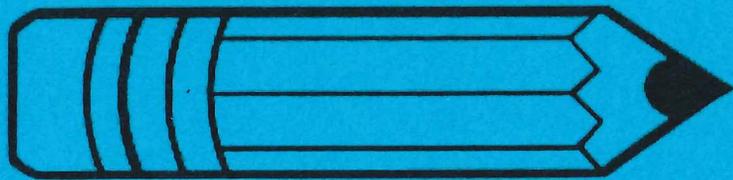


Mansfield Middle  
School's  
Seventh Grade  
Writers' Magazine



2014-2015 Connecticut Writing  
Project Contest Entries

By: Mrs. Blomstrann's students



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Maddie Young and Alison Meikle were terrific assistants as well.



**“Believe”**

“Pass the mashed potatoes, please,” Danny asked his father. He was almost full, but the food was so wonderful. After all, it was Christmas Eve, and so he had an excuse for stuffing himself like a pig. He was eight years old, and his parents told him that he was at the age where he’d get more than a couple of presents the next day. He could smell the Christmas cookies baking in the oven, and the sweet odor filled his nostrils as he shoveled spoonful after spoonful of mashed potatoes, roast goose, and peas into his mouth. He was sure that he would explode before the night was over. His little sister, Emma, was jabbering on and on about what she would do the next day. Nobody was actually listening to her since she wasn’t enunciating her words very clearly.

“Danny, follow me,” his dad told him. *What happened?* Danny thought. *Had the Christmas cookies burned? That would be terrible.* His dad led him to the bathroom, out of earshot of Emma and his mom.

“You’re a big boy now, right?” his father asked, tussling Danny’s brown mop of hair.

“Yes, I am,” Danny replied, swelling with pride while puffing his chest out as far as it could go. He had a smile on his face stretching from ear to ear.

“It’s time for you to know something,” his father said. Danny nodded, not sure where this was going. Maybe he was going to tell Danny a secret. A secret was not something that Danny often was told. He wasn’t exactly the best at keeping them because the urge to tell was stronger than he was.

“I’m Santa Claus,” his father whispered. Danny laughed at the joke, but his father’s face didn’t change. Then it sank in. Was there no Santa? After all these years of writing letter after

letter and picturing a plump old man with white hair and red clothes going down their chimney, he learned that it might be a lie. A lie. It was only a way to trick kids into behaving.

Danny ran out of the bathroom, head down. The smell of the Christmas cookies wasn't too appealing anymore. He sat down, and picked at his plate with his fork. He could only barely hear Emma talking. After all, Danny was in a different world -- a world without the big red man flying on a reindeer-pulled sleigh putting presents under the Christmas tree of all the little children in the world.

"I'm full," he announced. He didn't wait for his parents to say anything before getting up and pushing in his chair. His mom was the first to speak.

"You know, we should all call it a night. We can eat the Christmas cookies tomorrow," Danny's mom said. Emma looked a little disappointed but was visibly tired and didn't argue. She rushed past her brother and started climbing the stairs. Considering she wasn't used to the staircase's uneven surface, letting her journey up the stairs alone wasn't the best idea. His dad hollered at her to stop, but it was too late.

Seconds later, Danny watched as she missed the next step; the stairs swallowed up her little feet. She tumbled down a few feet before Danny's dad got to her. She was in shock for a couple of seconds, but soon enough, she started crying as loudly as a wolf could howl and didn't stop. Danny's parents tried to console her, but nothing worked; tears kept streaming down her face. His mom left the room for a few minutes, and he could hear her grabbing a couple of pieces of paper.

She came back, but Emma was still sobbing. "It looks like Emma and Danny have a letter from the mail." As soon as Emma heard that, she stopped crying. She picked up her head from her dad's shoulder and looked at her mom.

“Lettah?” she asked, still sniffing. Danny’s dad let her go and she hobbled over to her mom.

Danny’s mom did not answer but handed a purple envelope to Emma and a red one to Danny.

Danny’s dad assisted Emma in opening her letter so she wouldn’t tear it. Meanwhile, Danny carefully opened his up. His eyes scanned the piece of paper until he got to the bottom. There, in dragged-out cursive, the words “Santa Claus” were imprinted. He glanced at his mom who was wearing a big smile on her face. She probably didn’t know what his dad had hinted to him.

“Santa Claus does not exist,” Danny said coldly, tearing the letter down the middle very slowly for emphasis. As soon as he was done, he took the stairs two by two until he got to his room.

Before reaching his room, however, he heard his mom whisper to his dad: “Did *you* tell him this?” she asked, her eyes blazing with fury. Without breaking eye contact, she told her husband even more softly so there was no way Danny could hear: “I don’t care how you do this, but you know very well Santa *is* real, and you will get the silly idea of him not existing out of our son’s head.” As Danny slammed the door shut, he could hear his mom following him up the stairs and Emma asking his dad if Santa existed or not.

When his mom entered the room, Danny was madder than he had ever been before. He could feel his face turning red and steam coming out of his nose.

“Danny, please listen to me,” his mom pleaded. Listening was the last thing Danny wanted to do, but he obeyed anyway. “I know this is hard to understand, but Santa does exist. Your dad just wanted to see how much you were...” she trailed off, trying to find the right word.

When she appeared to find it, she continued: "How much you were committed to Christmas. And we all know you love Christmas more than anyone else." Danny didn't seem all that convinced.

"Do you see your dad flying in the sky and going down our chimney?" she continued.

His response was exactly what she wanted to hear.

"You're right, Mommy. Santa does exist."

After that, Danny wasn't too mad anymore. He suddenly realized how tired he was. All he wanted to do then was sleep. His mom held him close until his eyelids shut and his dreams beckoned him into a different world..

