

THE CARL CHERRY CENTER
FOR THE ARTS
AND
THE MONTEREY PUBLIC LIBRARY

present

THE 2020
Robert Campbell
MONTEREY COUNTY
HIGH SCHOOL POETRY AWARDS

SATURDAY, MAY 16, 2020

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Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts

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Cover photo: *Essence of Life* by Jose Marquez,  
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## Finding Our Way

On Saturday, March 14, I presented the last of my poetry writing workshops to the students at Wellington Smith School in Salinas. I had, since February 6, been visiting high schools throughout Monterey County, from Carmel to Gonzales, from Pacific Grove to Rancho San Juan, from Marina to North Salinas, as well as Rancho Cielo Community School and Silver Star Center, both located in Salinas.

The day before, Monterey County had made a local emergency proclamation as a precautionary measure “to help the County mobilize and coordinate resources should the [corona]virus be detected here.” That day, the Monterey County Free Libraries closed all its branches. On the 17th, the first confirmed cases of the coronavirus were reported. On the following day, the first Shelter in Place order was issued by the Monterey County Health Department. By the 20th, there were five confirmed cases.

From what we know now, the coronavirus had been spreading while I had been visiting the various high schools. I feel so grateful that neither, as far as I know, the teachers, students and staff nor I contracted the virus as the result of our contact with each other. I like to think that we were protected by the poetry that we shared, even though I know that is a romantic illusion.

What is not a romantic illusion is the power of poetry to transform, to empower, to solace, to delight. Which is why, after more than twenty years, I still visit the high schools in Monterey County to provide an introduction to the writing of poetry and to encourage students to submit their poems to the Monterey County High School Poetry Awards. This year we had over 400 students submitting more than 700 poems.

Whether telling us where they are from or how lonely it is sitting in a cell, whether avowing one’s faith in God or pleading in defense of nature, whether describing how the death of a parent has torn a home apart or sending a letter to absent fathers, whether comparing themselves to peanut butter or extolling the wonders of the sweet potato—the poems in this collection of award winners are instruments through which the young poets are finding their voices. It is an important part of their transformation from teenagers to adults.

In the process, they find empowerment—to assert one’s worth and value in the face of adversity and tragedy; they find joy in discovering and affirming who they are; they find solace in language, its ability to give expression to what they are feeling and thinking.

What better gift than poetry in these disconcerting and stressful times! Both the writing of poetry and the reading of poetry. The poems that follow were written before schools were closed, before Shelter in Place Orders put stress on all of us socially, economically and emotionally. They arrived only because the incredible teachers we are fortunate to have in the various school districts of our County either gathered and mailed the poems after the schools were closed or encouraged their students to do so. I have always valued our high school teachers for their dedication, commitment and caring; now, I value them even more. They deserve enormous recognition, gratitude and thanks.

I hope reading these poems will, in this time of the coronavirus epidemic, transform, empower, solace and delight you as well. This is the power of poetry. Poetry will serve us well as we listen to the voices of our young adults. We will find our way.

~Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts, Poet-in-the-Schools  
Carl Cherry Center for the Arts

## Where I'm From

I'm from telling my family I love them

before I go to bed every night.

I'm from praying when I wake up

And before I sleep at night.

I'm from respecting my elders

And serving them before myself.

I'm from taking my shoes off

Before entering anyone's home.

I'm from brooming and washing dishes.

I'm from praying before every meal.

I'm from being Second, to God

Fiafia'aga Atalima  
Marina High School

## Story of 3

This is a story of a Family of 3, they have a 3 month old  
and it makes them worry when the weather gets cold.  
When the baby gets hungry, it's time to hit the road.  
As they get to the store they say, "This is getting old."

Today they choose Safeway, even though it's not the safe way. When dad walks in the  
store, he looks down an aisle.  
He keeps searching until he finds what he's after.  
He looks at the shelf, he grabs what he can carry.

