



**Lacey Loves to Read 2018
Teen Writers Collection**

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Short Stories by Joy Tobias, Olivia N. Pries,
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Essays by Heta Honanie, Melbin Gomez,
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Knight of Ancient Sands

By Joy Tobias

In a time unknown, and a place unseen, a beautiful beach remained untouched. The sand swirled with red, orange, and brown. Golden grains sprinkled the land and enhanced its beauty. But the true beauty was the sea itself. At the highest tide when the moon was full, she'd rise up and greet the stars. Her body, a dark blue that vibrated with life. Her hair, a natural bed of seaweed and tangled shells. She was so beautiful, and yet so alone. She looked far and wide for a friend or, better yet, someone who could cherish her forever. The more she looked, the less she found. The less she found, the sadder and more bitter she became. She did not dare search the beach, believing no one was there. The sea became still as she gave up her searches, and all became quiet for twenty years.

On the twenty-first year, when the sun was barely over the horizon, a boy wandered onto the beach. He was an artist looking for a way to make himself known. He had followed an arrangement of brightly colored rocks to what looked like a massive wall of onyx with a small opening. Curiosity got the best of him, and the young artist crawled through the wall. The artist was then frozen in awe at the beauty of the beach and decided to stay and paint an image. The sea noticed, and a spark of hope lifted her towards the boy. The artist was both afraid and amazed at the sight of a sea full of life, and he ran away suddenly, leaving his painting material. The sea sank again, disheartened and bitter by his reaction.

Two days passed and the sea became still again. The boy returned to the beach with a bucket and light carving tools. This time, however, the sea did not look his way; she already had it set in her mind that he did not care for her. The artist began scooping up sand with his bucket and placing it next to him, making a large pile. The artist slowly made his way towards the sea, trying his best to get as close as he could unnoticed. Once the boy's feet barely touched the water, he took his pail and filled it to the brim with water. He slowly made his way back to his pile of sand and began his work. The sea glimpsed back in curiosity, for she noticed he had taken a part of her with him. The boy did not once look at her as he began carefully shaping the sand with the seawater. He continued shaping the sand for two weeks, putting his heart and soul into every motion. When his work was finished he stood up, looked once more to the sea, and left. He was never seen again after that day.

The sea, aware of the silence, looked to the beach to see what the boy had made. Her turquoise eyes lit up in awe as she saw, standing at 7 feet tall, a knight made of sand. His armor was gold and his shoes a vibrant orange. A large ostrich feather added a pleasant touch to the helmet. Below the knight's feet, a message in the sand was written to the sea: "I may be gone, but this knight will never leave you."

What the boy did not realize, however, was the fact that the sea was truly full of life. When the sun reached its highest peak the knight moved, just slightly, before suddenly springing to life before her very eyes. She was taken aback, not believing at first that the knight was alive. She turned away in denial.

"M' lady!" the knight shouted suddenly.

The sea turned again, facing him. "How can this be? I thought I was alone, that it was meant to be..."

“Fear not dear maiden, and dry those tears. For I am here to stay.”

“Have you no family? Or a place you must run off to? A princess to save?”

“Yes, m’ lady. I am home, and I will save you.”

“Me? But how? I am vast and a single wave could knock you down!”

“I will still be here, you’ll see.”

The sea, still wanting to believe that she could spend her days with a friend, accepted his offer. They talked and laughed for months, always meeting at the same time and place, and the two of them became very fond of each other. The sea became more lively, and moved in excitement for each new day. The knight stood his ground, never once moving as he promised.

One day, however, when the moon had turned away from the earth, the sea went to the beach at her usual time. But the knight was gone. “Maybe he is late,” she pondered and waited for him to return. Time passed and the sun rose and the knight still was not there. The sea became worried as she remembered his promise. “Has he been taken? Does someone envy him so much as to take him from me?” she whispered. Fearful of this, she searched the sand below her and the sky above. The more she looked, the more worries built up inside her. The sea became more violent in her search, and storms began to form in the night, making her even more bitter. Suddenly, from the sky, she heard high-pitched laughing. She looked up and saw lightning streak across the sky. They cackled and shrieked with delight around her. “Why are you laughing?” she demanded.