The next morning, he woke up to a banging on his door. He opened it, and his little sister started yanking on his sleeve. "Yet's go open our pwesents," she begged in her little girl voice. He smiled. This was Christmas. Santa Claus had come for a visit. Danny held her hand on the stairs so there wouldn't be a repeat of last night's unfortunate incident. When they got down, he took a moment to stare at the tree as Emma rushed to her gifts. There were lights of all colors strung up on it. The scene was beyond beautiful. The sweet smell of Christmas cookies reached out to him. He could hear Emma shrieking like an ecstatic child going down a roller coaster. Somewhere behind him, the sound of Christmas carols filled his ears with joy. He rushed over to join her. Life didn't get much better than this. Believe.

Zoe Chafouleas

Mansfield Middle School Grade 7

“A Life with Friends”

“Alice, where did daddy go?” Tyler asked wide-eyed. Sighing, I looked up from my homework. There were a million ways to answer this question, but I couldn’t find one. The booming sound of my parents fight last night still rang in my ears.

“I don’t know,” I played it safe. “But I’m sure he will be back soon.” I held Tyler’s tiny five year old hands and looked at him with admiration. He looked like a clone of me with big brown eyes and dark brown hair. I led him through our cramped apartment to our kitchen. Our mom hadn’t come out of her room for a long time. Finally, I decided to approach her.

“Hey, Mom,” I said awkwardly as I cracked open her bedroom door. It was pitch dark in there and all I could see was a lump on the bed staring at the ceiling. As I flipped on the light, the lump instantly twitched. When my mom sat up, I could see her eyes swollen from tears and her face wrinkled with sadness. I walked over to her window and whisked the curtains aside, allowing the late afternoon sun to come blaring in. I took a seat on my mom’s bed. “Do you need anything?” I asked worriedly.

“No, I’m fine. Could you help me get up?” she asked holding up her hand. I jumped up and grabbed her hand, giving it a tug while she shifted up. “I had better clean up and get ready for that job interview tomorrow,” she said, and I could see the pang of pain as she winced, probably remembering her argument last night.

“Why can’t you just pick a job? You’ve had multiple interviews. It’s like nothing is good enough for you!” Dad had exploded like a thousand fireworks.

“I think the interview on Monday looks more promising,” she had replied with tears starting to spill out of the corner of her eyes.

“That’s what you said last week and the week before that and the week before that! What could you possibly be doing all day?” he fought back and then pounded in the final nail. “You need to get more serious about this family! Call me when you get a real job and are ready to cooperate. Maybe then I’ll think about coming back!” he said as he had stormed across the room, out of the apartment, and slammed the door behind him.

“You can still drive Tyler to school tomorrow, right?” I asked hopefully.

“Sorry, Sweetie, but I’m busy in the morning. Would you mind walking with him tomorrow again?” she asked with a hint of shame in her voice.

“Mom, please! If I get one more ‘tardy,’ I’ll have a detention!” I stuttered with a mix of anger and hopelessness, but I knew it was hopeless. I sighed with frustration. This had to end.

I woke up to the annoying sound of my alarm clock. Then, I rolled out of bed and dragged myself to Tyler’s room to wake him. “C’mon Ty, up and at ‘em,” I said cheerfully, shaking him slightly. “Early start today. Go get dressed,” I said as he slumped out of bed to get ready to leave. I walked back to my room and pulled on the first thing I saw because I thought I had to prepare breakfast for the two of us.

“Morning, Sweetie!” my mom said as I walked into the kitchen. “I made you two early birds breakfast and lunch,” she said again as Tyler walked into the room. I grabbed the two bags and escorted Tyler out with my other hand.

“Thanks, Mom. See you later!” I blurted out in my rush to maybe make it on time to school today. Tyler and I raced down the seven flights of stairs down to the main floor of our apartment building and then burst through the two front doors. The crisp fall air pinched my face.

The leaves had just turned a bright orange, red, and yellow and I just had to take a moment to stop and enjoy them. A huge truck plowed by, the exhaust choking me as I sniffed in the ugly smell. I heard the loud sound of cars honking in the distance, angrily fighting to deliver their passengers to multiple destinations. Suddenly, Tyler sprinted across the street. I watched, as if it was in slow motion, a car turned the corner. I stood paralyzed as it made its way down the street right where Tyler was. The car swerved to a stop just in time. My heart skipped a beat as I inhaled sharply while calling out to Tyler.

“Tyler!” I screamed as a tall woman wearing business clothes popped out of the car with a worried expression on her face. Then, a tall girl with eyes gray as the sad sky above us and blonde hair as cheery as the sun on a hot summer day opened the car door and walked over to me. She looked about my age.

“Oh my gosh. Is he okay!” she asked me. “We are so sorry,” she said, looking back at her mom. “I’m Liz,” she said holding out her hand.

“I’m Alice,” I said taking out mine as Tyler came back over and glued himself to my side.

“We were just driving to school. It is so cold out. Would you like a ride?” Liz asked me. Everything I’d learned went against going in strangers’ cars, but I couldn’t stand another tardy, and it was awfully cold out...

“I would love one, but would you mind dropping my brother off first? His school is just up the road,” I asked hopefully. Their smiles gave me an immediate answer.

As we rolled up to our school, I quickly thanked Liz's mom and scooted out of their car. I made it to homeroom just in time as the bell dismissed us to our first period. Time seemed to go in slow motion until finally it was break.

“Hey, funny seeing you here,” a voice said as I sat down in the library to eat my lunch. I looked behind me to see Liz who was eagerly placing her school bag down next to mine as she sat beside me.

“Yeah, funny seeing you here too,” I said and we chatted for a while, but the thrill of having a friend didn’t last for long.

“Oh, look who finally found a friend,” taunted Courtney, a girl who had been mean to me since the beginning of the year.