He hears, "Security on aisle 5." Shit, it's getting scary.  
He walks toward the door, calmly walking out of the store.  
He drops one of the cans on the floor.  
He keeps walking because he can't hold 'em anymore.

When he jumps in the car he yells "GO GO GO."  
Security tried following but they were too slow.

This is a story written under my 1st and 5th Amendment rights.

I tell you this story  
as I break it into segments.  
Let me remind you:  
this is for my amusement.

Jacinto Carbajal  
Rancho Cielo Community School

## Peanut Butter

I am peanut butter

Some days, I am crunchy and salty  
Other days, I am creamy and sweet  
But I am always, always sticky  
With a tenacity to which no other foods can compare

Peanut Butter and I, we are an introverted food  
We're good in a PB&J sandwich  
Or on bananas or apples or mixed with chocolate  
But we're best all alone

I am peanut butter

Because I like the way I naturally am  
No added preservatives  
Just dry roasted peanuts  
No added makeup caked on my face

I eat peanut butter, always, every day  
Right out of the jar  
I *have* to be peanut butter  
Because, as they say,  
You are what you eat

Caroline Coen  
Pacific Grove High School

## Home

There was a time when the stars were the center of my life,  
When their sparkling beauty pulled me closer to the unknown.  
At the time, it felt as though fate was my only proven destiny,  
and prying prophets lined my life with lyrical lithium.

I still remember Father's voice blowing through my hair, a warm fire.  
He would tell me how the stars changed people and their personalities alike. He would tell me  
how when the constellations aligned in perfect rhythm,  
I would find a cave of comfort and coziness within.

And I know, now that I am older,  
that scientists say these things are false.  
That there is "evidence" against it.  
That trusting their books is more important than trusting our ancestors.

But who are they to tell me that the stars did not influence me?  
Who are they to tell me that Father's words did not shape me?  
Who are they to tell me that the moon that rose over the hill like yeast  
did not ebb my mood and flow my curiosity?

The very scientists that preach these "facts,"  
are called themselves by the things they fear.  
Is not their curiosity funded by the stars' fury?  
Did the stars not adopt them from the orphanage of knowledge, like a father?

Just as it does not take a telescope and a sundial to make an astronomer,  
it does not take a fistfull of sage and a mystic pendulum to make an astrologer. Although one  
can study and find truth by observing,  
it takes a sorcerer's calling to find Home.

Vincent Colon  
Carmel High School



## An Infinity of Petals

I am from a garden  
From self-made sprinklers and rope swings  
I am from the handprints transferred on cement  
( Old, dusty  
Probably gone now)  
I am from the rose bush  
The Oak tree  
Whose bright green hair I remember  
As if it was my own

I am from garapinados and moon moles  
From Cruz and Federal  
I am from “El dia que me muera...  
me van a extrañar.”  
I am from the Virgin Morena  
With roses that grow gloriously  
In her hands.

I am from the majestic Salad Bowl  
that includes a rainbow.  
From the injured hands  
my parents had in the fields.

Losing our Matriarch.  
Losing our sunshine and guide.  
Forgetting the taste and recipes  
that fade in time.  
I am from a universe  
Of roses.  
We are one.  
Each time a petal falls,  
we lose a loved one.  
The rose seems to have  
An infinity of petals.  
So here I am.

## Finding a little more of myself

I learned  
Jazz  
From my teachers  
Swinging and Shuffling  
Ballads and Blues  
They taught it all  
No actually  
They never taught  
Only Showed  
Showed how exciting sound can be  
Showed it for the struggle it is  
The competition between voices  
The roar of the brass  
The swing of the sax  
And the drive of the rhythm  
My teachers showed it all  
And I watched  
Watched what it meant to them  
Saw the emotions it created  
And I listened  
Listened to feeling  
And I always felt good  
My teachers showed me Jazz  
And I found a little more of myself in it

