother's wrinkled palm is a map of their country
families are forced to flee or be murdered
children throw rocks to defend the land.

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To The Boy I Remember, The Man I Came To Love

By Allison Thorpe

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

Born to country, you understood
the scent of the hunt,
the keen of hatchet and knife,
the wade of trail and stream,
all good qualities for war.

When your number came up,
I wondered if I would ever see you again.
What we had suddenly seemed
insignificant, distant, easily forgotten,
your parting kiss eager and patriotic
and so full of somewhere else.

You came home quiet,
Da Nang, Phnom Penh, Saigon
just names dropped from a reporter's lips,
muffled memories in an old documentary.

You never talked about what happened—
no leeches, no malaria, no blood—
preferred instead singing to ponds
patriotic with fish,
whispering to children
how to tie knots or name trees,
humming me asleep when the night
swallowed dreams,
cooing to tomatoes and squash
with a satisfied eye skyward,
chanting with owls and winter dusks,
burying black iris in the snow and
praying softly for their return.

A Chance Meeting at the Edge of the Namib Desert

By Lizette M. Tucker

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

Did your eyes meet before you killed that boy
tottering around the corner of the horse trough,
reaching after a fly's iridescent wings,
stopping inches from your crouching frame?
Did your heart break open?
If you had smiled at him,
would he have cried out or been transfixed
by the unusual glint of your sea-colored eyes?
Instead of steel,
could you have pulled from your pocket
the last piece of koeksister
to fill the startled "O" of his little mouth
with sticky sweetness and silence?

Before you left him gurgling his blood,
the smallest of dead silhouettes,
could you have dropped your knife in the fine dust,
traded it for this curious sack
of black plum cheeks and Buddha belly,
carried him on your back through the red dunes and scrub,
running, running for both your lives?

Would he have grown on you?
Would you have come to love him as you do your own boy?
Fed them both from a small pail of maize and honey,
taught them to track suni in the forest,
heard him call out for his brother when neighbors,
bothered by his color, beat him?
Wiped his face, cleaned his wounds,
hoped to replace his father's image with your own,
hoped that, with time,
he forgave you for leaving the knife behind?

Cultivate

by Philip Lee

Youth Category (13-18), First Place

My brother told me how his sniper rifle had felt:
Cold, against the balmy flesh of his right cheek.
The familiar, soft dirt had conformed to his chin
As he shot a single round into the head
Of an enemy soldier, sixty yards away.

I told him about my garden: the war I had waged
with weeds, the break of earth against the rusting spade.
I had sowed the soil with poppy seeds
And had hoped to see sprouts by the spring.

He told me how the juxtaposition of metal and earth
With his trembling body always eased his troubled heart.
How the thought of machines, made of blood
Stripped from the Earth's iron veins, would be used
To spill men's blood back onto the earth, and to nourish life.

I told him that nothing ever grew. Spring always came and went
Without a single sprout to give the barren earth
A hint of hope. Soon, the weeds returned and the seeds
Lay dead in the sterile soil where they had been sown.

He explained that my efforts were too gentle and mild,
That I should have ravaged the earth with
Violence. That life only prospers among
Mutilated roots and exterminated pests.
Peace only emerges after a war.

I worried him that the sweat from my brow
Had fed the weeds instead. That my peace could not grow in soil
Already strewn with strife and death. That our mother had forged life
Through nurturing and patience, not gunfire and murder.

Peace must be cultivated in the soil.
Life does not simply swell to fill the place that death has left.

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Poetry Hides

by Beckett Medwid

Youth Category (12 and Under), First Place

Poetry hides in a bush
of a branch on a
tall, tall tree sitting
in the middle of the wilderness

Poetry hides under a green
warm, soft, and fluffy blanket

Poetry hides in
a big, big pile
of one hundred dollar bills

Poetry hides in the green grass
getting chewed up
by a lawn mower

Poetry hides in your
green eggs and ham
Sam I am

Poetry hides in you

Poetry hides in your
blue blood flowing through your body

But poetry hides mostly where
it's supposed to be

like peace

In your heart

Adult Category

The Cries of One Crow

by Valentina Gnuv

Adult Category, First Place

The cries of one crow can destroy a morning—
somewhere in the world there is always a war.

At Arlington National Cemetery the headstones
rise like white birch stumps in a ruined forest,

armed guards protect the Unknown Soldier,
though what human does not go unknown?

In the National Liberation Museum in Groesbeek,
a Dutch sculptor carves clay soldiers climbing

from their graves, smiling figures offer each other
a hand. Cutting down a tree will not kill its roots.

One crow can torment an entire neighborhood—
whose childhood is not scabbled in violence,

each plastic grenade an education in war?
The tally of the dead rises like snowmelt in a river,

I cannot unwrite their stories, unbury their graves.
I can only hug the tall tree of my daughter, and

imagine the parents who wait for a soldier who will
never come home. Somewhere in the world

a forest recovers, a stump is sprouting new growth—
give one child a branch, he creates a weapon

give another child a branch, he raises his hands
to conduct a symphony only he will hear.

Note: The sculpture at the National Liberation Museum in Groesbeek, the Netherlands, is by a Dutch woman, Fransje Povel-Speleers, and is called Resurrection.

Boys

By Olivia Cole

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

There are only pictures of departure:
boys in clean white suits
starched into sameness,
pressed patterns of swirling brown
and tan to protect them. The pictures
are posed and perfect, their smiles
are starched too. Their salutes
neat and practiced, they are together
in clean, ordered rows, or kissing
girls, or standing alone, solemn
and incredibly young.

