2008 Ooligan Press
Young Adult Creative Writing Contest

High School Winners
about the contest...

Last fall, Ooligan Press announced its 2008 Young Adult Creative Writing Contest. Middle- and high-school writers from across Oregon submitted pieces of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. After receiving nearly 250 submissions, Ooligan chose the twenty-four strongest pieces. The twelve winning high school submissions are featured in this journal. The contest committee would like to thank all of the teachers, parents, and students that made this writing contest a success.

about ooligan press...

Ooligan Press is a general trade press at Portland State University. In addition to publishing books that honor cultural and natural diversity, it is dedicated to teaching the art and craft of publishing.

As a teaching press, Ooligan makes as little distinction as possible between the press and the classroom. Under the direction of professional faculty and staff, the work of the Press is done by students enrolled in the program. Publishing profitable books in real markets provides projects in which students combine theory with practice.
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fiction
Occupied
Hilary Gross

He had three cups of coffee and a Big Gulp from the 7/11 before he met me. When he came in he had some of each, and maybe a little drool, on his cheap white muscle shirt. I wonder if he cleans up well. His grubby hands undo his belt, and he unzips his pants to relieve himself. He flushes, but skips the sink. Apparently he doesn't clean up at all. He didn't even stop to appreciate my pastel pink and wintergreen floral wallpaper or take in the Clean Laundry scented air freshener the manager installed last week. And then I wait. It's what I do.

When a little girl, green in the face from car sickness bursts in with her mother, I welcome her. Of course it isn't the most pleasant of circumstances, but any company will do for now. I believe she had an orange for breakfast. She made sure to keep her little dress clean, and when she was done she ran right to the sink. I love little girls. They have such nice manners. Her mother comes in to help her wash her hands, she's not quite tall enough yet, and the manager hasn't bought me a step stool yet. Oh, well, bye honey, and my door clicks shut.

Sometimes I can just barely hear the bell ring as costumers come through my little truck stop on some highway I don't even know the name of. I've heard teenagers on family road trips complaining that they don't even have cell phone reception out here. Only about one in eight bells are for me. Sometimes it takes longer. But I think if the manager charged for use of the bathroom, he wouldn't be so grumpy all the time. I could be his most profitable commodity.

Around three I get hoodlums armed with Marks-A-Lot and Sharpies. There must be a small school somewhere out here. I want to tell them that vandalism is a crime punishable by law. That there are other ways to leave their mark on the world. I want to tell them that they're better than this. That they don't have to sink so low as scrapping immature obscenities across a perfectly nice flower print.

Sometimes I wish I was one of those lucky ones, built into a Country Club, with makeup mirrors, potpourri, and something with slightly more class than a bare light bulb. I'm sure the young folks there don't vandalize the walls. There no one would dare track mud across the tile floor. I don't get any respect.

A man in his early twenties pushes the door open. I hear his girlfriend out there pondering to herself whether she wants chips or gum. As far as I can tell, it's been awhile since their last pit stop. It is disheartening to find that grown men still cannot aim. It is almost enough to make you lose faith in humanity. This guy needs to go back to the Cheerio routine some moms use for their toddlers, tossing a Honey-Nut Cheerio into the water for a target. He flushes and sidles over to the sink. At least he washes his hands.

When I'm alone again, and I get to thinking, I wouldn't do as much good in a Country Club or a high-end restaurant. Here I make a difference. My sacrifice makes a difference in the world. I come to the aid of toddlers in need everywhere, or just average, everyday people with abnormally small bladders. I am a hero of the people.

It's hard to remember that sometimes when young rich princesses turn up there noses as if they would rather pee in the bushes. It gets hard to keep up my self-esteem. I try to stay clean, I do. But some people are just dirty.

Near evening it gets slow. I'll maybe get one more visitor before he comes tonight. That is my favorite part of the day, when finally, finally the residues of all the day's germs are washed off. When he comes in toting a tub of hot soapy...
At night Laura studied bats. Just as the sun started to fall behind the hills, she drove along Highway 218 and turned down a rocky side road in her station wagon full of scientific equipment. She told me, on her daily visits to my kitchen, that she set up mist nets over an old cattle trough, where she would trap bats in folds of netting as they swooped down to drink water. In the light of her headlamp, she measured their wings and took punches of skin for DNA testing. She focused on pallid bats, with their pale-yellow fur—the only species of bat in eastern Oregon that communicates at a low enough frequency for humans to hear.