“You’re just jealous that she has an amazing friend like me, Courtney,” Liz piped up, grinning madly. With that, Courtney grew quiet and walked away, scowling. I was amazed at how Liz had pushed Courtney off like all she was an annoying fly buzzing in her ear. Liz changed the subject and asked if I wanted a ride home.

“Hey, Mom!” I called to my mom who was waiting outside of the apartment building for me. She started walking toward me.

“Hey, Alice. Who is this?” she asked.

“Mom, this is my friend, Liz, and her mom. They drove Tyler and me to school this morning and they just drove me back here,” I said. Our moms introduced themselves to each other.

“So, what do you do for a living?” Liz’s mom asked my mom.

“Right now I’m getting interviewed for work with children,” my mom replied.

“I’m looking for a new substitute teacher in my elementary school a couple of towns over if you are interested. I could set up an interview for you.” Liz’s mom told my mom.

“That would be wonderful!” my mom exclaimed. I said goodbye to Liz and my mom and I walked back up to the apartment.

“I have to go make a phone call and pick up Tyler from school,” my mom told me. “You can stay here.” she said, more of a command than a suggestion. I watched her leave and then stuck my head out the window to hear pieces of her conversation.

“Hey, I finally got a job offer for teaching at a school!” my mom offered excitedly to the mysterious person on the phone.

“Yes. I think I will take it,” she said. More muffled sound. “I know I will take it,” she confirmed. Then, like magic, a sleek black car rolled up on the curb next to my mom and a dull brown shoe poked out. My mom raced to the car embracing the person inside and I held my breath, hoping that when I let it go, my wishes could come true. As he stepped out of the car, my stomach took flight.

“Dad!” I screamed with all my might and a relief flooded through me while he looked up to me, smiling with his warm chocolate eyes. I knew our family was whole again.

*“Not that the story need be long, but it  
will take a long while to make it short.”*

*- Henry David Thoreau*

Emmett Christenson

Mansfield Middle School

Grade 7

### “Success in Soccer”

Soccer is a universally loved sport that people all over the world play. To be successful in the game of soccer, it is essential to practice hard. Secondly, it is necessary to cooperate properly with teammates, as this is a team sport. Finally, players must listen to their coach, because coaches are very important in the proper construction of a functional team. All of these components combine to create success.

As the cliché states, “practice makes perfect.” That notion is absolutely correct. Becoming a great soccer player starts with practicing. Most youth soccer teams hold two or three practices a week. This is necessary in order to build many team and individual skills. One major focus of youth coaches is to teach the players how to juggle the soccer ball. Juggling the soccer ball is simply keeping the ball up in the air by tapping it with various parts of the body (except for the hands and arms, of course). The reason that this is such a necessary skill is that it improves an individual’s overall ability a lot. For example, juggling helps with passing and trapping the ball.

For some people, juggling for small segments of time two or three times a week is not enough. This is where practicing alone comes in handy. Practicing without others can happen anywhere. In addition, one could go to field, set up a rendezvous with a friend, or simply head to the backyard. Drills are a necessary part of practices. When a player gets together with a team to practice, often, if not, always, the coach will set up drills to work on. These drills are very important. Some may seem nearly pointless at first, but each one applies to a different skill that

is required to master the sport. An example of this would be dribbling the ball inside a box set up by the coach. This kind of drill would improve ball control. Another example is of a passing drill that goes on for what seems like forever but really improves passing through repetition. Overall, practicing soccer is a very necessary ingredient for succeeding to one's fullest potential.

The next important aspect of soccer mastery is to build teamwork skills and cooperation. Cooperation is an essential skill that must be built upon in order to excel in soccer. In fact, since soccer is a team sport, being able to cooperate with teammates is one of the greatest aspects of the game. One way to develop a sense of teamwork is to practice with the team after developing one's skills individually. These kinds of friendships and connections come naturally in practices as teammates work together in order to master the drills that are chosen by the coach. From my own experience, there was a time when I joined a soccer team and nobody knew each other very well. Our coach recognized this and decided to make our first two practices consist of team-building exercises. We did trust falls and icebreakers and, soon enough, we all were really close friends. How does this relate to succeeding in soccer? The answer lies in the soccer matches themselves. Because talking is important in soccer, people who know each other will feel more comfortable calling for the ball or warning someone of an oncoming defender. Another great way that teamwork effects play is that it simply allows players to have more fun. Which would be more fun: playing with a best friend or a stranger? Most would answer, "Playing with a friend." Cooperation is easier among people who know each other well. This leads to being more creative on the field due to comfort level. An example of this would be a willingness to try out a new combination play or trying cool trick

moves which require confidence. Without a doubt, teamwork and cooperation are key aspects of success in the game of soccer.

Even with practice and teamwork combined, the coach is the single most important person in a soccer game. All players must learn to respect their coach and take what he/she says seriously. Whether they are barking orders or shouting words of encouragement, coaches always have a reason for what they do and always intend to have positive outcomes. One way that coaches are significant parts of the soccer teams is the way that they organize practices. As mentioned earlier, the coaches will set up specific drills that the players may not understand, but in reality, these plays are often built to strengthen the weak points of a team. During a practice after my team lost a game, our coach had us run two miles. One of my teammates questioned the abundance of running and the answer was that in our last game, the opponent outran us and endured more. The coach had said that if we ran more, we could build on those weak traits and overcome the opponent next time. Know that coaches have their reasons for everything. Secondly, coaches are astounding teachers who are exceptional educators of the sport. For example, coaches teach through drill, informing the team of different tactics that could be transferred to a scenario of a competitive game. Finally, I think that coaches are wise figures and know what they are doing while trying to help the team succeed.

Soccer is a sport that requires priorities if players want to succeed. Athletes must practice hard, be cooperative, and respect the coach as these are key components to success. All of these points can be capitalized upon to create a well-rounded soccer player and to shape an outstanding soccer team. Students understand that performing well on a school test requires rehearsing material, collaborating with peers, and respecting the teacher. Soccer success requires no more than what students already know. The ball is at their feet.