Matt Edwards  
Marina High School

## Her Kind

Copychange of "Her Kind" by Anne Sexton

I have gone out, a timid little girl,  
haunting lonely lunch tables, braver alone;  
dreaming of belonging, I have dissipated into crowds  
watching each passing minute,  
scared thing, gross and fat thing,  
A student like that is not a student, quite  
I have been her kind

I have found peaceful meadows in the cold outside  
filled them with songs and dances  
paper, pencils, flags and innumerable flower chains  
paved the road for fairies, and sat silently for the wisps  
blissfully, taming the untamed  
A girl like that has dissociated  
I have been her kind

I was hurt in your playgrounds, peers  
pushed aside with a closed mouth  
learning how to live, look, and talk  
where those remarks relentlessly pricked at my skin  
and my heart sinks deeper in my chest where you laugh and play  
A student like that has no pride  
I have been her kind

Daija Engen  
Carmel High School

## Momma ain't raised no quitter

I'm siena fematt  
And this is who i am

I'm a go getter  
I'm an overachiever  
I'm a procrastinator,  
Even lazy  
Even a little broken  
But i'm a fighter

I don't quit  
and i don't run

From past generations of hard work  
And pain is who i am  
I'll carry that pain and embrace it

I'm my grama's princess  
Who made her mud pies  
and mud shakes  
I'm her straight A granddaughter  
But she isn't here to see it

I'm fematt and dominguez  
With go-getter mentality  
We never settle for less  
With our loud mouths and big egos  
Yet we're loving and compassionate

I'm mexican american  
I'm too white for mexicans  
And too mexican for whites  
Torn between the two  
Both never satisfied

I'm Siena Paris Fematt Dominguez  
I have a contagious laughter  
Shy and quiet  
But yet bold and loud

I'm my mother's daughter  
And momma ain't raised no quitter

Siena Paris Fematt Dominguez  
Rancho San Juan High School



## Two Rooms

In my house  
are two rooms  
One is light  
One is dark  
One is hot  
one is not  
temperatures change  
Like dusk to dawn  
i sit in one room  
Scared by visions  
Slipping into  
the other side  
A broken world  
A place  
So horrible  
a repeating  
Spiral of emotions  
Circling endlessly  
So i sit  
A lone wolf  
Chest puffed  
Won't be at ease  
Until i'm six feet under

By Jesse Hoffman  
Rancho Cielo Community School

## 9 Miles Out At Red Rock Canyon

These hills they bleed like lips that parch from thirst  
Red dust collects in blood-pools at the foot  
Of skyscrapers that rose before the first  
Foundations made by human hands took root

And ancient people once bled here as well  
Who in the sun-scorched mountains found, at last  
Some water for the harsher seasons' hell  
To ease the great eternal solar blast

They painted on these stones, to mark the site  
The ancient signposts of a bygone day  
In red, their hands; an elk and man in white  
We have this still, but names? We cannot say

And now they're gone, gone unto dust and bone  
And now these stones bleed their dry blood alone

CJ Hunt  
Seaside High School

## Perdonme ama

I learned that life ain't easy  
from my mother.  
My mother was a single mom,  
raising four boys and three girls by herself.  
February 8, 2002 was the day of my birth.  
My mom, only thirty-two when she gave life to me.  
It was destined for me to get her off the streets,  
but now I'm 18,  
sitting in the youth center program,  
doing 365 days,  
not able to help her out.  
Every day that goes by  
I can't stop thinking  
about my mom.

I still remember the days  
when she would tell me  
that one of these days  
I'm going to end up in jail  
or in a cemetery,  
and that day came true  
when I robbed some guy.  
When the cops stopped me,  
read me my rights,  
put the cuffs on me,  
and put me in the cop car,  
I thought about my mom.