We know in numbers what becomes
of these boys:

12 killed in Afghanistan skirmish

9 lost to friendly fire

33,082 dead in Iraq

But the numbers are shells
without eyes, without birthmarks;
they are figures missing a mother,
absent of a face or fingers.
They are boxes that can't be opened,
names painted on plaques.

Their homecoming is quiet, those that knew
them say little. There is no Latin
phrase, no cursive script. Poems
are written, women weep.
No photographs are taken.

South African Jail, 1961

By Mary Makofske

Adult Category, Honorable Mention

Cold seeps into their feet and up their legs
in search of their will.
One strip of light idles across the cell
but rests on nothing.

Only a bucket for waste. Not so much
as a cot, bench, chair.
They try not to ask why seeking freedom
so often ends here.

How does it begin? Tune whose words no one
remembers, a hum
in the throat. A foot that begins to tap
just to stir the blood.

Almost a joke, the deep bow and curtsy.
They enter the sway
of foreign rhythms, glittering ballrooms
they may never see.

Not a dance of their homeland, but of those
who watch them. As if
to show they can master this cage of steps:
a foxtrot, a waltz.

The guards are cautious. What can it mean?
One claps out the beat.
The dancers turn in quickening circles
as if they were free.

Youth Category (13 to 18 years)

Writing Rwanda

by Martin Conte

First Place

In a room with vaulted ceilings
high windows, and light streaming through
I am alone with a pad and a pen, and I
am silent. I close my eyes, allowing
my pen to hear the sounds about me.

At first, I hear only the rustle of my
moving arms, the wind blowing through
the cracks in the window panes. At first
all I hear is this solid Winter in Maine, that
surrounds us with that muffled roar, with
that chill that burns our throats, that sears
to the bone.

Then, eyes closed, ears closed, heart and mind
pouring open, I hear a young child's voice.
He is wearing a long, torn, red shirt, dusty
with the sand that has blown up against it, his
hair straggly, or cut short to his head, his eyes
wide, his stomach bloated from hunger. My pen
weeps for this boy, watching from the bushes
as men in many coats and grasping souvenirs,
trinkets, children's toys, young girls,
line his family up, and behead them, one by one.
My pen grieves, and the blood of that boy's family
runs from it, and the paper drinks it up
transports it from heart to mind to pen to paper
to memory, to family, to community, to world,
until the world has grasped it, and blown it
out and around, shared its flame, shared this boy's
pain, until we all bear upon our shoulders the grief
the pain, the blood
which pools about his feet.

Cairo

By Jacob Oet

Honorable Mention

I remember the spice market, jars of colored powder all around.
Smells of ginger, coriander, curry
drifted up from stalls and mingled with dust, a combination strong like tear gas.

A vender ran toward us, arms out as if to grab me.
I shrunk into my father's side.
Through dust I watched the man's large hands proffer a cluster of red peppers.

We saw the Giza Pyramids, made of blocks like Legos.
Across, the Sphinx lay crouched
without a nose to smell the spices rising, clay eyes covered in dust.

Eleven years later, two hundred thousand eyes
cram the city center.
Hard eyes, made red from dust, behind razor-wire fences and cardboard blockade.

I watch a New York Times clip: a man shouts at an officer
who remains silent.
A voiceover explains the whole world is waiting for the dirt to settle.

On TV, the rebels look like normal people who never expected revolution.
"When will they blow the tops off the pyramids?"
the voiceover asks. "Crowds rumor Giza is packed with dynamite."

In ancient Cairo of dust and spice markets, clusters of red peppers dry against a wall.
Armed soldiers march down a market street,
and in the city center they use tear gas on the mob.

At the spice market, the vender must have noticed my surprise.
We pulled away. He followed, saying in a reedy voice:

"These peppers are far from dormant.
You like spicy? Watch out boy, these peppers are dynamite,
ready to blow the roof off your mouth at any moment."

Youth Category (12 and under)

World Peace

by Isabella Robarge

First Place

What the world needs most
it does not have.
It needs world peace.
They shoot bombs but they need
to shoot world peace.
They shoot the sun so the world
will shine. They need luck
so the Peace Maker wins.
It takes time for peace to spread
in your heart. It is like
making a sandwich. The moonlight
is Peace's best friend.
The plants are Peace's family.
Peace sits like soup in a bowl.
Poetry is what every heart needs.

My Peace Place
By Xavion Bishop
Honorable Mention

I hear an eagle screeching
for its prey.

I see a lizard running
down the rocks.

I hear grasshoppers clicking
in the meadow.

I see a squirrel choosing
its food.

I hear shadows calling
my name.

I see a crow watching
the red shouldered hawk.

I see a rainbow trout staring
me in the eyes.

Adult Category

Earth, 1945

by Olivia Cole

First Place (Tie)

He heard about you but was too far
to kiss your fingers: water
between you while his wife
hummed into your hair.

While you were being born,
your mother knitting socks,
he was across the ocean taking
lives. This is the way
it works: her cradling you,
him cradling his rifle,
apologizing not for the lives he had given exit
but for the one whose entrance
he had missed.

This is war: wives weaving
and men making widows,
the lives collapsing
into one another, overlapping,
an infinite series of losses
and living.

You don't, but she probably remembers
the first time he stood
in the door and looked in
at you. His shadow would have

blotted out the light from the hall,
but you slept, and probably welcomed
his cool darkness in your dreams.

Cut Hair

by Kristin George

First Place (Tie)

Yesterday my friend cut
his 3 year long hair, trimmed
his beard too, then packaged it
in plastic for the place where
they make wigs for kids.