*“Words are a lens to focus one’s mind.”*

*- Ayn Rand*

## “In The Dark”

California’s woods were beautiful by day, but foreboding by night. Owls hooted dully in the trees with the wind ruffling their feathers with a light force. The window was ajar and the trees whipped past me with blinding speed. Their leaves fell to the ground dead and black, and the tree’s branches reached out groping at the clouds as if they were desperate. . . desperate for the last bleeding light. It was late October, the twenty fourth to be exact. On the day recognizing my birth, I had just finished baseball practice and the cool breeze relaxed my head after the heat and sweat of the field. I was the pitcher for the team. My long, gangly arms had more muscle than they seemed to have, and I could rip a pretty fast slider if I wanted too. I was tall too, five feet and eight inches. My sandy brown hair hung loosely over my face, damp with moisture.

“I’ll drop you off at the house so you can do your homework. I have to go and get laundry detergent but I will be home in about an hour,” my dad said. “I hate to leave you alone on your birthday, but your mother should be home soon.”

I waved goodbye and walked up to our bright purple door. On either side of me, our porch wrapped around the house like a snake, with a chair looking down our driveway lined with willow trees. The chipping cerulean paint looked grey and dead in the haze of the moon. I tried the handle on the door. It didn’t budge. Grabbing the key from under the doormat, I twisted it into the keyhole. I replaced the key and swung the door open.

The inside of our house was well furnished with lots of cushy arm chairs and coffee tables strewn throughout the house and even in some parts of the basement. In front of me lay a shoe rack with a couple pairs of sneakers thrown on it. Ripping off my cleats, I went up the stairs, taking them two at a time. I went into my room, leaving the door slightly ajar, and threw

my backpack on my bed making a pencil fly out and land on the floor. As I went to pick it up, my cat leapt out and started attacking my hand and then jumped up in the air, bolted out of the room, and disappeared.

“Really?” I muttered as I took out my math homework.

I lay down on my bed listening to music and solving equations. The posters on my wall stared at me and all my memorabilia from different places around the world cast ominous shadows around my room. I was almost finished when I heard a small bump from downstairs. Thinking it was my cat, I continued working. BUMP! I heard it again, but this time it was a little louder. I stood up and opened the door and looked into the hallway. The window frame cut a shadow across the floor and I saw my cat’s tail slink out of sight. Slowly, I made my way down the wood stairs with every other one creaking under my tread, splitting the silence in two. My cautious steps moved across the rug, making hardly a sound as I made my way to the kitchen door. I peered into the kitchen and my eyes traced around the wall, the stove, the island, and I noticed all the knives lined up on the wall. But then I realized that the big cleaver was missing from its place. Figuring it was in the dishwasher, I moved to the living room.

I entered the dining room and discovered that one of our old mahogany chairs was missing. It was made by my grandfather who since passed. Scrape marks ran from the table where it should have been to the steps of the basement. The basement door opened with a slight push and I peered into the darkness below. Ever since some of our basement lights broke, we were keeping two or three flashlights on the steps leading down. I grabbed one and flicked it on with the light cutting through the darkness like a knife does to butter. Cautiously, I walked down the stairs and into the foreboding darkness.

The damp air moistened my skin, and I could smell the mustiness in the walls from years under the ground. As I shined the light around the tool rack, I noticed the shovels and the seeds, and I thought I saw the rope. Actually, there wasn't any rope. Starting to panic, I felt my hands start to sweat, and the flashlight felt slippery in my palms; I dropped it on the ground shattering it.

That feeling of darkness I had never really experienced before. The feeling of hopelessness and not knowing, not knowing what was going on around me, enveloped me. With the light out, my sense of hearing increased. I heard a slight ruffle in the far corner that lasted but a heartbeat. I lost my sense of space, and the whole basement seemed one big black hole.

"Hello," I called out, and I could hear the wavering in my voice and my hands started shaking furiously.

I tried to turn around and head to the stairs, but I crashed into a shelf spilling boxes of various items onto the floor, and the shelf fell down blocking the way to the stairs. I knew there was one more way up. The other side of the basement led to the stairs, and so I began to slowly feel my way around the basement walls.

As I turned around the corner, I saw a faint light flicker off in an adjoining room, and the whispering of hushed voices.

"We have to be quiet in case anyone's home," I heard one say.

Here is where it got crazy. Fed up with all the hiding, I felt around in the dark some more, until I lay my hands on an old wooden bat. Slowly creeping towards the door, I playfully swung the bat back and forth warming up my skillful arms. The room came ever closer. Back and forth, back and forth, I reached towards the handle, careful not to make a noise. Back and forth; back

and forth. My hand gripped the doorknob, and I could feel my joints straining. In one quick motion, I pushed the door open and started swinging as if I were still at practice.

CLUNK! I felt the force of my swing stop against something hard. I heard it topple over with an “OOF” and I heard a light flick on.

“What are you hitting me with a bat for?” I was surprised to see the voice coming from my cousin, Henry, writhing about on the floor while clutching his ribs in agony.

“Happy birthday!” I looked around to see my family and friends pop out from the corners of the room.

I saw all of the decorations and, hesitantly, I began to smile. I looked around and, sure enough, I saw a two tiered cake surrounded by chairs with a big banner above held up by the missing strands of rope wishing me a very Happy Birthday. My grandmother was sitting in one of these chairs slicing the cake with the curious “absent” knife and placing pieces of the cake on little paper plates.

“What were you doing down here in the dark with a bat anyway?” my very annoyed cousin asked.