At around four or five in the morning, Laura would pack up her equipment and return to camp. It was primarily a summer camp, but in return for weekly presentations about bats for the campers, the camp manager let Laura stay in a tiny cabin behind the raft shed for the summer. Come September, she would return to the University of Oklahoma to continue work on her PhD. My own cabin sat just up the hill from Laura’s. Sometimes I would see her headlights pulling in just as I woke to start breakfast.

I wouldn’t see Laura again until about eleven, the point at which the desert day got too hot for anyone to sleep in a cabin without air-conditioning. She would come into the kitchen, sweating in a tank top and shorts, and make herself a bowl of Cheerios. While I baked bread or filled the ketchup containers, she sat on a stool next to the walk-in refrigerator, eating her cereal and telling me about the bats.

After Laura finished her breakfast, she used the phone in the pantry to call her boyfriend, Keith, back in Oklahoma. At the beginning of the summer, she had to go into town to

Batgirl
Madelon Case

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water and plenty of disinfectants, I sigh with relief. I love being clean, but I’m not always as sanitary as I’d like. When every inch of my surface has been scoured and scrubbed, I sparkle. Now without any dirt or germs to hinder me, I can rest. It’s not all too often you meet a germophobic bathroom now is it?
buy a new long-distance calling card every week because they talked for hours. Her laugh echoed through the kitchen while I worked.

About a month into the summer, she started leaving messages for Keith. She would emerge from the pantry a couple of minutes after going in, saying simply, “He didn’t pick up.” Hoping he would call back soon, she hung around the kitchen and talked to me. I learned that she had grown up on a pig ranch in Oklahoma, and I told her how I had finished a degree in physics a couple of years ago but now I wanted to start my own restaurant in Bend. She taught me her grandmother’s recipe for cinnamon bread, which I started making every morning to serve the campers. I called her Batgirl, but she just called me Tom. As soon as the phone rang in the pantry, I lost her.

When the waiting time lengthened, she started going running. I gave her a photocopied map of the trails around camp. She would return an hour or two later, shining with sweat, and down three glasses of water before asking, “Did Keith call back?” Increasingly, the answer was no. She would help me chop vegetables for dinner, make herself a sandwich, and then leave to get her equipment ready and take a nap before another night with the bats. So it went for most of the summer, as campers came and went and broom snakeweed bloomed yellow in the hills.

One day in late August, in her last week of fieldwork, she didn’t show up at all. At two in the afternoon, I asked some counselors hanging out in the dining hall if they had seen her. I walked up to the office and asked the camp manager. No one knew where Laura was. At seven in the evening, as I was pushing plates of brownies through the serving window, the phone in the pantry rang. I darted to it.

“Tom?” It was Laura. “I’m at a rancher’s house, down 218, just before the bridge. I got lost on a run and I swear I almost died. Can you please come get me?”

As soon as dinner ended, I left the pots and pans in the sink and took off in my pickup. The ranch was only two miles away along the highway, down a driveway leading to a squat white house. Laura sat waiting on the front steps. When she saw me coming she stood up and said something to the woman just inside the door, then ran down the steps and out to the truck. I climbed out of the cab as she came toward me.

“Tom, thank you so much.”

“What happened?”

“I got confused about which trail I was on, and realized I must be really far from camp, and I ran out of water in my Camelbak and got dehydrated. I finally saw this house and tore down the hill to it. I know I’m not too far away from camp at this point but I don’t think I could run any more.”

I stepped forward and enveloped her in a hug. She hugged me back, tightly, then stepped away and climbed into the passenger seat of the truck.

As we drove the two miles back to camp, she leaned her forehead against the window and gazed out at the tawny hills. “I bet Keith didn’t call back today, did he,” she sighed.

“No, he didn’t.” And instead of telling her exactly what I thought of Keith at that point, I handed her the water bottle from my cupholder and told her, “Keep drinking. You’ve had a tough day.”

She left that Thursday, driving out of camp under the searing midday sun as I waved goodbye. That night I drove down 218 to the side road she had mentioned and found the old cattle trough. I lay next to it in the dirt for hours, watching shadows swoop overhead and listening for the faint calls of the pallid bats. Finally the sun crept over the hills, and I drove back to camp to make eggs and cinnamon bread.
What to Keep?
Emily Carlson

I stood, frozen over an equally inanimate body, its warped, shriveled frame resting lightly on my mother’s comforter. Its hand was outstretched slightly, the gold of a wedding band hidden beneath her wrinkled, powdery skin. When had my mother become this “thing”? When did a person become a body? When did a human being full of life and potential become an unconscious, malformed mass? When did death finally grasp someone I had once loved?