Sparks of lightning took the form of a dozen little sprites. Their hair a wild flurry of light, their yellow dresses flowed with the wind. They laughed and mocked the sea’s cries. “He’s gone,” said one sprite.

“Gone forever!” said another.

“You’ll never find him!” said a third.

“We hid him well!” said the leader of the sprites.

“I don’t believe you!” shouted the sea, her waves churning in anger. “You vile creatures, envious of my friend. I’ll show you. I’ll show you all and prove to you that love always finds a way!” With that the sea stormed off, heading back to the beach where the Knight always stood.

“It’s pointless!” shouted the sprites as they followed after her. “He’s not there! He broke his promise!”

“You’re lying! Go away! I’ll find him, you’ll see!” the sea shouted back. She stopped when she reached the beach, not knowing where to start. “I’ll search every inch of sand,” the sea thought to herself. “He must be here, he has to be!” Then, with a sudden “crash!” she threw herself onto the beach, stretching halfway across the sand before backing away. She tried again and again, moving farther onto land and coming back again, searching for any sign of her dear friend. “Maybe they hid him on another beach,” the sea pondered. “I’ll search them all, he’s out there I know it!”

From that day on, the sea traveled the world, crawling along every beach and backing away if she thought the knight wasn’t there. And this is why, or so I’m told, the ocean moves back and forth in waves along sandy beaches. The knight was never seen again, but perhaps he will appear someday, or maybe another artist will build another.

THE END

Snowflake

By Olivia N. Pries

There we were, huddled together in the snowy, cold storm. So peacefully cold, so bittersweet. She turned to me, a smile on her face but her eyes filled with sadness. Her voice, soft and loving, broke my trance. "I think it's time."

"What?"

"Wake up."

The scream of my alarm pushes me from my broken, faded memories. And as I turn to click off my alarm, I half expect to see her staring back at me, a smile on her face and amusement in her eyes. But there's nobody there. My eyes catch the glint of the copper band that rests on my left hand as I move to turn off my alarm.

Forgetting the wakeup call for a moment, I lift my hand and stare at the band, memories flooding my head.

She had looked so amazing that day. Never one for tradition, she matched her silky skirts with the fiery red of her hair, her flowers replaced with branches of the tree we had both loved when we were younger. It was winter, of course. Winter was when we were at our best.

But only when it was *us*.

When I'm alone, like now... winter is a barren landscape, devoid of life or love. Joy's been rare since I lost her.

I know I'll never smile the same way again.

Before I met her, I had been a depressed and dejected teenage girl. I hated my parents, I hated myself, and I hated my life. The monochrome black and white of my pitiful appearance matched my personality and view of the world. I never slept, and cuts that were still healing crossed my arms and legs. Before her, I did it just to feel *something*. And then she came. She burned her way into my life in the last two months of high school.

The world around me flooded with red and green, no longer just a waste of my time. I suddenly could smile and feel happiness.

I learned what love felt like. I learned that I wasn't like the other girls. Maybe I could have experienced it sooner if I'd realized I didn't like boys. But I didn't care. I knew from the moment I met Paige that she was going to be the woman I married. I didn't care what people would say anymore. I openly talked about my feelings and my interests. I openly talked about my relationship with Paige. I had friends, for the first time in years, who didn't talk behind my back or pretend they were "only teasing."

...

I stopped cutting. The pain wasn't fun anymore.

She was so proud. She took my wrist one day and ran her hand over the scars.

She told me she loved my scars.

"They're beautiful," she said.

"They're proof that you're stronger than your demons."

...

But she was wrong.
She was the one who was stronger than my demons.
She was the one who chased them away.
And now that she's gone...
I can't escape them.