“I thought it might be burglars and so I came down too see,” I told him, doing my best to hide any leftover fear from the previous events. Quickly, I began to celebrate what had been one of the most suspenseful birthdays of my life. I spent the rest of the night recovering from the events earlier that evening as my cat slowly fell asleep on my lap.

Rebecca Mack

Mansfield Middle School Grade 7

“Lonely Judy”

The town my small family lived in was not luxurious or famous or big in any way, but it was perfect for me. I remember when Caroline was still a little girl. She was the most determined Girl Scout I had ever seen, but that was a long time ago. Years later, my house became empty. In my bedroom, I looked into the mirror hanging lazily on the wall and saw myself. My short, thick, gray hair poked and prodded at my neck, and I wore my withered red cardigan with threads hanging out the back. Then, I looked at my face with deep wrinkles surrounding my eyes. Mack always marveled at my eyes.

Soon after, I went to see Mack. In our small town, there is not a hospital. Therefore, I went on the bus to the neighboring town. The light pierced through the window, warming my back and making a dark silhouette in front of me. After several minutes on the bus, I arrived at the hospital which was as plain as the dirt on the side of the road. I remember thinking that it wouldn't hurt to put a mural here or there.

“May I help you, Ma'am?” asked the cheery woman from behind the desk.

“Oh, yes. I'm looking for Mack Golem. He's my husband,” I responded. At that point, I just wanted to see him whether or not he was awake.

“Yes, of course. Room 403. He should be up, but if he's not, we ask that you come back later and not wake him. In his condition, it is better not to disturb him,” the woman replied happily and motioned for me to pass through a long empty and echo filled hallway. Although the lights were on, it gave me an eerie feeling. It took me little while to reach the door, but I did. To

be honest, I almost turned back. There was not one sound - - not even a small cough coming from within the insignificant hospital room. *Knock knock*. Dare I open this door? I thought, "Yes, I should. Mack must be so lonely."

"Judy, how lovely to see you. It's been so long," Mack croaked. He was sitting in a bed with a small comb in his hand. Mack's room was plain and lifeless, and even though Mack was in the center of it, I hated that room. As I entered the room, I noticed he looked so skinny and weak. After Mack and I had a long talk, the phone exploded with an ear piercing ring. I picked up the phone and had to think before finding the words to say.

"Um...hello?" I said using my best Grandma-is-so-innocent voice.

"Mr. and Mrs. Golem, there is a call for you," said the same woman from earlier. "Please proceed to the main lobby."

"Oh, well, if that's what I needed to do," I thought. So I waved goodbye to Mack and walked back down the echo filled empty hallway. The lobby was the same as when I had left it, but now I smelled hospital disinfectant. How awfully sterile.

"Hello? Mother? I heard what happened to dad. I'm coming on Wednesday. I'll only be in town for a couple days," Caroline said hastily.

"Oh, my! He isn't doing so well, but I'm sure you'll still get to see him," I broke the news to her. Sugar coating her father's condition would not benefit anyone.

The remaining days before Caroline was to come home passed quickly and I was ready to see my daughter again. I had long awaited the time when the familiar baby blue car would pull into the house's cracked old driveway, blowing dust and dry dirt every which way.

"Mother, so good to see you. Do you see Dad a lot?" Caroline questioned as she opened her arms for a hug.

“Yes, he’s fine,” I replied smiling. This time I sugar coated it. The truth was, Mack was no different from the time we spoke last. After dinner, the two of us sat in the living room.

“Mom, I just don’t know how it happened,” Caroline said. “Dad was always so wise that breaking his hip just doesn’t seem like him.” I nodded in response. After he got to the hospital, Mack had become weak and wasn’t eating. Having Caroline there made me feel better, at least at the time. Then, I thought to myself, maybe Mack would enjoy some fluffy flapjacks; he always used to love eating them for breakfast.

The next day was the day that Caroline would see Mack. That moment was the whole reason Caroline had come back from the city and so I had no reason to take the bus. After all, Caroline could drive. When we arrived, a different woman was at the desk and the hospital was busier, louder, and less echo like.

“Hello. We’re looking for Mack Golem. Room 403,” Caroline stated a little louder than normal in hope that the nurse would give us her full attention. It didn’t work, and so we just headed for his room. *Knock, knock. Squeak.* The door opened and the air was dry and thick as if the two of us had just walked into the desert.

“Hello, Dear. Caroline has come into town to see you,” I said in a soft voice.

“Who is Caroline? Oh, yes. Well, come in.” Mack proceeded to drink what looked like coffee. Never had I thought to hear those words come out from Mack’s mouth. Caroline was his beloved daughter, twelve years out of college, and now Mack couldn’t even remember her name.. Caroline froze right outside the door. This was too much for her to handle. She only stood there and stared. At that point, I just told Mack we would come back another day or Caroline would call. I can’t remember which; it all happened so quickly.

Back at the house, I made us a snack consisting of a white as snow cut apples, some fresh tea, and a small platter of cookies. I knew that it would be a while until Caroline came back. Still, for these last few moments, I wanted her to feel at home. Caroline was quieter and more to herself; she had never seen her father like that and then she was hit with guilt and fear - a fear of the future and what would become of her father.

“Goodbye. I’ll see you around Thanksgiving,” Caroline commented as she put the last of her bags in the trunk of her car. That morning was a bit gloomy; the sun hadn’t come up yet and the wind pinched, bit, and scratched at my ankles.

“Yes. I’m sure you’ll get to see Mack all better then,” I replied trying to find something positive for Caroline to think about while she was leaving. She just nodded and drove off down the road. I found myself sitting on the front porch steps looking back remembering how Caroline was such a determined Girl Scout. That was a long time ago.

Alison Meikle

Mansfield Middle School - Grade 7

“Yet to be Discovered”

“The beast appears to have an arm- like, fin, an enormous, bewitching gown like tail, the head of a cow and numerous legs! Reporters tell us four sightings of this unknown species have been reported at this time,”

“Guys, guys. . . get up!” exclaimed a scraggly oceanographer from the bunks of the cabin.