I was mostly astonished
at how simple it would be
to sweep it all into the waste bin.
Disgusted too, by the limp
hairs splayed across the kitchen
tile, guessing how many
it would take to match
those heaps at Auschwitz,

sheathed in glass
the length and depth of this room.
Blonde and brown molded together
but all graying, with life enough
inside, needing to decay.
Plaited once by mother's hands,
fretted over as clumps clogged
the shower drain. Hair, that, even after
the shearing and scraping

was done, clings together,
leaves wrenched from stems by hands
so rough compared to my friend's—
who first gathered the strands
in a smooth knot, clipped
the cord at such an angle
as you would a long-stemmed rose,
intent on preservation.

Youth Category (13 through 18 years)

Our Own Peace

by Rachael Brittain

First Place

A bowl of rice passes around the hut
We only have a handful to share,
And we have none to spare.
It goes from father, to mother, to sister, to me.
We each take our share,
My portion, as small as two fingers.

But I can not help but notice a stranger,
This small stranger wanders through the village,
Unsure of his place, or where he should be.

We invite him in, and give him a place to sit.
I can split my rice,
One finger for each of us.
For one moment in time, we created our own peace.

Paper Crane

by Alexandra S. Timmer

Honorable Mention

Start with a perfectly square sheet of paper for waking a sleeping giant;
Fold one edge to meet the other for the nations who shared the sides of a bitter vendetta;
Flip the square for a sinister cloud that rose above the heavens;
Crease the corners for a melted city once engulfed in light.
Open up the paper for the blistering ash that rained down upon the streets;
Form the head for the austere procession of the scorched in the wake of the aftermath;
Gently pull the wings apart for a small girl who made a vain wish on colored sheets;
Now behold a small red paper crane for a hopeful future.

Youth Category (12 years & under)

If I Were

by Brittany Madden

First Place

If I were the great white wolf
I would make a big art piece and
I would be in a quiet forest

And if I were the big yellow sun
I would make some of the people who were cold
Well, I would make them warm

I had a dream I was with my mom
every weekend in her snug arms
They felt like a pillow at my house
The one I sleep on

I had a second dream
That I was the creator
If I were, I would give
world peace.

Night's Song

by Julian Molina

Honorable Mention

The sun sets at 8 p.m.
Shadows grow and swallow the land and
the gentle drops of rain cleanse my soul.
I take my ocarina and play the song of night.
The foxes howl with sorrow, the wolves cry with hunger,
The coyotes sing their loneliness.
The ocarina's chimes mix with the song of the canines.
We all cease with sadness, knowing day has come.
I flee to home
And wait for sunset so I can do it yet again.

Adult Category

GAZA, JANUARY 2009

by Estella Lauter

First Place (Tie)

In seven years, we've got a whole new body.

- Li-Young Lee, *Breaking the Alabaster Jar*

A European doctor on emergency duty in Gaza says
it's like being bombed in a cage,

and I think of how it must seem
to those already hospitalized
with wounds that may never heal
to hear the wham and whistle
smash and screech of missiles,
the rumble of earth giving way underneath
as they lie immobilized
waiting for medicine.
Even the body of a patient lying quietly,
incarcerated, on life support,
generates three billion cells a minute.
In seven years, he could have a whole new body,
not as it was, but *brimming* with life.

Where is Joseph, whose dreams saved
both Egyptians and the brothers who betrayed him?

Water brims to the top of a tube and trembles there.

Certain Blossoms Remind Me

by Constance Snyder

First Place (Tie)

of World War II summer afternoons, the victory garden planted before Daddy was called, that garden which brought joy to a troubled house. At the edges of lettuce and corn, in cinder blocks, they planted flowers – purple pansy faces, orange nasturtiums babies breath – that sweetness from small bouquets Mother sent out with us into the neighborhood— something for us to do those long afternoons.

Door to door, little brother and me. Five cents a bunch. In that black time of air-raid curtains when we lined up with ration books for sugar and meat and newsreels caught children wailing alone at the sides of roads crowded with soldiers and refugees, our little pockets jingled with nickels. There were never enough flowers.

Youth Category (13 through 18 years)

Bricks

by Andrew David King

First Place

*Have you ever thought, “I’ve been here before
in a dream?” he asks, because for him,
that’s where he is—*

steering a tank through endless city walls,
each one fading into the next, sand on sand.
So many times sleep has dragged him here, like it has me.
But it’s not enough, he realizes to merely imagine

stepping out into the fringe for the first time,
feeling the pockmarks of bullets.
He raises his hand, gestures toward the badlands of western Iraq,
past the cracked-open ribcage of the weeping city—*This is how you know
that the world is huge, and you are nothing more
than a tiny, tiny ant.*

I begin to speak: *You start building an empire with one brick.
That’s it, I say, just one,* hoping to bring him back to the reality
of incoming mortar fire,
although by now, he is gazing up
toward where the scorching sun edges
the rooftops of the tallest buildings,

here in this place where anything able
to straighten its spine and stand upright
is worthy of praise.

Little Bowl of Peace

by Dana Nurse

Honorable Mention

I bought a little bowl of peace for 69 cents.
It came in a cracked clay pot of blue and white.
“Be careful; it’s hot,” the woman had said.
I paid no mind and grasped it, not thanking her.
But it was scorching and burned me and flew from my hands
Out of the window.

And it fell to the ground, smashing into a million little pieces of peace.
The drops of gold began to roll.
Into the cracks in the asphalt, covering the sidewalk, soaking the street.

And a man stepped in the peace and it got all over his good shoes.
A bus passed through the street full of peace and it stuck to the wheels.
And where the man and the bus went, the droplets of peace went with them.
But that street of peace was on a hill, and the peace flowed down like waterfalls.