Hours have passed.
I sit on my kitchen counter, staring out the window at the barren, white winter landscape. A knife sits next to me, untouched except for a few fingerprints on the handle.
It's odd.
I had picked it up with the intention to return to my old ways, but...
I hadn't.
I couldn't bring myself to do it again.
Why? The scars? The thought that the red spilling from the cuts would only remind me of her, hurting me more? Resistance?
I sigh and look back to the knife.
Maybe she was right.
Maybe I am as strong as she said.
Maybe I just needed her to bring it out in me.
I pick up the knife again and take some bell peppers from the fridge.
"Thanks, Paige."

It's been three years since I wrote in this journal.
Life has been better.
I've got a stable job and a cat.
You know...
Paige may be gone, but the color she brought to my life has remained.
And I am eternally grateful for that.

Defector

By Cindi Bailey

“Breakfast?” I asked. My mom shook her head. We didn’t usually have breakfast, or lunch...or dinner. It was 1999, Kim Jong-il was dictator, and it was the time of North Korea’s famine, also known as “Arduous March.” Our lack of food weakened us all, but we were in better condition than most of my hometown. We had my dad, who sold lumber to China in secret to provide a little bit of money. At least two-thirds of the people in town had died from starvation already.

“Kim Shi-hyung!” I called, looking for my little brother.

“Kim Shi-bom!” he replied, popping up from under the sheets.

“Hey, I’m thirteen, you can’t call my name!” I yelled back, wanting him to use proper honorifics. “You say Noona!” I laughed.

A few weeks ago, my dad brought home a Hollywood film. This had only happened a few times before, when he could get his hands on one. When he brought films, Shi-hyung and I had to watch them in secret, because all the TV programs allowed were run by the government. It was just news about how great North Korea and Jon-il were and how bad South Korea and every other country were. So we would huddle under a blanket together and lock the door to a very small room in our house, and watch our movie. This was the exciting thing about living here, but it could also be deadly if anyone ever found out.

There was a rumor going around town that someone had been smuggling and selling lumber in secret.

“Mom, what’s gonna happen if they find out about Dad?” I asked.

“No one will find out, Shi-bom,” my mom said, hugging Shi-hyung and me tightly. “Your dad will handle it.”

Dad quickly walked over to us. “Yeah, everything is fine,” he said reassuringly, “and after this is cleared up, we can all go to the New Year’s firework show!” Dad exclaimed. Shi-hyung and I have always wanted to watch the New Year’s fireworks, but we never had the money for it.

“But we can’t afford it, we never can,” sighed Shi-hyung.

“We can this year though. We’ll go!” Dad said joyfully.

“You’re not lying, right?” I asked cautiously.

“Of course not.” Dad smiled and gave us all a tight hug. We had no dinner that day, like most days, but we had each other, and that’s what let me sleep.

The next morning five North Korean soldiers broke down our door and searched the house for my dad.

“That’s Do Min-yuk!” yelled one of the soldiers. They found him in the room with my mom, Shi-hyung and me. Four of the soldiers grabbed Dad out and Shi-hyung and I tried to chase after them, but Mom held us back.

“You two need to stay here,” Mom commanded.

“But Dad-”

“Just do as I say!” Mom yelled as she locked Shi-hyung and me in the room.

“Noona what are they gonna do to Dad?” Shi-hyung cried.

"I don't know," I whispered. I tried listening in on their conversation, but got nothing.

After about half a minute, Mom swung the door open with a horrified look on her face. "Come here," Mom said quietly as she hugged both of us tightly.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Shi-hyung, whatever you hear you need to stay in the room. Do you understand?" she asked in a serious voice. Shi-hyung nodded slowly. I hugged him again and Mom and I both left and locked the door behind us.

"Mom, what did that soldier tell you?" I pleaded, grabbing my mom's arm. She did not answer, but pulled me outside where my dad was kneeling in front of the four soldiers. The whole town was huddled around, while one soldier was making an announcement.

"This is a time for public execution," he began. My heart dropped. "Do Min-yuk was caught stealing and illegally selling lumber."

I held onto my mom's arm and whispered, "They can't we have to stop them." She just shook her head. My dad looked up and smiled at us with tear-filled eyes. Mom was already sobbing.