“What now, Fred?” stated another furiously.

“Both of you, shhhhh! It’s too early to get up.”

“There’s a new species seen in our area!” argued Fred. Suddenly, the other men leaped out of bed and into the kitchen to watch the news.

The scientists had studied together for multiple years in the past but had no such hope of ever coming across a new discovery like this one. During their time together, the three men became like brothers. Since Fred was the oldest by a year, he was sort of the leader of the pack - an outgoing, spunky man, who never brushed his white, bushy hair. Jim was a short, stout, kind man, who had been a friend of Fred’s since kindergarten. The baby of the group was George, a shy, humble man in his thirties hoping for their big break.

Before the newscast ended, all three scientists were determined and out the door with their scuba tanks and snorkels.

“WE’RE GONNA BE RICH, DUDES!”

They all hopped into their submarine and prepared for the search. Later that day, the three men were halfway down from the surface of the ocean hoping to get lucky. They were searching and searching. No luck.

“We’ve gotta keep lookin’.”

And so they did for hours and hours until the next day. Still no luck. Further on toward the middle of the night, they got an unusual signal on the radar.

“Bleep, Bleep, Bleep,” chirped the machine. After a moment, the signal got louder and louder and EVEN LOUDER THAN THAT!

“Here we go!” two men shouted.

“FREDDY! GET DOWN HERE NOW!” Jim exclaimed.

“WHAT’S WRONG!?” Fred howled back.

The three men hurried over to monstrous sounding radar. A red dot was coming right at the point where they were with the submarine in the image. Another rush of chills came to the men now watching from the peek holes nearby. There was a dark mass up ahead. Noticing that they were aiming straight toward it, one of the men took the wheel and changed directions.

“We should be near the shores of Cape Cod,” Fred stated.

“We’re in the middle of NOWHERE!” Jim was no longer excited that he took any part in this mission.

All three men hustled to their maps to find out where they were. After consulting and bombarding each other with ideas, they finally decided to take to the surface. As they took the journey to the top, the men noticed something going wrong with their equipment.

The lights flickered with awareness; the beeping resumed once again but louder than ever. The luminous glow of the technology suddenly dimmed.

“How is the power out? That’s not supposed to happen in submarines,” Jim said puzzled by the event.

As they got closer and closer to the rise of the ocean, they noticed the water being stirred and tumbled above.

Just before they reached the surface, the dark mass appeared up ahead once again.

“What’s going on?”

“This is freaky.”

They were frightened and confused, tricked by whatever this was. Before they had time to react in the moment, the submarine led its way into the middle of a massive storm that came out of nowhere, still trying to maneuver the submarine around and through the crushing waves which smacked the submarine like a piece of meat.

Once they seemed to realize what they were in for, the lights flickered once more and eventually flashed off once again.

The storm twisted and tumbled the ocean causing a ruckus. One of the men continuously fiddled with the rudder attempting to enable it to navigate through the aggressive oil-like water. Another was standing directly in front of the radar anxiously praying for it to magically turn back on. During this time, Jim was too shaken by the storm to function, as he had both a fear of thunder and of darkness.

The dark mass was being observed by this petrified man whose fears were pushed past his limits. He could somewhat see what looked like the legs of an octopus, but the head did not seem to match. The man couldn't believe what he was seeing because it seemed to make him feel as if inside some kind of nautical horror film.

The rage of the storm began to churn above them. They could feel the eeriness of the pulsing vibrations through the slick ocean. Luckily, the storm seemed to drag the submarine to the south leading it to the spot of the missing shipwreck.

Suddenly, the storm ceased and the winds grew still causing a spooky silence. The men frantically jumped to the peek hole to peer outside. All they could see was the silhouette of a beaten-down, seaweed crowded ship lying at the bottom of the ocean.

The power flashed back on causing the silhouette to disperse. Now the tension of the crew was broken, and they were ready to find the new species. They searched throughout the shipwreck in every nook and cranny until finally they found a helpful clue.

There was a nest-type figure laying on the surface of the rotting deck. The men were puzzled and started looking around to find the animal living in it. With any luck, they be able to cast their net from the side of the submarine and make a simple capture.

After waiting over many uneventful hours, the men felt a tug on the line. They raised the net lightly, not to disturb whatever was beneath. Much to their surprise, there seemed to be a figure peering directly at them from within the net. It was unlike anything the men had seen before. While the urge to hoot and holler in excitement was nearly overwhelming them, they bit their tongues in order to not scare off the creature.

The creature had many long, tentacle-like limbs, the torso of a human, and the head of a cow. The crewman gently lifted the net onto the deck, exposing the animal to the many wondering eyes of the fellow crew.

Later that day, upon arrival back to town, the men were pondering about how they would end up rich and famous by discovering this unknown creature. Crowds gathered at the dock, both young and old, to welcome them back from their excursion.

To this day, the voyage of the A.M submarine goes down in history as the greatest discovery of a new species of sea life found on the East coast. Fred, Jim, and George still leap up in excitement when they hear rumors of something new. They are waiting for whatever lies in the sea yet to be discovered.

*“Half my life is an act of revision.”*

*- John Irving*

**“Losing Fenway”**

Today.  
Today is the day --  
depressing,  
lonely,  
I am as empty as a hole.

I sit on the front steps  
petting the puppy. . .  
oversized,  
clumsy. . .  
beside me.

I want to get up  
and play with him --  
throwing,  
running. . .  
but I won't; I just won't.

It would make me sad,  
crying,  
screaming. . .  
I just can't.  
So, I sit and wait.

The car pulls up. . .  
unbelievable,  
disgraceful.  
They will take him. . .  
He is mine.