A busy city was at the bottom of the hill and the golden peace came rushing down.
One woman shouted to her neighbor; “You have to come and try this peace.”
Everyone in the city soon had their own piece of peace, and shared it with friends.

And the daughter of the woman of the neighbor had a friend who had a plane.
Together they went up and poured buckets of peace, and dropped balloons of peace.
The world seemed to like it and sent some into space.
Injecting it into the fabric of the universe, infecting the stars, planets, and comets.

But one of those comets got too fat with peace and crash landed on the street.
The street with the store with the window that my hot bowl had fallen through,
And the woman looked at me and smiled; I smiled, too.
“I forgot to say thank you,” I said to her.
But she shook her head, and poured out two more bowls of peace, still smiling wide.
Handing one to me clinking them in “cheers,”
“It is I who should thank you. I’ve been trying to get people to try my peace for years.”

My brother

by Ujijji Davis

Honorable Mention

He wakes up sometimes
In the middle of the night
Panting like he's been running through all of his nightmares
Trying to catch his dreams

He shivers as sweat beads
Trickle down the grooves of his skin
Like the tears of Ahmad down his little boy cheeks

So he stares into the dark
To black out the horrors of the desert

But he can taste it, the ammunition
Like chalk and guilt ground together in a wisp of gray fate
He found God over there
Somebody more merciful than the gun he held
And the grenade on his belt.
You see, he was a Grim Reaper by mistake
Uncle Sam promised college and the Marines promised honor
But they did not promise a full night's rest

So he wakes up sometimes in the middle of the night
And stares into the dark to black out the horrors of the desert
But the night cannot save him when he closes his eyes.

Youth Category (12 years & under)

A Love Story

by Meilynn Shi

First Place

When the stars are restless, so it is said,
Mars' bright eye shines more fiercely
Casting an evil red glow that betrays
His anger, his quick temper
His need for the noise of conflict

Beware, the bringer of war awakes!
The universe rings with the clatter of his armor
Galaxies clash and planets stray from orbit
The stars tremble at the sight of His sword

He has freed the dogs of war
And us mere mortals
Can only wait for the cosmos to realign

But there is hope, a star on the horizon
Unlike Mars' lurid glow
This one's light is white and pure

Praise the Goddess divine!
Venus has returned to her lover's side

Though she brings no force, no weapons
He comes readily into Her arms
And it is their love that calms the fires
Quenches his thirst, soothes his rage

Love blankets Him in downy peace
She is the final conqueror

And the fearsome Mars, now subdued
Blushes a dusky, rosy red

Or so it is also said

Our Purpose

by Maia Ziaee

Honorable Mention

I believe the orange
leaves should fall
I believe that the water
in a stream should run
I believe fish
should swim
nothing should be stopped
from its purpose

don't stop the flowers from growing
nor the lightning from
striking

Our purpose is not
to fly in heavy metal contraptions
or to flatten land for
our own selfishness

Our purpose is simple
but important
Our job is not
to kill or destroy

We are here to
open up to the world
and enjoy its miracles
but even more than that,
we are here to make peace

Adult Category

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

by Ashley Wellington

First Place

I.

Even the field, sweating through dusty pores,
Reeked of brass and drying blood
As a cluster of gray coats waited to spill
Out into the open.
In the soggy July heat, the stench of decay.
A wounded soldier, resting in the shade
Of a cannon, was struck by an officer for sitting down.
The officer later fell from a bullet not shot by his enemy,
And his skull cracked like a clay pot.
The soldier died near him
With outstretched arms and twisted neck,
His trampled carcass stripped to the sinews.

II.

You and I stop here, not as they stopped
In the roar, face down, blood seeping up
From the ground into dirty clothes and hair –
But to climb little Round Top, see Devil's Den,
Probe our fingers into bullet holes
In tree trunks. It is so quiet now,
As if the land, washed clean by so much rain
And stripped for souvenirs,
Wants, impossibly, to be just a field again.

Milkweed Pods

by Colleen Dwyer-Lulf

Honorable Mention

During World War II, children were encouraged to collect milkweed pods and turn them over to the U.S. government. Because the silk was buoyant and lightweight, it was used for stuffing in flying suits and life vests. The “hair” was used to make bandage liners. The leaves of the developing plants are also a favorite food of Monarch butterflies.

Each spring, below the old schoolhouse,
Water floods a swath of land
Sheltered by birch and diamond willow.

It leaves a trail of milkweed and summons
Monarch butterflies
That flit and filter in the shadowy grove.

We children tromped one fall to gather milkweed pods
And split their rough brown bellies
To loose the white silk bursting from the vessels.

Amid the willows and the golden leaves
And blue sky curled around our hearts in cool, neat curves,
The pods, into our hands, spilled cloudy foam and seed.

We bundled up our stock to send away,
To save sailors, we were sure, and cushion heads
Of brave young soldiers with languid smiles.

In the coat room, heavy with the smell of barnyard boots
And sodden wool, Gerald caught my hand and asked
If I would write him when he'd gone.

For months when letters came,
The imprint of his hand on mine still lingered
And I'd kiss my knuckles softly.

But when he does return, he huddles in his mother's house.
His one good hand shields his ravaged face.
(The other's left in France, curled and empty, on a forest floor.)

Sometimes I see the old man walking in that shadowed grove,
Hiding his empty wrist inside a pocket,
And poking his cane among the milkweed plants—

Sometimes stirring butterflies,
But most often amid the stiff, empty pods
That rattle in the wind.