Now I call my mom every day  
to tell her I messed up big time.  
I did a song for her. It's in Spanish.  
I tell her that I miss her  
and love her.  
*Perdonme ama. El amor*  
*Que tome diste*  
*No lo voy a encontrar*

Juan  
Wellington Smith School



## The Fairest Bloom at the Harvest

What is the fairest bloom of the harvest,  
The vegetable grown 'neath slumbering sods?  
Have it mashed, or in sushi., or however thou cravest,  
Sweet potatoes are surely the food of the Gods.

What can match its lovely orange inside,  
Its exterior, rough. yet most compelling?  
Once you've pierced its husky, and very hard hide  
What sweetness is found to be therein dwelling!

They say that once the entire planet froze  
And nothing grew. not even a sapling!  
Yet the good Earth warmed, and now sweet potatoes  
Are ours for the chewing and tasting and grappling,

This dear thing which delights the tongue  
Is the bounty of nature, springing unsprung.

Charlotte Juge  
Santa Catalina School

## Detangler by Anneka Keller

In my house  
Where the sun can't reach  
Heat fills the room,  
Warm water rains down.  
I turn the handle  
Stopping the flow,  
Pat moisture from my hair  
But most lingers -  
It clings to my locks  
Like honey to bread,  
Strands form knots,  
Problems to be undone  
And me, standing there,  
Wishing I had detangler  
For more than my hair,  
But for my life.  
For choices to undo  
And problems to straighten out,  
Yet everyday  
There are friends,  
Who care and share  
And love me,  
Combing through my feelings  
And drying any tears.  
They make it look smooth  
So none will know,  
The toughest, most painful  
Knots stay hidden,  
Just under the surface  
Where most can't reach -  
But have been tied up  
With the rest  
Of my tangled emotions.  
Life does not  
Happen in perfect style,  
For now, though,  
I will be grateful  
For my friends,  
Who detangle my hair.

Anneka Keller  
Pacific Grove High School

## Where I'm From

I'm from deep, dank forests,  
lit by the few beams of sunlight that passed through the thick trees,  
occupied by the joy of dancing fairies and giggling elves.

I'm from the eerie, ebony gates that enveloped my dwelling like a prison.  
The home where hate was misconstrued for love,  
where the painted smiles on the masks chipped over time

I'm from cracked mirrors and wounding words  
from blemished skin and salty tear-stained cheeks,  
from the ongoing war that never ceased inside,  
from the ugly duckling who only wished to hide.

I'm from long stays at Grandma Murray's  
where my thoughts and feelings could be translated into art,  
where I could share a laugh with an aged beauty.  
During the times when I yearned to flee,  
Grandma's house  
stood waiting,  
for me.

Delfin Kirsch  
Carmel High School

## A letter to absent fathers:

Love  
It's foreign to me  
Maybe because you weren't there to offer it  
Care  
Something you were responsible to provide me with  
But never did  
Responsibility  
That  
That, is something I won't learn from you  
My eyes water at the sound of hearing others praise their fathers  
I tell myself  
Why isn't my father like that?  
My eyes water at the sight of pictures of you I run into every once in a while  
I try to drive my mind away from thinking  
What are you doing?  
Where are you?  
Are you okay?  
I know, I know  
There's no point in messaging you  
But I do it anyway  
3:00am  
*"Hey dad, I know you won't reply  
I know you don't care  
But I love you  
Twice on sundays  
Goodnight."*  
I wait countless hours  
My eyes dozing off minute by minute  
It hits 4,5,6,7 am  
And my hopes  
Once again fade away  
I hate every speck of you  
Yet, I'd crumble to hear if you weren't okay  
I had my first heartbreak  
And your shoulder wasn't there for me to lean on  
But  
I got through it  
On my own  
So if there's one thing I should thank you for I guess  
It's for making me learn to be independent

Natalia Martinez  
Rancho San Juan High School

## I am a survivor

*Dedicated to the girls that thought there was no harm in their world*

I thought it was my fault  
I'd relive the scenario in my head over and over again  
Sometimes until I'd burst  
I thought it would all be normal in a while

