

Week 8: Writing Prompts -- Point of view, superpowers

Church of God, Moss Side, 1985

By Lena Glickman
Leland and Gray High School, Grade 9

Daddy is gone. Momma might as well be gone. Auntie takes care of us when she can, but as I and Janie have heard her telling Momma, her hands are full as it is. Sometimes we stay nights at Auntie's, and we squeeze into beds with our cousins, me with Bobby and Martin, and Janie with Mary and Lee and Kat. It's crowded sometimes, 'cause the beds aren't meant to hold three or four people, but we both agree that we like to sleep there better than at home. At home sometimes there are men who Momma says not to talk to, and we have to be quiet and leave the two of them alone. And sometimes Momma forgets to bring back enough food to keep us filled up for the night, and sometimes she yells at us for nothing. And sometimes as we fall asleep I hear Janie crying. We both agree that we would rather stay with Auntie all the time. But her hands are as full as Momma's are empty of money and food.

There is not always quite enough to eat at Aunties, but there is always something, because Uncle brings home what he can. "He don't bring home all of it," Auntie says, "but he brings home what he can." I don't quite understand the meaning of this, but I nod my head when she tells me anyway. When Uncle is home, which is only at night, there is lots of laughing around the house and Auntie has a big smile stretched across her face. During the day there are lines all over her face, and sometimes she gets angry. When the sun goes down and Uncle comes home the lines fade away.

Sometimes during the day, while I'm out playing basketball with Bobby, Martin and the boys next door and from the apartment below us, Janie sits inside with Auntie. The other girls play in the other room, with their dolls, but Janie doesn't much like playing with them. She helps Auntie cook and clean and sometimes draws her pictures or tells her stories that she makes up. She is Auntie's favorite, everyone knows it, and sometimes she gets told things that the rest of us don't. Sometimes Janie tells me what she says later, and we try to make sense out of it.

One night, when we were at Momma's house, Janie told me that Auntie was talking about our Daddy. Neither of us remembers him all that well, but I do more so than Janie. I knew him around a year longer than her. I remember Daddy one morning, saying "Come on George, time to go." And then taking my hand and walking down the street with me. I don't remember where we were going. But I remember how big his hand felt, and rough from work, and how I couldn't quite walk as fast as him and had to skip every couple of steps to keep up with him. I remember it was a cold winter day, but with no snow on the ground yet. We could see our breath, like smoke, dancing in the air before disappearing. Our hands were freezing, and they would have been warmer in our pockets, hidden from the cold, but I remember Daddy holding my hand anyway, walking down the street to a destination I can't remember.

Janie says Auntie was talking about Daddy. She says he was a good man, like Uncle, but that he and Momma didn't always get along so well. She said he was serious and had a temper some days that you didn't want to get in the way of. She says he loved me and Janie a whole lot and got mad when Momma let us go out on the street too much, 'cause he thought it was too dangerous.

And then, when I was almost 4 years old, he died. He was hit by a car, but we don't know if it was an accident or not. Janie says Auntie said that was when Momma "really left all her morals in the gutter and forgot she was a mother." The whole time Janie told me this she looked at the floor, as if she was ashamed of something. When she finished she looked up at me with tears in her eyes, and I could tell that they were about to overflow.

That night we waited for Momma to come home, and our stomachs growled, like they were angry at us, for food. We waited for a long time, and then went to bed, figuring she would be home in the morning with something for us to eat. We had gone to sleep without anyone else home before, but it was always hard for us to sleep on those nights. Just because we were little didn't mean we didn't know how dangerous it was here. We saw the news, and we heard about the deaths, and we even knew a few people who had been shot. We wrapped our blanket tight around our little bodies, and I held Janie's hand, praying that Momma was safe, and we were safe, and that there would be food in the morning.

Momma wasn't home in the morning, and it was Sunday. We always went to church on Sunday. Our only real good clothes were our church clothes, and we always kept them clean, and Auntie ironed them every week. We dressed ourselves and tried to fix ourselves up just as Momma or Auntie would. We walked down the stairs of our building, and remembered to lock our door. We walked the short way to our church and found ourselves a seat. I couldn't find Auntie's face in the sea of people, so we sat next to someone we didn't know. Half way through the sermon Janie tugged on my hand, and I saw that her eyes were wet. She climbed onto my lap, which was barely bigger than hers. By the end of the service her breathing had grown heavy and rhythmic, and I hoped that she was dreaming. Dreaming of a better day, when we weren't hungry, and she could be on Momma's lap instead of mine, or holding Daddy's hand, walking towards something better. Doesn't matter what; just something better.

NICOLE AND MOLLY



TIM CARPENTER, *Essex Junction High School*

One special acorn, one special moment

By Mariah Hill
CHARLOTTE CENTRAL SCHOOL, GRADE 8

Stumbling through the thicket I spot an acorn on the hard ground. How odd, I think, they have but one oak tree on this estate. Only birch trees because they match their freshly painted house. They had saved one oak just because of how big it is, and it is located over near the barn, far from here.

Picking up the lone acorn, I notice how oddly it feels in my grasp, almost glowing with warmth. Examining it in my palm, I roll it around to see it from all angles. It looks fairly normal, golden brown coloring and all.