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Stolpersteine
by Susan Roth
Honorable Mention

“But to carve the name of a single person on a single marker is to say,
‘Look, this individual lived – lived right here at this actual address.’”
Gunter Demnig, artist and creator of *Stolpersteine*,
stumbling stones of remembrance marking the homes of those
deported in Germany during the Holocaust.

In Cologne, city of the Rhine and the massive Dom,
where roads wind past the forgotten names,
he is carving a poem on the stumbling stones.

Once a bang on the door meant another name gone
and the cruel boot to an Adler, a Drucker, or Stein,
erased from Cologne, city of fire and the blackened Dom.

Now he bangs on the stones and names are brought home
to the ground where you walk on shattered rhymes
of the broken poem he carves on the stumbling stones.

Hier wohnte Rommni or Sinto or Cohn,
here lived thousands deported in the fiercest time
of Cologne, city of war and the battered Dom.

Names are lines in a poem where the secrets of bones
buried deep burst from the letters he signs
in the tomb he craves on the stumbling stones.

Brass shocks the dulled cobbles, all honed
to gold by your steps, while cathedral bells chime
the toll in Cologne, city of ghosts and the haunted Dom,
where he carves our lost lives into stumbling stones.

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Youth (13-18) Category

the ungodly hour

by Jennifer Hu

First Place

even he felt the heat
on a night like that one
weighing on him
like giles corey's stones

in the darkness he hugged his gun
and saw puritans in the village
creeping by the devil
witchcraft in the forest

but he knew it was only his platoon
hiding in the woods
burrowed under sweaty blankets
the puritans had nothing to fear

he might have been mistaken though
maybe there *was* witchcraft
in the forest that night
waiting under a starless sky

because in the morning the land was hell
lit up with mortar rounds
and the devil's prey
lay strewn on the ground

a burnt girl
a soldier
a cow with shrapnel in its side

**BOMBS AWAY.
CIRCA WORLD WAR TWO
FLORENCE, ITALY**

by Emma V. Ginader
Honorable Mention

Remember a time
When the avenues and the alleys
Were safe to walk upon?
When our legs were as free as our minds?

Not any more,
All I see are chisels of cobblestone.

Remember when we debated
Mussolini's politics
Beside the river bed?

The bombs drilled
All of the bridges into ruin

Remember the art
I introduced to you?
You didn't like it,
Your mind was blocked off,
Buried in the deepest trench.

The art is hidden
Somewhere. Shut off by bricks.

Remember the days we went window-shopping
Our eyes glimmering in the clear glass?

The sandbags are in the way
Blocking the view with their lifeless and dense mass.

Remember the passion I had for you.

Remember how I loved you?

Remember
when you were alive?

Youth (12-Under) Category

The Light is Shining on Us

by Xiao Jin Jackson

First Place

Inside a shooting star are wolves so fast
they make the star shoot

 Inside a shooting star is cold air
 pushing to get out

Inside a shooting star are frogs
croaking so loud it's like an elephant yelling
into a microphone that has a speaker that runs
all the way around the world.

 Inside shooting star is peace
 trying to make its way to Earth.

Inside a shooting star is laughter,
everybody is happy.

 Inside a shooting star is light,
 light shining on us.

Healing Over

by Virginia Hinchman

Honorable Mention

The door hangs dejectedly off its hinges
like a wounded soul
The roof is caved in:
crumpled, helpless, unloved.

Chipped paint and rotting wood
are all that's left
of what was once a someone's safehaven,
someone's home.
Harsh red spray-painted numbers
tattoo the place with the memory
of the dead.
Bags of rotting trash
are spewed across the side walk.
Plastic, wood and metal
poke out of a teared trash bag.

Small moss framed flowers grow
in the cracks of the house,
pushing their delicate Violets' heads
determinedly through the broken concrete.
Grass weaves through the broken boards.

The flowers, like New Orleans
are not ready to give up.
They will never give up.

Adult Category

Cletis Pratt

*And Samson said, Let me die with the
Philistines.*

- Judges 16:30

by Joseph Bathanti

First Place

First man I ever saw in irons, wearing nothing
but a pair of filthy white long john britches,
was Cletis Pratt, two guards, casually gripping
his upper arms, escorting him back to the population
after two weeks in single cell – same as the hole,
officially termed *Administrative Segregation*.
They had shaved his head.
He looked like Karl Marx.
He looked the wrath of Nazareth.
His big black beautiful beard was nappy and clotted
with what looked like lint, but he had gone grey in the hole,
and fat with outrage, eating thorazine and salt peter.
He'd never fooled around with weights,
had had a chiseled impossibly perfect onyx body,
where now pounded a gut and two silver dugs.
Hobbled by a short span of chain and two shackles,
another chain circling his waist to which his hands
were buckled, he couldn't quite keep up,
though the guards weren't hurrying him.
Sweating and winded, he bobbed and minced
like a dazed fighter – too exhausted to lift his heavy hands
to protect himself, to ask for mercy, to just go down –
his first day back in the gym, starting to train
again after a jolt in the penitentiary;
needles in North Charlotte;
needles on Hay Street in Fayetteville,
82nd Airborne, all the medals and insignia,
the Purple Hearts, his stunning beret.
Two tours in Vietnam.
Ten fucking lifetimes ago.

Witness

by Penny Harter

Honorable Mention

In an old story a blind boy saw it,
the flash of the first atomic bomb test over Nevada.

The storyteller said maybe he saw the radiation,
or maybe he wasn't really all the way blind.

In another story, there were pigs in little cages
placed near the explosion to see what would happen
to their skin, and as they writhed in the light
some of them began to smoke.