I felt a warm, commanding hand on my shoulder, its palm slicked with nervousness and sweat. “You did your best, Lee. Nothing could have been done. At eighty-seven, could you expect her to win against cancer?” I turned to look into the face of her doctor. It was red and unpleasant, bristly and harsh, dictated by duty and fascination more than compassion. The wiry mustached lip twisted into a pitiful smile, pulling the pock-marked skin out in a grotesque deformation. “You should make a call.”

Aimlessly, I wandered into the sterilized hallway, assaulted by the washed out water colors, scarred chairs, the scuffed floors. I shuffled along, flanked by nurses, orderlies, patients. The low hum of the hospital pulsed beneath its inhabitants like a constant heartbeat, continuously churning the masses to some unseen rhythm. I walked slowly and out of beat, to the phone. Holding the receiver, and not bothered by the sticky feeling it left on my palm, I dialed the number.

Rain pattered on the roof, falling silently and spattering into a million pieces on my windshield, seemingly absorbing the light from the street lamps rather than reflecting it. I sat in my car, curled into a ball, hands wrapped around my knees, head down, mind swimming. One thing, I thought. One thing. A lifetime worth of memories and I can keep one thing. Mother was so plagued by debt, her entire home was to be confiscated and I had managed to talk the lawyer into letting me keep something.

With eyes blank and bleary, and a dull click, the latch on the door unlocked and I wandered into the rain and up the walk.

Moonlight oozed in through the blinds, sliding off the eggshell walls and dripping into misshapen pools on the wood floor. In the dim iridescence, the pale lumps of dust-covered furniture seemed like mountains frosted in glittering dust. Family grinned up at me behind tarnished frames, plastered on smiles shining behind grimy glass.

A flick of the lights and the illusion was broken, moonlight gone, furniture once again merely discarded items, more trouble than value. Settling into the worn carpet, I folded my legs and gazed about. A lifetime of memories, and I can keep one thing.

I was seated like a chieftain, arms and legs folded orderly, trying to decide what to keep. My gaze fell on our matching pairs of gloves. Memories full of warm winters, snapping fires, and snow-drenched clothing drifted to mind. Memories clogged with shrieks of delight, with snowball fights and sled rides and the surprise gift of a snow day. I reached out my hand to grab them, to put on my old pair, now far too small and riddled with holes; hers, soft and warm and so big they left wriggling room in the fingers.

My mother had artist’s hands. They were large and steady, but often flitted between actions and ideas, drifting from paint brushes to clay, to a pen and ink, back to paints again. But too soon, they lost their working, earthy smell
and gained the sharp, panging scent of antiseptic. They lost their strength and wasted to thin quivering things without the ability to command a brush or pen. Saddened, I replaced them back in their spot, their warmth fading from my hands.

My mind drifted over to mother’s box of brushes, stained with paint and ink, varnish worn for the handles, bristles tattered and splayed out haphazardly. Days full of half-melted popsicles and summer, of drifting in as mother completed one of her works, of her laugh, her smile, her happiness and compassion that leaked into everything she did. But then, a more recent memory surfaced, one of someone else’s smile. A smile plagued by worries and concerns, it contained a strained tightness that the other did not, forcing a mild sense of panic into my heart, as if suddenly, that smile might break. A face that smiled too hard, wishing too much for that warm, comforting stranger. With a hesitant deliberateness, I replaced the brushes, watching as a flake of long-dried paint seesawed to the carpet.

Delicately, I held mother’s much loved mug, chipped and stained, color faded and dissolved from so many goes in the washer. It brimmed with memories of slow Saturday mornings, of long talks in the dusk and strong coffee: the bitter smell of the grinds mixing harmoniously with the sweet perfume of Mother’s shampoo. But slowly, softly, the scents of childhood and wood smoke dissolved into the rain; and I was left sitting in an empty house surrounded by broken trinkets and hopelessness.