"Everyone over twelve years must watch. Everyone under twelve years cannot," the soldier continued. After he had announced the execution, three soldiers shot in unison. All I could see was my dad slowly becoming smaller and smaller. My mom screamed and passed out while I knelt down and screamed for the soldiers to stop shooting, and when they finally did, I could not recognize him.

"Don't break the rules," the soldier finally said.

It was January 5th when my mom decided we had to leave.

"We have no money and no food," my mom began. "We need to leave now." No one had power during the winter, we were all starving, and Dad was not here to provide bits of food. If we did not leave, we would die.

"How? It's too dangerous," I worried.

"If we don't leave, we'll starve to death, Shi-bom." My mom was planning our trip to China. She explained that North Korea and China were divided by the Tumen River. And since it was winter, the river was completely frozen, so we could run across.

Preparing for our escape didn't take long, because we had nothing to bring except the clothes we were already wearing.

"No matter what happens, you two need to get across safely," Mom said, looking at us.

"But you have to come with me and-" Shi-hyung tried to speak, but Mom interrupted.

"We'll all go together, but you two getting across is most important." She looked at me. "And then when we escape, we can watch the New Year's fireworks." She smiled.

"Really? Promise?" exclaimed Shi-hyung.

"Of course."

We were standing right in front of the frozen river; we would then try to escape North Korea. We looked around for hiding Chinese and North Korean soldiers, who were waiting to shoot anyone who tried to escape. Right across the river was a huge banner that said *accommodating, harboring, or sheltering defectors is prohibited*.

"I don't want to go. I'm scared," Shi-hyung whimpered.

"It's okay, we'll make it. You just need to run," I comforted him quietly.

Mom quickly gave us both tight hugs and whispered, "Run as fast as you can and don't stop, no matter what."

All three of us started to run, but we were startled by the sounds of gunshots. I held on to Shi-hyung and Mom stayed right next to us. We didn't stop, and didn't look behind us.

"Keep going we're almost there!" Mom shouted. We kept running until we reached the other side of the river.

"Follow me, Shi-Bom. We need to find a church," Mom said. A church was our best hope of getting to South Korea. Once we got there, we would be free. Mom pounded on the church doors, and a middle-aged man opened up.

"Does anyone speak Korean?" Mom said quickly.

"Yes, I do," the man replied. "Defectors, right?" he said, letting us in.

As Mom and the man talked, we found out that a few other defectors had come to him, and he knew how to help us; we would fly to South Korea the next morning. He even gave us food. We had never had this much food; enough to stuff us all.

Today is December 31, 2000. It has been a little less than a year since our escape last winter, and I am living in an apartment with my mom and Shi-hyung. We get to eat a lot now, three times a day, and go to school with other kids. We are healthy now, and our life has turned around completely, now that we have escaped. I hope that my experience gives hope to other North Koreans and other people who can do something about their life situation. If you believe and fight hard, your end goal will be met.

"Are you ready?" Mom cheers.

"Yeah!" Shi-hyung and I scream.

"-3, 2, 1!" Mom then lights the huge box of fireworks and runs as fast as she can to us. The fireworks go off like big, bright, beautiful flowers in the sky.

"Happy New Year Shi-Bom, Shi-hyung! Your dad and I promised to show you two the fireworks," Mom says while hugging us tightly.

Death Wears A Leather Jacket

By Kya-Lynn Rassler

"That's not fair, Zorn!"

"Who ever said I played fair? Stop complaining and take your turn, Marley." Do they not see me trying to sleep? It's not like I just got back from a time-consuming mission.

"This is why no one likes you, Zorn!"

"I seriously doubt the reason for my lack of friends is a result of my Monopoly skills."

Are you serious? They woke me up over Monopoly. "What are you guys arguing about now? Mr. Folter and I just got back from a mission and we don't feel like listening to you two bicker over Monopoly," I say as I get up from the sleeping bag.

"It doesn't seem to be bothering Mr. Folter, he hasn't even stirred," retorted Zorn.

"I'm sorry Todd, we didn't mean to wake you, but Zorn keeps cheating!" cried out Marley.