Maybe that smoke rose into the blind boy's eyes
until his tears rinsed his darkness downstream,
or maybe that radiant smoke spoke to the child
like a voice from the burning bush, saying,

May your eyes be opened.

***Trees with No Branches/
Flowers with No Names***

*- for Nobuo Miyake, Takeharu Terao
and the Hibakusha*

by Kathleen Hellen
Honorable Mention

One::

A finger like a bone rose out of smoke and pointed
to the sun the world went white
a thousand winds rushed in

Two::

Glass that didn't shatter melted bodies
bloated buildings shrugged
collapsing in the radiance of waves

Three::

Something in his eye besides his eye turned in
tattooed pattern of his wife
blackened husks the sleeve of skin

Four::

Heads as big as human grew in keloid cherry
blossoms stem on top
maggots hatched in wounds that wouldn't heal

Five::

Man or woman? Indistinguishable
the end beginning

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Youth (13-18) Category

My Brother, the Soldier

by Megan Elliott

First Place (Tie)

Bombs go off in brains
Neurons fire imaginary explosions
To pounding eardrums
Mom slumps in the wooden kitchen chair
Elbows on the table
A glass of wine or two or three
And tears and tears and tears
He'll be gone for Christmas again
We open presents silently
Avoiding each other's eyes
And his name
Mom gets drunk
And says "Fuck the war"
Dad and I do the dishes
I walk outside in the chilling air
Tiny Christmas lights twinkle secrets at each other
They are grenades exploding in the desert
I write a letter in my head
I tell him a joke about mom
I ask him to come home
I wish him Merry Christmas
Maybe he'll be home this time next year
Hopefully he'll come home next year
He has to come home

Love's Lullaby
by Hanna Hurr
First Place (Tie)

A mother cradles her child against her thin breast
And gazes sadly into deep shining eyes, a mirror of her own
The infant cries, wanting milk
But there is none to give
The woman has not eaten in days
And her breasts are dry as the bone-cracked land that surrounds them
She whispers into his ear

A single word

Peace

Suddenly the stars rearrange
Painting perfect patterns in the inky sky
All around the world, cities fall silent
Apologizing for their constant pandemonium
Mothers look at the sky, listen to the stars, and whisper

Vrede

Hetep

Rauha

Irini

Heiwa

Soksang

Rongo

Amani

Santiphap

Ukuthula

The word flows from mother to child
Cracked lips to soft ears
The newborns remember without understanding
Years later, as the world writhes in war
The word ricochets in the grown children's minds, and they drop their weapons
Silent, thoughtful. They turn their heads to the sky, and again, the stars sing.

Eulogy in Autumn
by Megan Mikhail
Honorable Mention

It's October here.

The leaves cling to the tree outside our window like a gossamer gown,
sewn in the brightest shades of fiery crimson and sour-apple green.

The wind tickles my nose just so, whispering your name in my ear
and filling me with a longing I cannot silence.

I miss you, little brother.

I can see you in the passing clouds, in pools of moonlight, in my own reflection.

I see the hatred too, that pulsing beast that struck you down,
carrying you beneath its fury-white wing until we were a world apart.

It's October here.

Men go on killing other men, just for the release of it.

Women go on living in the sewers like so many rats.

Many days I cannot believe that the world still turns without you.

It seems like the balance of gravity should have tipped from the hole you left behind.

Maybe one day we'll all float away, weightless and giddy from the loss.

Maybe I'll find you tucked away in a corner of space,
just waiting, whole and smiling and reading a book.

Maybe.

It's October here.

But where are you, sweet Nicholas?

Do the trees change color there,

or is it always summer like we sometimes imagined it would be?

Do you miss the snow falling in soft drifts like cotton

while we bundled up in front of the fire and sipped sweet, hot chocolate?

It's cold, but there's no snow yet.

It's October here.

Youth (12-Under) Category

In the Form of Rain

by Celeste Fox Kump

First Place

War is a fire,
anger,
fear.
It crackles,
burns,
sputters,
kills.

Its eyes
red,
angered,
wild.

Its teeth,
black,
jagged,
sharp.

They rip,
tear,
hack,
threaten.

And yet,
with all the power and menace,
peace comes,
in the form of rain.

First it sprinkles,
rains,
pours,
and slowly but surely the fires of war are put out,
and there is peace,
in the form of rain.

Oh, If I Could

by Kimberlee Bagby

Honorable Mention

Oh, if I could,
Stop all the wars
And make world peace...
I would

If I could,
Give everyone in the world
Money and food...
I would.

If I could,
Give everyone
In the world a house...
I would.

If I could,
Stop all the tragic
Deaths...
I would.

Oh, if only...
I could.

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

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Adult Category

grassroots

by Alisa Gordaneer

First Place

there's a revolution afoot in the garden, the chickens
are scratching up resentment, the beans have surrendered.
it's become an all-out struggle, with worms,
beetles rambling in shiny coats
stolen
from the night's shimmer.

at first it's quiet, as though
you could imagine them fomenting quietly, muttering against
damp grass by moonlight, passing secret messages in
the scuttering of dry day. but the trees get wind of it, bushes
rustle, and suddenly the grasses know all, tell all
until the whole garden has rebellion on its leaf tips, insurgency
in every seed.

it will go like this
despite the gardener, despite the scythe, despite
white flags waving from the laundry line.

THE CITY THAT KILLED A POET

by Lavonne Mueller

Honorable Mention

The house where Lorca hid in Granada
is now a hotel
local business men use their cell phones
to call in Iberian stock reports

next to the door
where he was dragged out to his
Our Lady of Agonies still holds court
here in the city that killed a poet.