With a determination I hadn’t felt before, I pushed all the items away from me. Full of purpose I stood, looking down at them with morbid fascination, their imperfections and abnormalities smoothed over by the distance. Turning from my small circle of nostalgia, I strode out of the living room, letting my palm rest on the cold sureness of the door handle. As it slid open, I looked back at my mother’s remains. Not that thing lying in the hospital, but what my mother had left behind. Everywhere, her unique fingerprint was seen, her eclectic taste, her strange love of a-symmetry. For the first time in a while, I allowed a small sense of pride to swell up within me. *A lifetime worth of memories, and I didn’t need one thing.*
Henry has nothing to do, and the lizards are making strange noises. Before emerging from the armchair to feed them, he studies the wallpaper in Mr. Rose’s living room. It’s off white and decked with various fruits, fat purple grapes and occasionally a lemon. Though somewhat humorous and outdated, the wallpaper depresses Henry. The fruit swells, dripping and ripe, yet remains painfully flat and two dimensional on the walls. He wonders whether Mr. Rose chose this wallpaper. Henry shuffles across the hardwood floor and studies the note left for him. The lizard care instructions are written in microscopic cursive on yellowing, lined paper. The note insists that he feed them once a day, approximately two cups of crumbling kibble in a nondescript box. It also notes that the lizards cannot be left alone, as they are social creatures and enjoy attention. The last sentence, the only thing that Henry can read without squinting is written in harsh red ink. It instructs him not to touch the lizards under any conditions.

The lizards stare at Henry, continuing to hiss and wheeze, as Henry stares back at them. Their eyes are black, shiny, and absorb light. One unleashes its mile long tongue, the same purple as the wallpaper grapes. “Oak,” Henry mutters, recalling the lizard’s name. The other two are Lilly and One Hundred and Fifty Second, named after Mr. Rose’s favorite streets, he presumed. Henry presses his nose against the glass, and Oak tries to lick it, his purple tongue leaving saliva on the invisible barrier between them. Henry longs to communicate with them in the only way he knows how, to touch them.

Henry remembers his walks to school. It’s summer now, and he misses those walks. Every day he would venture along the rolling cement hills, making friends with the garden gnomes and poking each red painted plastic button of their blue painted plastic vests. Sometimes he would encounter a surprise like a foggy window and wet his eager fingers with the dew. Other times he would search for various sticks and leaves, ones with special qualities like the cranberry red ones that hang like fingers. He would pick up a leaf, ignoring the color, and feel the veins. Running his finger down the spine, he would wait for an explosion, for something, but the leaf remained unchanged. Paying visits to his gnome friends, his leaf friends, his only friends, gave him enough satisfaction to endure the rest of the day.

One Hundred and Fifty Second has black splotches the color of graphite on his white body. He lays in the one strip of sunlight in his cage, arms and legs splayed out at his sides. His tail curls under his body like a measuring tape, and his eyes squint shut. Henry reckons the lizard is dreaming. He decides to leave them for a while and make himself some food. The hollow feeling in his chest is starting to bother him. The kitchen is small and neglected, and the refrigerator houses nothing but a pitcher of curdled milk and some Oscar Meyer bologna. Taking out five slippery slices, Henry sets them on one of Mr. Rose’s ceramic plates, which are decorated with the same grapes and lemons as the wallpaper. The bologna feels like a miniature ice skating rink to his fingers, cold. He takes one bite, and then another, moving his way around the bologna until nothing is left but a small bitten circle. Without a thought, he approaches the lizard cage, bologna in hand, and drops the leftovers inside. The lizards squirm, forming knots with tails and limbs and trying to eat the last of the meat. The winner is Lilly, the gila monster. She inhales sharply and looks through the glass at Henry. Henry complies, dropping another piece of bologna in the cage. Feeling rebellious, he gingerly sets another strip
of bologna on the table next to the cage, and another one on the ground. The lizards, catching on, hoist their lank bodies out of the cage and aim for the bologna. Though all three snap and bite, it seems to Henry the lizards have made an unspoken deal to take turns.

Soon, Henry has made a bologna trail around Mr. Rose's cluttered living room, spirals of lunchmeat twisting around table legs and making designs on the cheap orange carpeting. Ending his journey at the piano in the room's corner, he sits down at the bench, observing the piano with his right eye, and the battling lizards with the left. He then runs his index finger over the piano keys. Henry knows nothing of music or the ear, though he enjoys piano concerts. Not for the conventional reason, but because of the care the musicians take to strike each key, the way their hands dance across the ivory. He longs to connect with the piano, so he closes his eyes and moves his hands up and down the keyboard. The lizards have made their way to Henry's feet, their purple tongues scouring the ground. They play with Henry's shoelaces as he makes friends with the piano, circling around him and curling their tales around the oak chair legs. Henry forgets about everything except his intimate contact with the keys and the lizards' intimate contact with his ankles. It all ends though when he hears the front door click shut. Henry turns around to witness Mr. Rose, wiping a stray tear with his handkerchief, decorated with lemons and grapes. “I've never seen them dance like that,” Mr. Rose says.
Books
Michal Orczyk

Through the window in my white-walled room
I hear an anxious rustle,
And my shoes beside the door
Lie aching for a walk.