I look to their right and see the Monopoly board scattered with game pieces.

"Just because you don't like something doesn't mean it's cheating. Oh, stop crying. If you keep crying I'm not going to play," Zorn said as he saw Marley start to wipe away tears with her leather jacket.

"I'm not crying, and I'm not playing with you either!" yelled Marley while getting up and stomping off.

"Go wake everyone up, Zorn. And try to find Marley," I tell Zorn as I walk back towards my tent. Today we have another mission. And as usual I'm the one who has to finish it. That's just the job of Death I suppose.

While the sun sets, I look back to make sure everyone is riding behind me. I count Ellen, Mr. Folter, Zorn, and towards the back I see Marley, clearly still sulking. As we near the gate to the mortal world, we slow down.

"So what exactly is this mission, Todd? You haven't even told us any names," Ellen says loudly over the roar of the motorcycles.

"Missouri. A family in Missouri," I yell back equally loud. As we come to a complete stop, the gate to the mortal world opens. "Just stick close to me and don't stray away," I warn as we ride through the gate. Here we go again.

We leave the gate and land just outside St. Luke's Hospital.

"What are we doing here, Todd?" asks Marley.

"A mission. My mission, but I wanted to bring all of you along," I say while parking my motorcycle near the entrance.

"I have a feeling this is going to be a sad one. You only bring us along for sad missions, Todd," Zorn said quietly. Well, he wasn't wrong. My mission was to collect a 67 year old woman by the name of Mary Gonzales. She had been in the hospital for a few months now and I felt like it was time to get her. We all walk into the hospital without anyone noticing. Why would they notice? We are invisible to the mortal eye. The gang and I make our way up the stairs and to the 3rd floor. A few doors down we arrive at a room with the name 'Gonzales' next to the door. As we walk in, we see a 4 year old girl

sleeping on the chair next to the bed. I know her name is Amy, and I know she is Mary's granddaughter. Mary lies in bed, looking out the window to her right. As I walk in she shivers. She may not be able to see me, but she sure can feel my presence.

"Shouldn't we wait till the rest of the family gets here? You shouldn't leave the little girl alone, Todd," Ellen solemnly says. But she knows it's no use. I came here to finish my mission and that's what I'm going to do. Just then a teenage boy and his parents walk in. They must be the rest of the family. They walk in quietly, as not to wake little Amy. They stand by the bed, and quietly talk.

"I will make this as quick as possible," I say to no one in particular. I walk over to the side of the bed, and watch as Mary closes her eyes. I rest my hand on her forehead and listen as the beeping of the heart monitor slowly fades away. The room is silent, except for the crying of the family members. Mr. Folter silently walks Marley, Zorn and Ellen out into the hallway so I can finish my mission. I take out my small leather bag from my jacket pocket and run it over Mary. Once I feel her essence in the bag, I close it and leave the room. I meet the rest of the gang out in the parking lot. No one says anything, they know how hard this job can be for me sometimes. We quietly start our bikes and wait for the gate to fully open.

We land back in our world, right next to the fountain of the Afterlife. I take out my leather bag, and spill the contents into the fountain. Once in the fountain, the fates will decide whether the soul goes into the Underworld or Heaven, but I had no doubt Mary would go to Heaven. Once the bag is empty and returned to my jacket pocket, I feel a hand on my shoulder. I look behind me and see Ellen.

"You did what you had to," she whispers.

"That doesn't make it any easier," I say while turning around. "Now let's head back to camp and wait for our next mission," I say loudly for the whole gang to hear. As we leave the fountain, I drown out the cries of the family from the hospital, and let the roar of the motorcycle engines fill my ears.

Music Never Gives Up on You

By Heta Honanie

As a person with anxiety, it has never been easy to roll myself out of my soft, cozy bed – my safe place – and force myself to go to school. To me, high school is a place packed with so many wonderful opportunities. I get the chance to learn about a wide variety of topics that will help me with my dream career as a flautist! There are both teachers and students there with more experience than me who actually want to help me succeed in the future!