Today
boys eat chocolate buns on church steps
sweets their only piety

during the early months of the Spanish Civil War
thirty thousand people were shot
roaring lorries packed with victims
drove past roses big as cabbages.

Loose red earth
drifted in Andalusian refinement

no one could be executed
without the opportunity for confession

by the light of a lorry headlamp
Lorca dug his grave
in his own suit of light.

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IN THE NAME OF GOD

by Melisa Cahnmann

Honorable Mention

I don't care for a bearded God,
a God that throws spit or stones.
You can keep your spilled blood,
your wrestlers and victors. I want
a God who sweats when she dances,
a God who craves dark chocolate, a God
of multitudes, a God who plays H.O.R.S.E..
I want a God that listens, a yoga God
who moves from plank pose to upward
facing dog. I want a vegan God, a God
who eats bacon, I want a God without judgment,
a God of patience and knit sweaters, a God
who isn't afraid to change his mind.
God, almighty King of the Universe –
I don't want that chauvinistic bully
to forgive me. I don't care for robes
or loincloths, velvet or cashmere or
whose God has the better basketball team.
The God that I love is not yours, not mine
not so easily possessed, not a God who owns
property or wears vests full of explosives.
Your God leaves a funny taste in my mouth.
The God who has a rich feast in the foyer
of a finer structure or sings in the sweeter sorrow
of a minor key – all these Gods, the male
and female, the dead and the risen,
keep them, call them whatever you like.
I want a God whose name is all names,
whose enemies are arrogance and war,
whose peace is as present as the purple crocus
and her possible bloom in the spring.

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Youth (13-18) Category

what Mrs. K from next door said when I asked her if she's happy

by Joyce Li

First Place

happy yes
aren't I lucky?
these days hereabouts not too many people are
funny how we have so much yet we're never happy
it's too bad
what I mean is
young kids your age have seen entire villages destroyed
like a horror movie except without cuts and it lasts
more than a couple hours
like you entered the wrong theatre and now you can't get out
it's your life
and maybe you've three little sisters and a little brother who are
hungry and maybe today there is enough rice to go around
not like yesterday
you'd be relieved and you'd play a game maybe
and the laughter of your siblings would be so beautiful
you would smile
wouldn't you?
while some people've got everything and then some
but they never stop to breathe and sigh and dance
or even to look at each other
no they're not sad
but we both know that
happiness is not just a lack of sadness
it's beautiful and fleeting and hard to describe like snow.

The Antaeus Dream

by Katherine Tan

Honorable Mention:

On nights the moon stands
solemn faced and the stars
half-hang-half-float like fireflies
suspended in glowing martyrdom
and the breeze rasps secrets of the
crucified to anyone who'll listen.
I step out. Crunching grass beneath my
feet, worms between my toes, ears pressed
to ground, waiting –
like stethoscope to patient's heart,
I attune myself to Earth's pulse
(not the throbbing in my ear) but the
shuddering recoil as shell
shatters ground, the silent moan as
body plunges face forward
into dirt.

Somewhere, a mother returns her son to
soil. Bowing deeply, her tears baptize
the spot. They quiver for a moment, like
final echoes of a lullaby many years
unsung, then disappear beneath
black earth.

I still taste salt
in these blades of grass – my
tongue stings with remembering, my
ears acknowledge pain. I am Antaeus-bound
to the soil, the secret sacrifice of its
pulse, but for this I will not cry –
Only for the dream of a bullet-startled dove
who discovers nothing
but a trick
of pebbles and wind.

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Youth (12 – Under) Category

All I Can Do Is Hope

by Jamie Handgis

First Place

I long to see a world,
a world of a different color
a world of only peace
where all the darkness is hidden away

I dream to see a world
a world of a different color
possibly lavender with an overflow of grace
Where race doesn't matter and the many moons
have a scratch of maroon

I want to see a world
a world of a different color
where the possibilities are endless
Where yellow, orange and blue blessings
are found among the clouds
where the silky sky holds all the
answers

Yes, I can see the truth
so all I can do is hope,
hope to see a world
a world of a different color

twenty-one kinds of peace

by Ellie Weinstock

Honorable Mention

a leaf on water
birdsong
a growing tree
this sky
a poem
friendship
a book of fantasy
no capitals
a candle
color
a jar
a baby
children playing
music
clouds
a feather
purple butterfly
heart shape
culture
meditation
a dove

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First Place – Adult Category

Sloping Walls

by Colleen Dwyer-Lulf

Hollyhock nodding against my grandmother's house
Brushed on screens surrounding the porch
Where I sometimes bunked on hot summer nights.

My uncle slept in the attic with sloping walls
That tilted toward ragged quilts
My grandmother made by hand.

I was ten and he was seventeen when he became my hero.
Not for something he had done, but just because he was so old
And wise in that way teenagers seem to children.

He did not push me aside as I watched
Him paint curly-top flames (fire so beautiful it hurt)
Arching from the front of his '52 Ford.

Then my vacation over, I went home and he to Nam.
There the North Dakota boy "Became a man"
Intertwined with jungle rot and steamy swamps

Like the hot, wet cloud that rose from his cup at a Saigon cafe
Amid the chatter of their foreign talk
And black lacquered dishes he sent home to Grandma.

He didn't tell her how the brains of one gook
Dried on his face like a gob of snot
Or of the warm pee that washed pants in the foxhole

Or the child who carried the exploding present
That threw bits of men to rooftops
Or the gnarled hand of one old woman who reached

From the mass of flesh that had been her family
To touch his dark, wet boot
When he entered the sloping walls of her bullet-riddled hut.