As I open a book about a man by a pond,
The rusty, red sunlight launches a final crusade,
And passes its duties to the luminous moon,
While the stars march into the sky.

But, in the room, I feel none of it—
The moon is two-dimensional
And the sun monotone,
And the man by the pond watches me and laughs.

He squats down in the grass, under the stars.
“Still we live meanly, like ants,” he says.
I finish the book and start for the door, but the sun has set
And the stars are obscured by clouds.

Villanelle (For Mr. Thomas)
Max Ehrenfreund

I want to see, to see the silent light,
to see the sky, the cloud-dust burning gold
above the sun that sets so soon tonight.

The drunk needs nothing brave, nothing right,
while stumbling home, his fingers numb with cold, except to see, to see the silent light.

Though no one can restore a blind man's sight,
those few who still have eyes will shout, "Behold!
The ghostly sun that sets so soon tonight!"

This sickly skin, now gray and turning white,
these trembling hands—perhaps I am too bold
to hope at all to see the silent light.

I'll be flying soon, sailing like a kite
to where I'll drink my fill (so I've been told)
beyond the sun that sets so soon tonight.

Look straight into the west, where the air is bright,
and never turn away; if you grow old,
you'll want to see, to see the silent light,
above the sun that sets so soon tonight.
Two Children
Desiree Miatke

She wanted to be a queen,
so he brought her a dented crown
made of painted plastic,
and a wooden-chair throne.
He dressed her in the tattered silk
of his mother’s stained white bridal gown,
and appointed three fluffy kittens
as her courtiers:
they tumbled like jesters
over the threadbare grass.
Her court was the hollow
under the jaded boughs
of the dying willow tree,
and he brought her paper flowers
to set about her throne.
He donned cardboard armor,
and took up his dead-stick sword,
and he stood at the gate
of the palace,
defying all evil.
She tore a strip from the gown
and bound it around his arm.
He was her champion.
She was his queen.

In the Land of Our Fathers
Caity Clark

Where religion holds no value
in a world of those who seek truth in logic,
and not within the chambers of the human heart.

Where individuality is encouraged
so we may compare ourselves to another,
and affirm that we are better.

Where we fear to pass judgment on guilty men
because of judgment passed upon us,
“How dare we kill an evil that has destroyed our good?”

Where one knows another like the back of one’s own hand,
if they only knew what the back of their own hand looked
like.

Where children get older prematurely
because adults who wish they were young
do not take responsibility to preserve what they have lost.

Where mirrors reflect faults,
scales and balances determine beauty,
and fortunes are spent to erase the age lines that prove
wisdom.

Where the American dream rings true
until, like the Liberty Bell, it cracks
with the thunder crash of reality; a swift blow to
the head knocks one down from the clouds where one
should
soar, and muddies their feet in the muck of the Earth
and the harsh truth that very few people can ever change the
world and that
you are not one of them.
Homeless No More
Kristine Olson

I was six years old when I first caught sight of b.o.b. I was in the first grade and the original elementary school in town had not yet been demolished and replaced by a high-tech, environmentally friendly one. On that day the sun shone down on the soccer field where I played tag, with golden, crispy grass, a line of green, raindrop-shaped bushes and a chain-link fence separating our six-year-old world from the street—and everything and everyone that lay beyond it.

During recess, we kids were oblivious to everything except our imaginations. (I was pretending to be a puppy when I first saw b.o.b.) He wore a red and black flannel jacket, a ratty baseball cap, and oval glasses—all similar to the apparel he wears today. He rode a beaten, black bike and held on to a gray leash that was attached to the neck of a sandy-caramel mutt. He had been cycling along the sidewalk—beyond the mystical chain-link fence—and bodies froze at the sight of him. Six-year-old heads followed the movement of his bike, and there was a sense that we had witnessed something out of the ordinary; we had seen the “homeless man.”

“Did you see the bum?” one little boy whispered excitedly as he ran toward the fence to get a better look. “People call him ‘Bob.’ It stands for Bum-On-Bike.” A proud smirk flitted across his angular face; he was so smug for knowing something important that the rest of us awestruck six-year-olds did not.