It is also a place filled with peer pressure and bullying. A place where friends unwittingly make each other feel bad by flashing their straight A's while another smiles and tries to hold back tears. It is the place where so much work can be assigned in one week that there is no longer such a thing as a social life. A place where students often need to have lightning-quick minds, or else they will be left in the dust.

Everybody has their own way of coping with the struggle of high school. Some stay incredibly organized and get all of their homework done the moment they leave school. Others play a sport in the afternoon to release stress. Some people, unfortunately, turn to pleasures that feel thrilling in the moment, but have devastating long-term effects. Those people are usually the ones who get left in the dust and never bother trying to catch up.

What about me? It all started the summer before fifth grade when I picked up a flute for the first time. At first, the instrument seemed impossible to play, with its ridiculous amount of keys and the oddly-shaped embouchure hole. It was stressful for me when I was attempting to play tunes as simple as "Hot Cross Buns." However, I was determined to be the best flautist that I could be, so I practiced constantly, until playing was a hobby rather than a chore. By the time I got to seventh grade, I knew that I wanted a career as a musician. The year after, I learned how to play the guitar and ukulele. Music came naturally to me because I have perfect pitch, an auditory phenomenon allowing me to recognize any note when I hear it. It also allows me to play just about anything I want by ear!

As soon as I left middle school, anxiety hit me like a train. I was terrified of going into high school, joining the marching and symphonic bands, leaving behind friends from middle school, and taking advanced classes. Ironically, I did not even believe that anxiety was an actual problem until it began to affect me. Over the summer before my freshman year, there was a period of approximately three weeks when I threw up every morning due to anxiety. Those days, I was barely able to eat, and I had no energy to do the things that I enjoyed, including music. Playing music had suddenly become a chore again. Then, I had to rehearse for marching band in late July, which was daunting.

Starting marching band, I was a disaster, not even being able to move my feet in time to the music. Thankfully, I got better with practice and help from upperclassmen in

band, and I was marching well by the end of the season. Marching became therapeutic for me, and bit by bit, my passion for music started to return. I also stopped feeling physically ill, and gained enough courage to survive freshman year successfully.

I basically started collecting instruments to play for fun, including the banjo, a crystal flute, a borrowed piccolo, and even a recorder. As much as I want to be a professional musician, I also realize that it's sometimes just as beneficial to play music for fun as it is to play "serious" music because the moment my passion dies is the moment my career path won't be worth it anymore.

Overall, making music is the best part of my life because it gives me hope. It reminds me that it is never too late to pick up a new hobby, and my fellow musician friends are always there to support me. Thanks to music, I have the power to make all of my worries disappear.

The World Needs Love

By Melbin Gomez

Have you ever felt butterflies in your stomach? Felt the need to protect someone? Felt as if you would be nothing without that certain someone, a pet, or even an object that holds sentimental value? That my friend is what we call love, and you have it. Love is something that everyone in the world needs but sadly that is not the case. See, in today's society we are taught to hate by either political leaders, the media, our idols, or sadly even our own bloodline. Love can also be widely misinterpreted in many situations. We all need to learn what true love is because that way, we would all live in peace.

As we can see in all parts of the world, people don't love one another. There is racism, discrimination, and hate towards one another. These are all things that have no love in them, because of them there is violence, rejection, and sometimes there is bloodshed along with the loss of innocent lives. Sadly all of this is not new, it has been present in the world for many generations from slavery and war. Lack of love between family members has also been present from parents selling off their children, abandoning them and leaving them to die, or even killing them because they were born the "wrong" gender for them. Hate is something that many people want to eliminate in the world, but there are always those who for some mysterious reason want to hate. Certain people enjoy hate so much that they idolize some of the people that have caused so much destruction and death for people "different" from them, such as Hitler. Why, you may ask? I believe that there is no exact reason for it, my best guess at why this would be is because we as humans are hardwired to try and be the best of the best. Since our brains are trained as such, we tend to ignore our morals and good nature in order to reach what we so desperately desire.

