

NIGHTMARE

Freedom

By Rose Wunrow
U-32 Middle School, Grade 8

It is a frigid morning. Frost clings to the treetops; mist fills the wintry valleys. The sky is the kind of gray that hurts to look at.

He follows the guard down the long hallway, past the faces that peer at them behind bars. He wants to tell them, 'Don't worry; it'll be your turn next,' but the words die away in his throat. He glances at the solitary confinement room, wincing as he remembers its close darkness.

He is wearing clothes, actual clothes, the same ones he had come in nearly 20 years ago. Not the rank, filthy attire of a criminal. The clothes of a free man.

The warden doesn't look up as he stamps all the necessary papers. He slides them across the desk before returning to his crime novel.

"See you," the ex-prisoner says quietly as he folds up the papers.

The warden attempts a joke. "I hope not."

He steps outside onto the wet pavement, past the gates that clang shut behind him. He starts walking along the sidewalk. Where, he doesn't know.

It all seems so beautiful. Cars, more cars than he'd remembered there being, skidding past, spraying water all over the place. Rain falls against his withered cheeks and drips down his gray hair. He looks down at his hands, wrapped around the mangled carpetbag which carries everything he has in the world.

The hands of a free man.

He rolls the words around on his tongue, loving their feel, their sound. He'd never thought he would use those words.

He is now walking on a country road which rises steeply before him. The gravel crunches under his feet as he walks.

He never remembered how much space there was in the world. There are so many beautiful things around him. Little dew-drenched cobwebs grow between the wires of the fences on either side of the road, and ghostly sheep peer out from between the green trees.

He thinks it must take prison to make you see this.

The rain is falling faster on his face, and he stops to look up at the sky. Twenty years since he's felt the rain.

A car skids to a stop beside him. A girl peers out of the window with concern.

"Do you wanna ride?" she calls. He smiles. He can taste rain mingled with tears of relief and joy. "No," he calls, "I'm free."



Tasha Woodworth, a sophomore at Essex High School, created this picture, a representation of a nightmare. The Young Writers Project is always looking for student art; for more information, go to the YWP Web site: youngwritersproject.org

Winter is a seamstress

By Bridget Iverson
Mount Mansfield Union High School, Grade 9

Winter borrows bare limbs of trees
To knit her snowy finery.
Her pins lay scattered in the air
To prod at those who wander there.
Her needles hang from roofs in rows
And at night each softly sews
Upon windows with silent grace
Careful stitches of morning's lace.

Beauty

By Sally Tucker
Hartford High School, Grade 9

if you asked
why put up with it all:
why cope with the stress
loss, depression
regret, hopelessness
anger, imperfection
constantly fighting for something
we can't all have
always picking ourselves up
only to fall again
I'd say
we live for beauty
for everything
around us
just to see it all
the beauty of happiness
of sadness, love, laughter
endings and beginnings
the beauty of knowing
you're human for feeling the pain
your healthy for crying
when they're gone
the beauty
that we've all
decided is worth it
every hour of waiting
every word of rejection
it's worth the moments
filled with beauty
the minute's beauty
completes you
so you don't have to
question why you're here
you just know
you want to be

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The Young Writers Project aims to get students published, either online or in our partner newspapers. Work can be in response to our prompts or general writing. Your work can be fiction, nonfiction, essays, poetry — any genre.

To submit work, go to our Web site youngwritersproject.org and follow the instructions on how to submit under the menu item "Publish." Student judges select the work to be published.

My secret spot

By Ken McFadden | Leland and Gray Union High School, Grade 8

There's a spot in my yard were I feel so secure. That place is in the woods — a secret spot by a big oak tree. In the summer when I'm all alone I sit under its shade. In the fall I sit and watch its leaves fall to the ground. In the winter I sit beneath its bare branches looking at the cold vast snowy woods. I go there when I'm mad just to get away from it all. I go there when I'm sad. When I go and sit beneath it I think and I ponder and I try to solve my problems. That's why I

love my oak. I can climb its mighty branches for my oak is the strongest oak. When I climb its branches to the very top I can see a sea of color. As I look at all the trees I wonder, why can't we all have an oak as divine as mine, a mighty iridescent giant in the sky? When the moon's light hits it just right it glows with a fiery white light — so mighty, so strong, my big oak. It's a marvel, and it's all mine. It's my little hideaway.

Black and white

By Lena Glickman | Leland and Gray High School, Grade 9

Black and white,
like an old photograph.
Black and white
split me in half.
Happy and clear
I have nothing to fear.
My mind is as white and pure
as the first snowfall of the year.
But sometimes a darkness creeps in
and I can't help but give in
to loneliness and fright.
Black is a night
when you can sleep
and there's nothing to keep
your mind from straying to the darkest corners
of your soul.
But in the morning the bright white comes again
and once again you can be whole.
A strange game of tug-o-war
and sometimes I wonder which side I'm rooting for.