Eleven years have passed since then. Every so often I still see b.o.b. cycling around town, waving to people he knows, and the rest of the time with his eyes fixed on the pavement in front of him. I know he gets free coffee at the Chevron station and picks up cans (he can add “town recycler” to his repertoire), but other than that, I think he’s on an endless bike ride with his dog. His sandy-caramel mutt died some years back. He or she had gotten sick—b.o.b. carted her around for a while, on one of those spiffy covered wagons parents hook to the backs of their bikes—and eventually Sandy (as I secretly called “her”) disappeared and was replaced by a new dog: Max (as I also secretly call “him”). Max is black with brown splotches, and pointy ears and muzzle.

When I was a child, b.o.b. was the only bum that my parents did not tell me not to look at, walk near, or speak to. Still, I felt that because he was a bum there must be something dangerous about him, so naturally I invited some friends to go exploring in the hazelnut orchard behind my house. Supposedly he lived somewhere in the interior of the orchard, and while we trespassed through the muck and trees, I told my friends, “He’s a pretty scary guy. We have to be really careful, because if he catches us, he’ll probably kidnap us and tie our hands with rope. His dog is vicious too—I think it’s a rottweiler.” I cannot remember what compelled me to fib about the quiet homeless man and his docile dog (that was surely not a rottweiler). But we did find his home that day. It was on the other side of a small ravine—just a couple of large, blue tarps hung over a rope stretched between two hazelnut trees and a random assortment of belongings scattered inside and around the sides. The whole time we had legitimately been trespassing on someone’s property, but it was at the sight of his makeshift house that I felt I had actually trespassed on someone’s property.

Now, more and more of the surrounding farmland—including the hazelnut orchard—is being developed and I
Dinner
Madelon Case

The crab cakes look tempting under the lights of the Wegman’s Grocery deli counter, but we have eaten crab cakes for the past two nights. The first night—when I arrived after a day of traveling alone from Portland, Oregon, to Rochester, New York—Grandpa had a crab cake from the retirement home’s dining service waiting for me in the fridge. The next day a frosty package arrived containing a box of frozen Maryland blue crab cakes packed between blocks of ice. Grandpa called my aunt to thank her, but realized halfway through the conversation that he had ordered them himself. We ate our defrosted crab cakes off trays in the living room of their apartment. I sat on the corner of the red couch, closest to Grandma’s chair. My mom usually sits in that spot, but for the first time, I have come to Rochester on my own.

Today, Grandpa gave me his car keys and his credit card. “Wegman’s won’t make you sign if you keep it under twenty-five dollars,” he told me. “Pick out whatever you want for dinner.”

I pace along the deli counter, eyeing the pasta dishes, then turn away and head toward the Chinese food. In my trips to Wegman’s with Grandpa, he always praised the stunning variety of food offered—presented it as a brilliant example of capitalism at work. The array of options for ready-made food, he told me, gesturing toward the sushi and sub sandwiches and lo mein all available in the bustling grocery store, represent the market’s ability to match what customers want. But right now I don’t want options. I am shopping for the man who likes his coffee reheated for forty-five seconds in the microwave and cooled with two ice
cubes, the man who taught me the only correct way to slice an avocado. “Cut it in quarters, lengthwise, then gently remove the pit and the peel,” he demonstrated, standing with stockinged feet in the kitchen of the summer house he and Grandma once owned on Keuka Lake.

I wander by the cheese counter and sample tangy goat’s milk cheese. I know Grandpa likes goat cheese—buys three containers of chèvre at a time and stashes them in the door of the refrigerator—but I glance at the price tag and move on. Back at the deli counter, faced with bowls upon bowls of tantalizing dishes, I point out an Italian pasta salad that looks particularly appealing. The salesman gives me a sample, and I stand there trying to remember how Grandpa likes his pasta, but the salesman is watching me expectantly, and the fresh tomatoes and garlic taste so good on my tongue that I go ahead and order a quarter pound of it.

With something sitting in my basket, I move through the store with more purpose. I select a warm loaf of ciabatta from the bakery, and a bundle of asparagus and carton of strawberries from the produce section. To my relief, the total comes to below twenty-five dollars, and I don’t have to pretend to be Richard Rosett.

Back in the tiny kitchen of my grandparents’ apartment, I follow Grandpa’s methodical instructions for cooking the asparagus: steamed in a centimeter of water in a shallow pan. I lay the tender stalks alongside a slice of bread, three fat strawberries, and a bowl of pasta salad on each of our plates, and bring my grandparents their dinners. I eat in silence, sitting in my mom’s spot on the couch, until Grandpa smiles after taking a bite of pasta and says, “Good choice.”