Everything seemed to stop in time,  
Everything changed before my eyes  
It seemed like an unforgivable crime  
And all I could do was cry

I have moved on  
That event has shaped me into who I am today  
I will never forget,  
That event has changed me in a good and bad way

I smile and laugh less  
*I care and freak out more*  
I trust and love less  
but,  
I grow and see more

We should all stand tall and never give in  
We shall not be called victims  
Yes we were harmed and even injured  
But "victim" is a fragile word  
Fragile is far from a word that should describe women like us  
Describe a person who has gone through so much  
We are not victims, we are survivors

*Don't ever blame yourself,*  
You are strong  
Don't ever feel ashamed,  
You are resilient  
And we all know that won't ever change

Leslie Menchaca Martinez  
North Salinas High School

## *Silence*

I learned silence  
from my parents.  
It was what saved  
their lives.

Silence guided my dad  
through the ocean nights,  
and hid my mom  
through the gunfights.

It meant peace  
before the fire.  
And death  
when it was taken away.

So, if silence kept them safe,  
then logically,  
it would for me too.  
But this is a different war.

Silence can no longer  
help us, help me.  
I need to call out,  
and find the things we need.

In a place where a voice  
is left unheard,  
I need to speak louder  
to be noticed

This is America.  
It's very different from Vietnam.  
So it is time that I learned  
how to speak in this land.

Where it is still unfamiliar,  
strange, and difficult to navigate,  
like the fish boat my dad used to escape.

Like the booms my mom thought were a game.  
In my case,  
I play solo as I explore  
without instructions  
or a map.

My voice is my only tool  
that I need to learn how to use.  
Silence is our new  
enemy.

Han Jade Ngo  
North Salinas High School

## The Strongest Strength:

I Learned  
Strength  
From my beloved dad.  
His past wasn't the  
Best, fell to addictions.  
White powder snatched him  
He was lost  
He was there physically  
But we all felt alone  
My beloved father had left  
The loving father I knew  
Left with all my memories  
I heard screams  
I saw anger  
I felt sadness  
But my dad was  
Strong and fought  
His addictions.  
The only white  
Powder he takes now  
Is sugar  
My memories slowly  
Come back  
I remember  
My beloved father  
making me a  
Banana milkshake  
With Nesquik  
Powder flavored Chocolate  
I hear sweet laughter  
I see sunny happiness  
I feel warmly loved  
I believe anything  
Is possible  
He taught me  
Strength by  
Fighting for our  
Love.

Karla Nieto  
Rancho San Juan High School

## Not Grace

I wasn't myself.  
The idea of being myself  
While performing ballet seemed absurd.  
In order to attempt a first position arabesque,  
I had to be Misty Copeland, not Grace.  
Certainly, goofy, uncoordinated Grace could  
not perform such acts of beauty or grace.  
In order to execute the perfect cabriole,  
I had to transform into  
Margot Fonteyn, not Grace.  
In order to pirouette, fouette, grand jete,  
In order to bourree, saute, changement,  
I had to transform into another ballerina.  
I couldn't be myself. Being myself meant  
Tripping over my own feet,  
Falling occasionally, and smiling too brightly,  
All of which were open to criticism to  
Those who decided to pay attention to the  
Eight year old in the back just trying her best.  
There was no heart in the movement, all of it  
Taken away as I struggled to blend in with the others.  
Until, one day, my heart was thrown into the mix.  
Emotion tightened my chest and bubbled to the surface.  
My movements became my own, with the occasional  
Trip or rolled ankle. Still, I wasn't  
Michaela DePrince, or Anna Pavlova.  
I was myself.