I run into the house  
and up the stairs. . .  
sneaking,  
rushing  
into my brother's bedroom.

I look out the window. . .  
Grownups talking,  
plotting,  
planning. . .  
It's my puppy; not theirs.

I sit on my brother's bed  
watching Fenway  
jumping,  
wagging.  
He does not know, but I know.

They drive away,  
stealing,  
taking.  
Tears make their way down like raindrops  
on a window.

I can't hold it in. . .  
I run to my room with tears  
streaming,  
flowing  
down my cheeks like they're racing to get to my chin.

I lie down on  
my bed  
clutching,  
squeezing,  
my pillow thinking to myself. . .

I wish. . .  
hoping,  
praying  
to get him back. . .  
but I won't; I just won't.

“On Thin Ice”

“Ryley, we have always been helpful and good hearted. I do not understand,” Paige stated.

“I know. We’re never mean to other kids. I just don’t understand either. Why do people have to bully others?” Ryley wondered. “I wish there was something we could do to make them stop. If only we weren’t the one’s they picked on,” Ryley complained with a frown. “If only.”

The next day was a beautiful Sunday morning. The birds’ melodious songs drifted through my window while the bright sun smiled down upon me. Slowly, I slipped out of bed and tried to comb all of the knots out of my auburn colored hair with my fingers. My freckles stood out against the red marks on my face from sleeping. Meanwhile, the scent of pancakes tiptoed into my room and made my mouth water. I looked down out my window and saw the snow glistening in the front of the house.

*Ring ring.* I ran down stairs just in time to pick up the phone.

“Ryley? It’s Paige! Horse Barn Hill in twenty minutes!!” I hung up and ran to the old, worn down closet to search for my snow pants. The scent of mothballs rushed out of the closet and filled my nostrils. Gross. I picked through the clothes with no luck.

“Mom! Where are my snow pants?”

I headed to the kitchen to find my mom just about to throw my perfectly good snow pants away. Quickly, I snatched them out of her hands before they became history in last night’s lasagna dinner.

As fast as I possibly could, I ran into the bathroom and changed into my snow gear. They were too small! I opened the door only to find my mom with my brother’s snow pants.

“No way am I wearing these!” I yelled.

“It’s all we have until I can buy you new ones, Ryley! Just wear these for today and I will get you new ones for next weekend.”

I shut the door and frowned at the huge, baggy snow pants. Believe it or not, my brother is sixteen and he still has snow pants with childish red flames going up the side of the pant leg. Then, I put on the snow pants, shoved on some gloves and boots, slipped on my coat, and ran out the door. It was as cold as the North Pole outside. I had only been out for thirty seconds and my pale fingers were already icicles. Luckily, looking for my sled took my mind off of it. Immediately, I ran to find Paige.

When I reached Horse Barn Hill, I saw two things: first, my best friend, and second, Carly and her two “friends,” the meanest girls in school. Carly walked by, pushed me aside, and whispered coldly, “Nice snow pants,” in my ear, and her words felt like the ice outside. She then smirked and walked away. I wanted to curl up and hide, but I knew I needed to sled with my best friend and not let Carly win over me.

That night, I walked home with my head hung low and small tears trickling down my face. Paige tried to comfort me, but it was no use. Carly was being so rude to me and usually I could handle it, but it got to the point that I couldn’t ignore it any longer. For some reason, though, Carly never picked on or laughed at Paige once.

I got to my front door and tried opening it, but it was locked. Then I remembered that my mom had to go to work that night and my dad was away on a business trip. I was supposed to sleep over Paige’s house. Before I could even turn around, Paige’s mom had picked her up and didn’t even ask if I was ok. Unfortunately, my house was locked and there was no way of getting in. Paige’s house was too far away to run to in the freezing cold. Instead, I ran to the play scape

and flopped on the platform where my brother and I always go when we're upset. Tears flowed like cold raindrops from my tired eyes. Even my freckles felt like they were freezing - if that's even possible. I cried for what seemed like hours. I cried until there were no tears to cascade down any longer. That's when I fell asleep.

The next morning, I woke up in my warm bed. My brother must have carried me in the house the previous night. Usually, Paige would come over in the morning, and usually, I could hear her talking with my mom, but all I heard was the lonely sound of silence. I decided to get ready and headed to the kitchen with hopes for perfect, delicious pancakes to cheer me up.

"Where's Paige?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, sweetheart. I thought she was with you," my mom replied. I shrugged my shoulders, grabbed a piece of toast, and ran out to the bus. That's when I saw her. Paige was laughing and standing with Carly and her friends. I walked up to her and Carly rolled her eyes. Then I looked at Paige, but she ignored me and just kept talking to Carly.

"Hey," I said. Nothing. Not even a hello. Not a, "I'm sorry to leave you alone last night in the freezing cold." I ignored her and went on with the rest of my day, but the next day, it happened again. The unpleasantness continued day after day until I overheard Kelly, Sophia, and Carly heading towards Horse Barn Hill talking about the big Science test coming up.

"Yeah, so like, just stay friends with Paige until the end of the test. She will give us all of the notes and answers we need," Carly whispered. Then she laughed that wretched evil laugh that always made me think of her as the Wicked Witch. I couldn't breathe. My heart sank to my stomach. I needed to get out of there! I ran to Paige's house and opened the door.

"Paige, Paige!!" I shrieked. Paige came walking downstairs; a mask of total shock went over her face. I quickly told her everything before she could push me out the door.

“How could you!” she began, “You think that by telling me that Carly is using me, you will make me stop being friends with her?! You’re just jealous! You are always thinking about yourself! Never about anyone else!” Then she slammed the door. My best friend was blaming me? Jealous?! Why in the world would I want to be jealous of someone who is friends with the biggest jerk in the world? I choked back my tears and walked home. The snow crunched under my feet and the cold, icy flakes of a broken friendship somehow managed to get into my boots and freeze my toes. When I got to the door of my house, I saw my mother waiting for me, her arms wide with a cup of warm hot cocoa on the table. She has always had the knack of knowing how to cheer me up. I just ran to her and cried.