In the Moment of the Dance
Aurielle Marie Thomas

My feet lack the ability to execute what my mind clearly comprehends: “first to second, tour jeté…” The ball of my foot falls asleep just as I arabesque about the stage. As the stage lights beam into my eyes, blinding me, I am thrown off balance and land awkwardly, my body falling flat on the stage. I am lost. My body tenses as decisions cycle through my mind. Am I going to stumble behind the curtains and hide, or will I stand up to continue the dance? As a fifteen-year-old girl living in San Antonio, Texas, I have never confronted such a feeling of humiliation.

I feel glued to the wooden floor, as if hours have gone by, but I lie on the cold stage for less than a few seconds. My heart beating wildly, I will my muscles to follow through. I rise back onto my tingling foot, push through the pins and needles, and try to dispel my anxiety. I balancé twice, once to the right and again to the left, and then gracefully step into a piqué while I alongé my arms through continual port de bras that lead each movement throughout my body, displaying harmony and passion. My hands flutter gracefully, the arch of my back and the arc of my arms in synch. I stop worrying about the audience’s possible reactions and judgments. Through the many pas de bourrées and tour jetés, I evolve from a creature burdened by gravity into a being blessed with grace. I feel part of something bigger than myself, lost in the dance like a drop of water in the river, effortlessly ebbing and drifting with the flow. I am surprised when I hear the clapping of the audience as the curtain falls at The Coates Theatre.
In the following years, I advanced in the Cecchetti Ballet techniques on pointe, but I knew it was not my destiny to become a professional dancer, even though dancing is still something I do for my own enjoyment. More importantly, the things I learned as a dancer, the sense of confidence and determination that I experienced, stayed with me.

As I also learned, when my family moved to Portland, Oregon, there will be times when life will be difficult. I had to leave all of my friends and make new relationships at my new school. I missed the familiarity of my old home. Unlike my sun-baked San Antonio days, my days in Portland were cold and rainy. However, after my dance performance, I knew I could adapt to changes. I was not the easily defeated girl that couldn't get up after a hardship; I was the strong, persevering girl who never surrendered. My mission was to always find the beauty of the flow of the dance and to embrace every “obstacle” as a gift of opportunity.

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Children on the Roof
Ingrid Van Valkenburg

I could almost see the faded stars turn into the beginning of tomorrow’s sun. My bare feet stepped carefully, one by one, up the sheer slats of the ladder. I trembled in the wind that brushed against my skin on that cool summer night. When faced with the decision to push forward onto the unstable shingles or stay secure on the sturdy ladder, I pushed forward with a new mind-set. With one big heave, I lifted my body from the security of the ground into the unknown realms of the roof.

I joined two silhouettes at the peak of the roof. Listening to their laughter made me embarrassed about my hesitation to climb up, but my cheeks refrained from turning their usual scarlet undertone due to the chill in the air. I pulled my thin fleece jacket closer to my body, and popped the collar to cover my face, but the cold air wouldn't escape the bond it had made with the warmness of my skin.

There was silence among the three of us sitting there, watching the day slowly awaken. It was almost as if the sun had decided it would sleep in this particular morning. One of the figures shivered vigorously, no doubt because of the herbal energy pills we had taken to pull this all-nighter. I huddled together with the others, while we all made an effort to stay warm under the twin-sized comforter.

We didn't speak, primarily because of the possibility that the volume of our voices would prevent the sun from rising, but also because there wasn't much we needed to say. Summer was ending and the world of high school would prevent times like these. The idea of absorbing each second seemed like an obvious solution to keep summer continuing forever.
Each of our three backs lay against the roof while we looked up at the stars vanishing one by one in the curiously dark blue Portland sky. The rocks and grains of the roof pushed through our layers of clothing into the skin of our backs, but the pure serenity of the morning kept us all still.

Birds chirped cheerfully on the chimney, flapping their wings joyously. I opened my eyes to whiteness, but colors quickly appeared on the blank canvas as my eyes adjusted. The sky faded from white to bright blue, clouds formed, pine trees sprouted from the russet soil and beautiful butterflies fluttered around them. And so it was—the world painted before my very own eyes.

“We missed it,” a drowsy voice breathed.

“Maybe tomorrow,” I whispered, smiling, and we all lay our heads back down to rest.
EMILY CARLSON was born in San Diego, but moved to Oregon shortly before her third birthday. Though Emily had always been fond of literature, writing a twisted fairy tale in second grade developed her passion for the written word. Today, Emily is a sophomore at Lakeridge High School where she participates in French Club, Scholars Alliance, and the orchestra. When free from her writing notebooks, Emily enjoys going to Starbucks with friends, attending concerts ranging from indie rock to the Oregon Symphony, reading outside, and playing her violin.