Grace Paul  
Carmel High School



## Uncertain Certainty

The hours fade into one another  
More easily than they once used to  
Like water trickling from a faucet  
movement  
But none worth noting

The smell of dust bunnies and broken will fill the air  
Your neighbors are quieter  
Summer seems like a fantasy trapped in our dreams  
An eternal winter

Intellectually you know this is for the best  
Change has already begun to sweep the world  
Fewer people will die  
The water in Venice is clearing  
And the wealthy people we once lauded  
Are not at the forefront of our minds

The value of hug from our best friend grows tenfold  
Your mom's cooking is priceless  
Your sibling's laugh is the joy you look forward to  
The hope for the average overshadows everything else

A wall is broken down  
We see our lives for what they really are  
We see people for who they really are  
The world has been reset  
The only thing certain is the uncertainty of our future

The kids studying in bed today  
Will go to college tomorrow  
And the children being born now  
Will be our new hope  
Some things may stay the same  
But how we see the world  
Has changed once more

Saul Pena  
North Salinas High School

## In Defense of Nature

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury  
Here is my final defense of nature  
My client in her despair lifts up her plea to humanity  
She asks to please be heard

Stop the plastic, trash, oil spills, factories, and cars  
That poison her air, land and oceans

Her animals and plants are suffering  
Few seem to care

Saws, axes, bulldozers clear her land  
Trees falling by the thousands  
With few to protect them and take a stand  
What about the oxygen they bring  
What about the homes for eighty percent of living things

No more destruction of homes  
Over harvesting of her zones

Nature is not the source of humankind's woes  
She stands before you open hearted exposed before her foes

She pleads innocence of any misdeed  
She promises to give all that humankind may need  
But refuses to give in to humankind's greed

Nature is only guilty of giving  
All she asks is respect for all things that are living

Listen to my case in defense of nature

You hold her fate  
Stop before it is too late

Humankind, it is up to you.

## Three Part Harmony

1. Talking  
The voice with the most to say  
A melody you can't keep from humming  
The filter that distorts developed declarations  
Into sloughs of stuttering syllables  
The voice you wish you'd hear less often.
  
11. Singing  
The voice closest to God.  
A harmony perched at the top of the staff  
The air in your empty skull mixes  
With the passionate affair of your vocal chords  
You hoist yourself to divine status  
Standing on the tiptoes of a single note.
  
111. Thinking  
The voice that never needs to take a breath.  
A baseline written in a subconscious clef  
Synapses create utopias  
Aspirations and apprehensions  
Debate before the most exclusive of audiences  
Loud, raw, judgemental, unrelenting,  
You.

Claire Roggeman  
Pacific Grove High School

## My Perseverance

I am from cortezes and eyeglasses  
From Santos y Nava  
From the nosey aunts  
And the ghost uncles

From the loud streets  
Of 40's clappin'  
And necklace snatchin'

From the street  
That holds the rosarios  
Of my brother and uncle

I am from,  
The panic  
Of loud noises

From the earbuds,  
Tuning out the world  
Allowing me to hear  
My ease

An album  
Of the pure dreams,  
Making it out  
With Bryan and Esme

I am from the prayers  
Protecting us three  
Lost the two  
Now it's only me

I am from anger  
Sitting beside me  
And hunger standing behind

I am from these tragedies,  
That robbed my innocence  
Robbed my loved ones

But could never rob  
MY PERSEVERANCE

Sadie Santos  
Rancho San Juan High School

## Cancer Sucks

In my house,  
There is a family of three.  
A widowed father,  
A bully,  
And a crybaby.

In my house,  
There are four rooms,  
Each belonging to one of us,  
An office,  
Two bedrooms,  
And a hole where one used to be.

In my house,  
The family of three,  
All live separately,  
In their own rooms,  
Never destined to be closer.

The crybaby sits,  
In the darkness of her room,  
By a cold window,  
That overlooks a misty valley.  
She sits and cries,  
Day and night,  
Night and day,  
Tears in her eyes.

By the cold window,  
She can't breathe.  
She can't speak.  
There are no thoughts in her head,  
They all moved to her heart,  
Where it feels heavy as lead,  
And it feels as if it's been pierced by a dart.