“She doesn’t believe me!” I sobbed, “Our friendship is over!”

“No.” My mom replied, “It’s not over. She going to find out tomorrow after the test and try to be your friend again. You just need to make the decision to forgive her.” That’s when I knew what to do.

The next day, I walked into Mr. Carey's room with my head held high and a proud smile on my face. I was prepared for the test, and so I felt really confident. We all sat down and started. At the end of class, I finished up the last question and handed it in before the bell rang. That’s when I heard Paige.

“Hey. Where are you guys going?!” she yelled. Carly turned around and went toward Paige.

“Didn’t you hear me? The test is over and you’re not our friend anymore.” Paige’s face turned as pale as a ghost and her eyes started to well up. She turned to me and I just stared back.

“You were right,” she sniffed. “They were using me... Oh, Ryley! I’m so sorry! I didn’t believe you; yet you were still right! I have been such a bad friend lately. Can you ever forgive me?”

“Of course,” I replied, “It might take a while, but, like always, we’ll figure this out.” She smiled at me and I smiled right back, and for the first time, for what seemed like forever, we hugged like true best friends again. It was like my mom always said, “Once a friend, always a friend.” Then I understood what she meant. Paige and I had our differences and fights, but we would always figure out a way to make up and stay friends forever - always.

*“Don’t try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say. It’s the one and only thing you have to offer.”*

*- Barbara Kingsolver*

## About the Authors:



My name is Kosha Boskovic and I am a twelve years old. I am interested in both sports and penguins. A fun fact about me is that I am the first member of my family that has been born in the United States. The main struggle I faced while writing my piece was making it so that children who read my piece would preserve the magic of Christmas. One thing I am proud of about my piece was revising it so that the magic does not fade.



My name is Zoe Chafouleas. I am twelve years old and live with two dogs and a family of five. I enjoy playing basketball and am on the school team this year. I struggled to keep my story short and to the point and am proud of the message my story delivers.



My name is Emmett Christenson. I am 13 years old and was born in Denver, Colorado, where I spent the first few years of my life; I now live in Mansfield with my family of seven. I have fun in school for the reason that I get to write different types of essays in my Language Arts class and take in an abundance of information in every other class. I also enjoy playing all kinds of music on my alto saxophone and listening to orchestrated arrangements. I love to play goalkeeper for my soccer team year-round and be on my basketball team in the winter. In my piece that was submitted in the Connecticut writing competition, I struggled to find an effective topic, but ended up settling on one that I could relate to very well-- soccer. I do have pride in the essay because of the time and effort that I put into sharpening it like a fine tool.



## About the Authors:



My name is Brennan Hare. I was born on April 27, 2002 in a quiet state known as Connecticut. For the first few years of my learning career, I was homeschooled. While some might enjoy this immensely, I began to grow bored. Halfway through first grade, I went to Oak Grove Montessori. After a couple of weeks, I was already starting to expand my mind and learn at a quicker pace. After four years there, I was off to middle school. At first I was nervous because I wasn't familiar with how it worked at a large, scary middle school, but I was welcomed right away and here I am to this day. Now, three years later, I spend time with my friends drawing, reading comic books, or playing lacrosse. Since I was involved in so many activities already, I thought I would do a little extra writing. While I was working on this writing project, the biggest dilemma I faced was how I would make this story interesting. I am disinterested in a story that doesn't have any suspense or action, and I wanted to make sure that did not happen with my piece. Another challenge I faced was how to make this scary. I am a fan of scary video games and movies, and so I tried to incorporate the environment that a character or I would experience in a thriller. But these challenges are why I like these sorts of activities and facing them wasn't so much a challenge as it was a friendly dispute between my story and me.



My name is Rebecca Mack. I am thirteen years old and enjoy reading and competing in gymnastics. I read both science fiction and realistic fiction books. I train for four hours per week at Frog Bridge Gymnastics. I had trouble with my piece thinking of what reactions my character might have because she is much older than I am. One thing I am proud of is my use of sensory details at the beginning of my story.



My name is Ali Meikle, and I'm twelve years old. An interesting fact about me is that I have one dog, three cats, six chickens, and three horses. Some of my hobbies include horseback riding, basketball, cross-stitching, swimming, and softball. One of my favorite places to visit is Cape Cod. Some activities I enjoy doing there include camping, visiting the beach, crab fishing, biking, clam digging, and most of all, having campfires with my friends and family. Something I enjoyed while writing was exploring different ways to develop my characters to make my story more interesting. One thing I struggled with throughout my story was making characters seem as lifelike as possible.



## About the Authors:



I'm Emma Santasiere, I am twelve years old. I love to play soccer with my friends. I also love art - - especially sculpting with clay, painting, and drawing. I also love animals. In fact, I have only used organic products for almost four years now because a lot of products are tested on animals and most animals die from it. One thing that I struggled with on my piece was coming up with all of the different words that described my feelings at that moment. One thing that I liked about my piece is that it is about a dog.



My name is Maddie Young and I love to write! My favorite hobbies are to dance, act and sing. Something that is quirky about me is that I dance everywhere I go. I don't even realize that people are watching me. One time in Kohl's when I thought no one was watching, I even did a split! I love bright colors, sparkles, and elephants. Overall, I am a very happy person, and absolutely love life. One thing that I enjoyed during this creative writing process was that I could use my imagination. A part that I struggled with was finding an ending that would bring my characters back together without coming right out and saying it. In my piece, I am most proud of being able to write about a difficult teenage problem. I worked hard to make it seem believable.