But then I am overcome by the strangest feeling yet this evening. Without thinking, I place the acorn in my mouth and chew it until it breaks open. It's cool in my mouth, but for some reason this comes as no surprise to me. As soon as I've chewed it into several pieces, I am aware that a liquid is pouring from its core. I take out the pieces and swallow down the liquid, which seems to thicken. It goes down fairly easily though, for that matter.

The sun is setting much more rapidly now, and I feel it's probably time to be getting back to the barn. Walking back I take a different route to avoid the risk of Mrs. Cainan's seeing me "sneaking around," as she puts it. She's most likely preparing for her evening ride and will be first to know if I haven't changed Pharaoh's shoes.

Back in the barn, Pharaoh is pawing restlessly at the hay. His white coat is slightly uneven, and I snag a comb from the hook on the wall and run it through his mane and over his back. Pharaoh stands exceptionally still for this, which makes things easy. Mrs. Cainan enters just as I finish changing Pharaoh's shoes. I place his saddle on his newly groomed back and she mounts gracefully.

"Paige, I know you weren't here an hour before as I much usually prefer," she says curtly, gathering Pharaoh's reins in her pale hands. "Don't try to sneak through the garden either. You trod on my petunias. And I see you anyway."

Her cold, yet familiar tone makes me blink more rapidly than usual. I nod while hiding my anger, and Pharaoh trots out of the barn with Mrs. Cainan sitting stiffly upon his saddle.

Out of frustration I heave a great sigh and toss Pharaoh's old shoes onto the workbench mounted onto the wall. I walk outside and slump down onto the Cainans' mowed lawn, to lean against their only oak tree. As my back touches the bark of the great oak, the most peculiar thing happens.

The birds' chirps that echo from the canopies of all the birch trees scattered about the estate come to an abrupt halt. The distant wail of cars, motors, and sirens weaving its way through the bushes from the highway dissolves. I'm left sitting in complete silence.

As I glance up at the sky, I see a flock of geese, in V formation, immobile. I take a sharp breath of surprise as I stare at the geese, frozen in mid-flap. Looking around some more I spy a gray squirrel in midair as he is jumping from limb to limb of two nearby trees.

My breath quickens as I keep noticing the still world around me, and I think back to the distinct acorn I had eaten earlier. It seems I've stopped time.

Life

By Sarah Levine
The Grammar School, Grade 8

I don't understand
You stopped talking
Like always
But this time is different
This time is deadly
You promised you'd stay with me
Forever
And you always said
You were a man of your word
But there's a first time for everything
You always said that, too
I watch you gravely
Lying immobile in this abyss of
Starched white
Machines beeping their language
Of beeps
Seeming to count down the
Seconds
Until you're gone
A machine gives a long beep
And with a last wish
You are no longer
A man of your word.

Rain man

By Kelly Davis
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

Crinkled pages pull me in
To the world of ink that lies within
Swirling and whirling I pull myself out
But I'm somewhere I know nothing about
I look around and what do I see
But a swarm of people surrounding me
They cheer and shout and lift me up
Til I am high up on a mountain top
They yell my name, they scream out loud
The look of my parents tells me their proud
A flash of light brings a memory out
And explains what this is all about
The land is barren, the people frail
The mothers are thirsty and the babies wail
The sun is blistering, the air is hot
But water to drink there is not
I see myself look up at the sky
I close my eyes and raise my hands high
And with a jolt it begins to pour
For this is why my people adore
Their savior I have come to be
Yet none of this occurred to me
Another jolt and I open my eyes
I cannot see so I squint them tight
My mother is standing above my bed
"It's time to get up, sleepy head."

YWP Special Projects

WINTER TALES. The Vermont Stage Company's professional actors give dramatic readings to selected student winter tales. VSC's shows will be in early December. This year additional presentations will be made at First Night in Burlington. The prompt: Tell a story about winter; it can focus on the holidays or the season – the weather, the outdoors, the emotions. **Deadline: Friday.**

For specific details on all the projects and to submit your work for the **Newspaper Series** go to: www.youngwritersproject.org



YWP is a grassroots nonprofit that helps students write better and gain an audience for their best work. YWP offers writing ideas or 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.



Super powers haiku

By Matteo Björnsson
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

Read minds just like books
But to breach such privacy
Is evil indeed

From father's eyes

By Missy Greenslit
Rochester High School, Grade 10

My chest is throbbing,
As fast as the thoughts in my head,
I'm a father, in their eyes a success,
But how? I can't move from bed.
Doctors swarming around,
Tears fall from me,
I don't make a sound.
I see her walking towards me.
Watching the machines hooked to me.
Lines jumping and numbers flying.
I can't die, I'm only 43 (forty three),
Just the thought makes me sick.
I couldn't imagine not hearing her,
Every night conversations,
Hard to envision,
But heart complications?
She's telling me to stay calm,
Her whispers are like summer days.
But as she walks away, I know,
In my heart she'll always stay.

How to submit

Works can be in response to our prompts or general writing; the work can be fiction, nonfiction, essays, poetry -- any genre. To submit work for potential publication, register at www.youngwritersproject.org, and follow the instructions on how to submit.

Peace Power

By Antonina Marie DiNatale
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 12

A power much greater than anything else
A force which no one can defy
Not one to be simply put on a shelf
Or in a book surrounded by a lie
A magic not for a fairy tale or elf
But only seen in the beholder's eye
A power that's bigger, not just a crease
A power to bring everyone happiness
and achieve world peace.