Across the valley,  
The mother lies,  
In the cold dark earth.  
But her spirit remains,  
Watching over the house,  
Which cancer has torn apart.

Natalie Schluckbier  
Marina High School

## My Door!

The back door there,  
Open to an other world,  
Leading to the barn,  
There, no worries in-sight,  
From the inside life,  
Able to get away,  
Think only  
In the moment,  
Only with the pigs,  
No other problems of  
School, of homework, of anything,  
Only me and my pigs,  
Working together, reaching to  
New heights, seeking opportunity,  
Building confidence, while  
Leaving everything else behind,  
Living in the moment,  
Driving in the ring,  
First step inside,  
The outside world  
Not in-sight,  
Only me,  
My pigs,  
My competitors,  
The judge,  
Seeing my parents ringside,  
Me driving in the ring,  
No other thoughts in-sight

## French Press on the Counter

On the counter in the corner  
There is a box and little shelf  
The box with coffee and sugar  
The stand with a red french press

And in the morning the first awake  
Boils the water  
Wakes the others  
There's coffee

Usually it is my mother  
Flicking on the light to wake  
My sister and me  
But other days I am the first

I treasure that early quiet  
Filling the kettle, washing the press  
One, two, three, four scoops of grounds  
Fill the press with hot water, push down

Coffee ready and hot  
I made coffee, I call

And sometimes, later evenings and weekend days  
A simple offer of coffee with a smile to my mom  
And an affirmation and thank you  
And with every cup a silent I love you  
Simple actions, simple feelings  
A red french press and a bag of coffee

Regan Somers  
Marina High School

## The road to independence

The wind was blowing through my hair  
My cheeks were pink from the cold winter air

The road ahead was very clear  
I peddled faster and faster with nothing to fear

The scarf was tied firmly around my waist  
My dad held on through all the dangers we faced

The ride felt easy as if I could float  
As if the wheels barely touched the road

Suddenly I noticed I was rambling on  
I looked behind me but my dad was gone

I was now finally biking on my own  
A feeling I had never before known

The wind shifted and the sun started to shine  
This moment was truly mine

I biked on for quite a while  
Finally returning to see my dad's big smile

Nynke Stomp  
Carmel High School



# Ode to My Instruments

*Practice always makes perfect*

I began with my piano  
My mother's pressure to succeed always haunting me  
Having weekly lessons every Wednesday  
I spent countless hours  
From first grade up  
Staring at the keys  
Visualizing my fingers  
Flutter up and down the piano  
Playing each chord  
Fortissimo, Pianissimo  
I learned in 4,4 time  
Where to take a rest  
And where to hold notes

*Practice always makes*

The violin sound better  
The fragile instrument  
Played in middle school orchestra  
I spent countless weeks learning the strings  
The rosin, sticking to my fingers when I practiced  
But in the end, I became  
First chair violin in the class

*Practice always*

The trumpet in Jazz Band was something new  
I now had to blow to play a note  
Which took countless hours of learning  
It became even harder  
When I got my braces  
But even so  
I practiced and persevered  
And learned how to put a jazzy twist on songs

*Practice*

Last came the ukulele  
The instrument I have come to love  
Self-taught from Youtube  
I learned songs like Lemonade and Lullaby  
Jamming out with friends  
Taking me to my happy place  
Getting lost in the chords

Caleb Velasquez  
North Salinas High School

## The corner of park and almaden

I live in my house  
where the fridge is never empty  
and the stove is never cold.