Although there are some who believe they love a person, that is not always the case. Some people consider love to be represented as keeping them to themselves, forcing them to show love for them, and overall being completely controlling of them because "it is what is best for them." No, this is not what love is, it will never be like this. Love is when you feel the need to protect them, care for them, be their advisor and stick by their side no matter what. I know that we all love our parents to an extent, and though it may be extremely hard to say that you do because of the things they have done, we love them unconditionally. Without them, we wouldn't be alive to enjoy the blessings of life. I myself wouldn't be here to say this. Why not show that type of affection to every single person around us? They are also human beings, why not show them the love that some may think they don't have? None of us knows everyone's background, it's not possible to do so, but besides our past, we all deserve love. Without love people feel below everyone else and in some extreme cases...the lack of love causes death.

In the Bible, a book that is extremely important to millions of people, it states that we are all brothers and sisters, and that the Lord is our father and we all are His creations. Whether you agree with the Bible or not, it is very true to an extent. We are all humans, we are all born the same way, and we are all equal. No matter our color, no matter our gender, no matter our beliefs, we all need to learn to love each other and protect one another. If love were to be shown everywhere by everyone, omens such as slavery, discrimination, and death would all be avoided. Love is a strong feeling, it is something we really won't be able to truly explain. Love literally unites the world, it will forever end all of the evil that will be present in the future. We all need to show this passion to everyone, we all need to forget our quarrels, our hatred, our unfairness and just appreciate one another. The world would be a peaceful place if all we had was love, which is something countless people and I want so the world can live in overall peace.

Loss of Life

By Kaitlenn Hammond-Merryman

In my life, as a 15 year old I have gone through many losses. Losses of family members being taken away, to losing and not being able to find myself. Going through all this immensely changed my life and my view on everything. It changed my awareness of things, like what to do during my life.

When I was young, I used to be very close with my cousin Brendan. We did everything together because we were so close in age compared to our other cousins. We had such a close bond with each other. But when my aunt got diagnosed with a mental illness things drastically changed. CPS had to get involved and my cousin basically got taken from me. It felt like my heart was being ripped out of my chest. He was like my best friend. But when CPS got involved Brendan's dad, who was not very close to the family, got custody of him. My aunt is the one related to my family, not him, and he lived far away. I saw him maybe once a year, if that. But currently I haven't seen him in two or three years. Brendan's dad doesn't let anyone in the family have any contact with him. And he was basically a brother to me, that's how close we were, so losing him tore me apart. When we were little, even though he had a younger brother Brendan always chose to be with me. We are about three years apart and that's such a small gap compared to the next closest cousin in our family, who is six years apart from Brendan and seven from me. Being able to be with Brendan all the time helped build who I am today, but Brendan going to his dad's changed everything.

Another loss for me was when my favorite grandpa died. His name was John and he was in the military. He did not die in the military though, he died from acute pulmonary fibrosis. His favorite thing to do was golfing and bowling. My grandma also partook in golfing which I think is very boring but it's what they did. He was my father's dad, and we went over there a lot to eat dinners together. And I loved bowling so when I was very young I used to love to bowl with him and my dad. My grandpa John was in league bowling and competed. When he was dying my dad and I always went to the hospital to see him. But when he had died my dad was very sad for quite a while and it was hard for me to be around it sometimes. It would make me very sad and I am always around my dad, so whenever he was affected by something so was I. It was very rough during that time.

During my life many things have happened, from good to bad. I'm not sure exactly what to do with my life. As a teenager I'm supposed to start knowing where I'm headed in life and what I want to do in my future. But in all honesty I have no clue what I'm doing with my life. I'm very lost in the mix of band, school, dance, and my outside life. When balancing all of these things out I don't really focus on my future. I have started to think of things but I'm supposed to know by the time I'm a junior so I can start planning my classes according to what I want to do. What college I want to go to depends on what type of program I want to partake. And I am very lost in this situation.

I know that I have been through some major changes and losses in my life but I know it has made me who I am today. Knowing that gives me hope for my future. To try to see my cousin, to live life to its fullest, and to make sure I look at what my future holds and the things I want to do in college.