Flower: a villanelle

By Sophie Glickman
Leland and Gray High School, Grade 11

Stuck in a bubble of haze
This routine numbs me
Wilted flower in a plastic vase

These halls become a maze
The way through so clear, I can't see
Stuck in this bubble of haze

Standing in line with red plastic trays
Crowds, noises and smells, now I'm dizzy
Wilted flower in a plastic vase

Friendly, I give and receive praise
But few words really penetrate me
Stuck in a bubble of haze

Laughter comes and goes, frustration stays
Even when I'm fine there's melancholy
Wilted flower in a plastic vase

I eat the doughnut in its sticky glaze
Thinking of healthier ways to be
I'm stuck in a bubble of haze
A wilted flower in a plastic vase

Peel me a new skin

By Casey Hayes
Rutland High School, GRADE 12

Peel back the image
In your mind —
And see the real me.
For I am not what I seem.
I am a liar,
And I've deceived you again.
I keep pretending
That pretending is okay —
That if I hope long and hard ...
I can be whoever, whatever
I want to be.
Peel back the image
And see the me
That sees you; the me
That's fascinated by your
Simplicity.
The me
That's only half a heart
And dig out the other half
From under the floorboards
By your bed
Put the pieces back together
SNAPSHOT
And plaster the new image on your
mirror.



YWP is a grassroots nonprofit that helps students write better and gain an audience for their best work. YWP offers writing prompts, special projects and a safe Web site, www.youngwritersproject.org, where students can share their writing, comment on each other's work, participate in group discussions and work on projects. YWP is indebted to the generosity of the Vermont Business Roundtable which is funding the YWP's core work for the second year.



Natural highs

By Danielle Novotny
Rochester School, Grade 10

The tingly feeling you get in the pit of your stomach,
When you fall in love.
The overwhelming feeling of joy,
When you laugh so hard your face hurts.
The wave of heat that rushes through your entire body,
When someone tells you you're beautiful.
The electric shock that comes out through your fingers
When you hold hands with someone you care about deeply.
The comforting and cozy feeling of home,
When you lie in bed listening to the rain.
The fuzzy feeling that squirms up and down your back,
When someone plays with your hair.
The indescribable feelings of natural highs,
Are feelings that one feels they would die without.

Anaphoric poem

By Jake Gilbert
Hartford High School, Grade 12

I think I see her sitting on the 5 on my clock
Waiting for the minute hand to crawl in
And sweep her away past the 11.
I think I see her straining, holding stars to the sky
Like sequins on a dress
I know she would look beautiful in.
I think I see her plummeting inside a raindrop
That shatters against my glasses
And pulls streetlights into beautiful shapes.
I think I see her soaring at the tip of every wave
Trying to escape from that river
I always drive past a little too quickly.
I think I feel her lying stretched
In the space between my heartbeats
Waiting for me to lie next to her.

I'm sorry

By Naomi Grayck
Main Street Middle School, Grade 7

Dear Dad, I'm sorry I couldn't be your little girl,
I'm sorry I took up your time,
I'm sorry you couldn't be there when everything unfurled,
I'm sorry I didn't walk in a straight line.

Dear Mom, I'm sorry I wasn't strong,
I'm sorry I looked away,
I'm sorry I didn't listen to your song,
I'm sorry I rebelled all the way.

Dear Sam, I'm sorry I lied,
I'm sorry I thought I could be better,
I'm sorry I didn't cry,
I'm sorry I never wrote you one letter.

Dear Adam, I'm sorry I never understood,
I'm sorry I never smiled at you,
I'm sorry I gave away our childhood,
I'm sorry I told you things that weren't true.

Dear Jacob, I'm sorry I went along with it,
I'm sorry I didn't help you through,
I'm sorry I just didn't get over it,
I'm sorry I never cared for you.

Dear Reader, I'm sorry I never hugged you,
I'm sorry I never told the truth,
I'm sorry I never got through,
I'm sorry I always wanted to be you.

I'm sorry you had to read this,
I'm sorry you won't remember,
I make my hand into a fist,
And crunch the burning ember.
For I can't change who I am,
I've tried once or twice,
I guess you will just have to understand,
I don't want to be right.

Imagination paint

By Claire Puleio
U-32 Middle School, Grade 7

A swallow and a thrush
swoop across the page
with the flick of a brush.
The lilies and red roses
splat the white
in perfect poses.
The page is dancing
with deer,
white-tailed and prancing.
My imagination
paints the page
with articulation.

The nameless things

By Emily Patch
Rutland High School, Grade 11

Little things float around the hay field,
and I suggest while crossing, you should yield.
For you wouldn't want to hurt these little beings
Although these things you shouldn't be seeing.
They float and fly and glide on the brisk wind
Giving hope for the people who have sinned.
They are small and delicate and have wings.
I know that there is no name for these things.
So be careful walking in fields of hay,
for these things may want to help you someday.

Stripped of a name

By Veronica Kovacs
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

You take away my name,
Turn me into a them;
Identity gone.
Categorize me,
Put me into a group;
Just a face.
Take away myself;
Make me what you want,
what you see.
I'm no longer me,
Just who you want;
Them...