MADELON CASE lives in Beaverton with her parents, two brothers, and a cat named Clara. She is a senior at Catlin Gabel School. She enjoys reading, running, writing, climbing mountains, and playing piano. Her favorite flower is the dwarf monkeyflower.

CAITY CLARK grew up and lives in Lake Oswego with her sister, mother, father, and dog, Sadie. A “jack-of-all-trades,” Caity participates in activities ranging from lacrosse and basketball to her school’s Assembled Student Body to Debate Team and band (she plays the trumpet). In her free time, Caity loves to go on runs, read, write, volunteer, and hang out with her friends.

MAX EHRENFREUND is a senior at Lake Oswego High School. Her parents teach elementary music and high school art in the Beaverton School District. She is interested in studying literature, international relations, and math. When not writing, she plays the piano and the trumpet.

HILARY GROSS is a senior at Catlin Gabel School. She took a creative writing course to challenge herself, and likes that it provides a space for her to write. She admits that she generally dislikes writing biographies of herself, as well as that introduction game where you give the three little details: your name, your age or grade, and a fun fact. But you aren’t allowed to “pass” in that game so: her name is Hilary, she is seventeen, and she likes watermelon. All of which, incidentally, are true.

DESIREE MIATKE is fifteen years old and is just finishing ninth grade at WWCLE, a community learning center in Ashland, Oregon. She has been writing since she was in first grade, but didn’t start seriously working on a novel until entering fifth grade. Desiree finished a sci-fi/fantasy novel and is in the progress of writing her second. In addition, she has written many short stories, mostly in connection with her novel, and also a large collection of both free verse and rhyming poetry. One of Desiree’s poems, Serenade, has been published in a local newspaper’s online gallery. Desiree plans to write professionally someday.

KRISTINE OLSON is a junior at Wilsonville High School. She runs track and cross-country and sees B.O.B. around town while running. To date, she has never spoken a word to him despite all of her community activities through school and volunteer work. Kristine has known of B.O.B. for most of her life, and she saw this contest as the opportunity to finally write about such a peculiar member of her community. She is the editor of WHS’s literary magazine Soliloquy.

MICHAL ORCZYK is a senior at Catlin Gabel School in Portland, Oregon. He is in a creative writing class where he writes poetry and prose, discussing his work and the work of his peers weekly. His life has been pretty nomadic. Michal
was born in Wroclaw, Poland, and lived in upstate New York and California before moving to Portland, Oregon. Besides writing, he’s big on the outdoors and does a lot of mountaineering and rock climbing around the U.S. and Canada.

**Julia Rose Ruby** is seventeen and a junior at Catlin Gabel School in Portland, Oregon. Because of a growing interest in poetry and short stories, she decided to take a creative writing class as an elective this year, inspiring her to write regularly. When not studying or writing, Julia enjoys playing violin and mandolin, going to Powell’s, knitting, and eating Thai food.

**Aurielle Marie Thomas** is a senior at Catlin Gabel School. She has a passion for self-expression and uses dance as an outlet to express herself in a creative way. Aurielle writes to release and reveal her life experiences as well. She is in love with the opportunity to fill a page and make an impact on others. Aurielle believes that every step counts in order to get to a destination, just as in writing. Every effort, every thought, and every passion creates new personal excellence. She would like to dedicate this piece to her mom and dad, the people who gave her the courage to believe she can in this world.

**Ingrid Van Valkenburg** was born in Portland, Oregon, sixteen years ago and has lived in the same house with her mom, dad, and younger brother since then. She is a sophomore at Catlin Gabel School. Ingrid has been fascinated with the art of writing since she was a child, and continues to relish the time that she is able to write. Her other hobbies include swimming, golfing, and spending time with friends.
contributors

contest committee
Carly Cohen
Twig Deluje
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Miala Leong
Megan Wellman

readers
Logan Balestrino
Emilee Newman Bowles
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Mike Hirte
Chris Huff
Amanda Johnson
Malini Kochhar
Miala Leong
Gloria Lewis
Lauren Shapiro
Leah Sims
Ian Vanwyhe
Melissa Wells

contact ooligan press
Ooligan Press
Portland State University
P.O. Box 751
Portland, Oregon 97207-0751
Phone: 503.725.9748
ooligan@pdx.edu
www.ooliganpress.pdx.edu