Instead, when he came home, he polished his car
'Till it mirrored the tossing trees above, clouds, birds,
And his own black eyes behind the patterned flames.

Honorable Mention-Adult Category

Wishes for the Next War

by Richard Swanson

That the dogs of war on the eve of battle
Share their fleas with their generals' socks.

That codes of smart bombs be sent to dyslexic pilots,
Who drop all their ordinance into the sea.
That tanks on the road to glory return to base
With the hiccups.

That soldiers on opposite sides in separate tents
Get sent by scrambled mail
The photos of each others' families.
That field commanders lose interest.
That subsequent orders begin with "If you'd like to..."
That maps of battle crumble like manna from heaven.

That the generals dance for peace.
That the checks for weapons bounce.
That the vultures starve from lack of spoils.
That the troops sleep in, this morning, tomorrow,
And as long as it suits them,
Knowing the sweetness of time on one brief earth.

Honorable Mention – Adult Category

Small Fires - Nagasaki

by Elizabeth Murawski

The wind when it comes
is warm. There is no home
that isn't leveled

or burning. She barely
feels the tug
on her nipple, or sees

the blue-white dribble
on her baby's chin,
his swollen belly,

the one tree
left standing, its trunk
and branches a Y

incision, its few leaves
whispering
like witches. Leaning

by itself on the sky,
the gate of the temple
resembles pi,

an irrational number.
Small fires flicker. Empty,
she lets him suckle,

the child in her arms
who may die
or live without her.

First Place – Youth Category

Dark Side of the Moon

by Lois Beckett

The moon hangs tonight in the summer sky:
distant, sweetly tinged with gold.

Such serenity comes
only with distance. I am like the moon.
I am calm because I am far from suffering.
I can walk outside tonight hearing nothing
but the sighing of the breeze. I am only afraid of shadows.

I shine tonight in my quiet world, peaceful as the moon.
How could I not love such beauty?

With that same loveliness the moon shines
on a deserted field. No one walks there.
The earth is sown with landmines. Do not gather
their sudden, deadly blossoms.

How full and romantic the moon is
over the city's vacant streets.
No one pauses to gaze at it. Kidnappers wait
in the dark. People stay at home –
not that their homes are safe.

Gun shots, moans of the sick, weeping,
and the moon is beautiful, beautiful.

It turns and turns around the earth,
does nothing.

The moon does not understand suffering.

And though I barely understand it,
I cannot rest in the moon's soft light.

Far from me, a girl wishes she lived on the moon,
that she could bound weightless through the air,
never hear another cry. Silence, she prays, silence.

But I cannot be silent.

Though the sun is far from the earth, it's shining
is not as cold and empty as the moon's.

It's life brings life. I must find a way,
whatever my distance, to help, to give comfort

I cannot numb my gaze with stars
or veil my eyes, as clouds cover the face of the moon,
that glowing face, beautiful and blind.

Honorable Mention – Youth Category

White Feathers Falling

by Rosemary Bateman

i

I wanted more of myself in my hands,
rising like wind-twisted juniper over the ledges of thought,
layer upon layer and all the same.
I wanted moments to pass like slow sugar in the veins of trees,
thick with untasted sweetness, but
I dream the numbness of winter
creeps like ivy between my ribs, pulling them apart.
If I were empty enough, I would let the soul of a dead mother of dead sons
share my shell, but I am too overflowing with the song of my life.

ii

Miles from the throaty calls of mourning doves,
a woman lies dry in the dust.
She is bent forward, curving neatly into a gray photograph
where blood still crusts red.
I expect the wind to fold her husk-like body into the sand
or peel her like a yellow onion, first crisp,
then moist enough to burn the eyes.
I wonder how much war took away
before that one bullet finished
the long and heavy task of dying.

iii

Somewhere a dove
slams its skull into a shining window,
thinking there is more sky there.

iv

Let us just look into and through each other's eyes for a while,
under the om-shaped moon and careless stars,
and not say anything.
Let us stand for a while on the bank of this river,
cry, pray, wound ourselves with thought,
before we embrace and our minds like pearls like white feathers
fall back to hands and heart.

Honorable Mention – Youth Category

Manji

by Danelle Forsthoefel

Falling.
No, not falling.
Floating.
Yes, floating.
Drawn to an unseen force, leaning forward and back,
Rolling side to side.

Lying, floating there in white reverie.
Hear the rare whisper of the calumet,
See the proud sprig of olive.
Honor the once barren field
flooded with blood red poppies.
The flat open palm of a hand
Shouldering no pain,
Numb to the world...numb to the cause.

Floating. Floating.

Directed with a whisper
along the periphery of a seven pointed star,
Bending one direction...then shifting.
No peril anymore.
No glorious death to celebrate:
the bullet planted in my heart
a token of honor, a medal,
bloodstone.

I look to a thousand cranes,
weep for the buried bird of Aphrodite.
Drifting towards the unknown.
Skimming the unseen.
Floating.
No, not floating.
Falling.

First Place – Child Category

If The World Was Silent

by Helen Wang

New cars, old cars, chugging on
the road. Yet unable
to drown out the
yelling of the boys
with wet wash cloths.
If they weren't there
I could listen and hear
what painful thoughts
still linger.

Just for a minute,
If the world would
stop, just for a
minute, just for a
second.

The silence, so silent you could
hear the broken spirits crying
and pulling us into
their hearts, to hug and wrap our
silent awe.

Honorable Mention – Child Category

A Cool Pine Forest

by Fiona Ferguson

Peace means
no war and
no sicknesses
peace is like
a walk in
a cool pine
forest with lots
of flowers

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