I live in carmel  
where everyone seems  
to have spare pennies in their pockets

I live in california  
where twenty percent of us  
don't know when we'll receive our next meal

I live in the united states  
where 553,742 people  
will go to sleep tonight without a roof above their heads

now 553,743

I live in a world  
where reconstructing lots  
is more important than constructing lives

I live in a world  
where people are afraid to donate leftover food  
because they don't want to deal with a lawsuit

I live in a world  
where we are equipped with  
endless wealth and resources  
but because of our greed  
and our need to succeed  
there are still millions of people in poverty

we live in carmel  
where we all seem  
to have spare pennies in our pockets

but what if we didn't  
what if we were one of the 553,743 people  
who have to sit on the street begging for spare pennies  
because they can't find a steady job

what if we were the men and women  
who look into our car windows at stoplights  
and pray to be noticed by us,  
to get that one extra dollar they need to buy themselves dinner

then would we roll down our windows and realize

that not everyone can live in a house  
where the fridge is never empty  
and the stove is never cold.

Evan Vitiello  
Carmel High School

## The Virtuoso

A found poem from the memoir *Night* by Elie Wiesel

A violin in a dark  
barrack.  
Who played the violin here?  
At the edge of his own grave,  
in such silence,  
such a beautiful sound,  
a fragment of a concerto.

It was as if his soul had become his bow!  
Gliding over the strings,  
he played that which he would never play again.  
How could I forget this concert,  
given before an audience  
of the dead and dying?

Darrell Wang  
Carmel High School

## How Lonely it Is

In the last years of his life, novelist, short story writer, essayist and non-fiction writer Richard Wright [1908-1962] wrote some 4,000 haiku. A traditional Japanese form, haiku, when practiced in English, is a three-line poem with seventeen syllables, written in a 5/7/5 syllable count. In *Haiku: The Other World*, a collection of 817 of his haiku, Wright has a number of poems which include the line “how lonely it is.” That was the writing prompt for the following poems.

~~~~~

How lonely it is
smoking outside by myself
feeling the fresh breeze

Alex

~~~~~

How lonely it is sitting in a cell eating your dinner.  
How lonely it is when you don't have no one to talk to.  
How lonely it is when I'm by myself on Thanksgiving.

Juan

~~~~~

how lonely it is
sitting in my cell alone
cold like an iceberg

Christian

~~~~~

Another writing prompt was “where I'm from”

Where I'm from  
the streets are cold  
the dirt has no grass  
life won't grow

Malachi

## Ghost Towns

I wonder how many places I have walked through  
How many names of those places I've forgotten  
Moving to another place before I could make a memory  
From Germany to Alaska to Arizona to California back to Alaska again  
The town names lost beneath the cloudy skies  
Because I pay the price of my mother  
Owing to the world what the military demands

I pay the price in years of my life  
Moving around the country non- stop  
So I've learned not to think too much  
About these ghost towns I live in  
Which helps most of the time  
Until I start to think about these towns  
And about the friends I may have made  
Whose names I've forgotten, lost to time  
And their not so familiar faces

Somedays I just want a single wish  
To be whispered from my mouth  
To the ears of perhaps a god  
Because I know that nothing is going to change  
So I just wish for these ghost towns to stay  
Trapped inside a bottle inside my head  
A winter wonderland and a sunny coast all in one  
Yet sometimes I think that I wouldn't change a thing  
And that the hastily made moments I have are enough  
Yet sometimes I want more than I can have

I keep paying this price year after year after year  
All I've gotten is some fancy coins and plastic cards  
A sign above my head that reads "Lost Boy- Don't Send Back... Ever"  
And pictures of all these ghost towns  
Where the slogan seems to be  
What might have been for me

Eddy Zhu  
Carmel High School

## Sasha

In my house  
There are windows  
Where I can see,

But I can never touch  
The apartment where  
My grandfather is dying;

I listen to him  
Over the phone, and  
With every breath I cannot

Hear, every sentence that  
Trails off,  
He catches my breath

And won't let it  
Go again  
Until I hear him

Rasp once more;  
"Hold on,"  
I want to say;

"I'll be there soon,  
So do not shave,  
Do not bathe,

Do not close your  
Eyes and never  
Open them again;

Cling to life like  
It's a rope,  
And if it blisters  
And burns,  
Makes your hands  
Red and makes your

Calluses bleed,  
Hold on anyway,  
Hold on, for me."



