

1ST PLACE

“Two Heroes” by Bethany Hsiao, 9th Grade

My Purple Heart –
displayed more proudly
than an Olympic medal –
sears my eyes.
My gifts –
bouquets of pink roses,
hand-crafted thank-you cards,
looks of gratitude –
pain my soul.

I escaped war
with just a bullet
in the thigh, while
John will never
have his legs back
and escape people's gaping stares,
Maria will never
make another memory
lying as a vegetable in a hospital bed,
David's little girl will never
see him again.

Though my life continues,
anxiety attacks strike me
harder and more unexpectedly
than a lightning bolt.
Visions of whirring bombs,
screaming people,
mangled bodies
haunt my nights.
Guilt of surviving
steals my sleep.
My family's eyes cry,
“You're back home
but not with us.”

When these tentacles of agony
grip me tighter than slave manacles,
Sunny –
my medical service dog –
shares and lifts my burden.
She senses and accepts my every emotion –
whether it be
depression, fear, or angst.
When people surround me,
my fingers tremble
and my voice withers.
Sunny nuzzles my hand
with her velvety, golden head
as if saying,
“You're okay. I've got you.”
When nightmares drench
my body with sweat,
Sunny props her paws on my bed
and tenderly licks my face,
teleporting me back to reality.

Sunny always
stands by my side.
She has re-gifted me
hope in life,
strength to open up,
courage to move forward.
Sunny is
my hero.

2ND PLACE

“A Little Sparrow’s Sonnet” by Olympia Ghosh, 9th Grade

“Chiddick, Chiddick,” can you hear the birds speak?
The thunder will clap, watch their wings, they’ll flail
and look above to find a sparrow weep.
Humanity has breached her breadcrumb trail.

She dreams of grass, he dreams of green; begs it.
She flees to his open arms of greed, lust,
born uncaged but encased by the exits.
Shouldn’t murder of freedom be unjust?

Yet compassion soars through the trap of time,
She can pierce a stone heart to bleed some life.
This tug-of-war game, is it worth a dime?
Put down your arms and listen to her fife.

Listen and learn, her whistle tells no lies,
Resilient cries may catch your surprise.

3RD PLACE

“Morning Song” by Vera Villanueva, 12th Grade

I emerge from my tent
Of warmth
And darkness
Under a canopy of white

Frosty lips
Kiss a stillbirth dawn
Stealing breath
From a dying night

Ashes from our camp before
Long to take a phoenix flight
As the stars they had danced with
Fade without a fight

Before the show is over
Another takes its place
The orchestra assembles
In all their feathered grace

A single lark begins the anthem
With a three note melody
Another joins in the tune
With flawless harmony

The sky comes alive
With flame once more
As Robins and Cardinals
Their songs outpour

Finches and sparrows
Add to the symphony
And the world awakes
To the beautiful cacophony

HONORABLE MENTION

“A Girl’s Best Friend” by Rachel Pauli, 12th Grade

I was 4 years old –
I can still feel your fur through my fingers
As you dozed off to sleep
Though I was your protector,
You were my shepherd,
And I was your sheep
Your breathing would relax
As you would dip deep into dreams
Then my eyes of jade
Would quickly fade
And we would melt into a world of
Only you and I
I was 4 years old –
With nothing but a lack of experience
With tear-stained cheeks
That were nothing more than
A broken crayon
You were taken so quick,
Ripped from my innocent hands
Torn from my naïve eyes
You were gone in the blink of an eye
But I was your whole life
17 now –
Exposed to plenty of heartbreak
But I still remember the day
My toddler bed awaited my tiny body
As my arms lingered for you
But you never came
17 now –
And you are long gone
But nothing will make me neglect you,
A girl's best friend –
I can't forget that

HONORABLE MENTION

“All The Things You Taught Me” by Alexandra Barrett, 9th Grade

Where would I be,
If I hadn't met you,
I probably wouldn't know,
All the things that I do.

The love in your eyes,
Told me you were the one,
You showed me compassion,
And how to have fun.

I would easily mess up,
But you forgave me like that,
Another thing you taught me,
So I wouldn't fall flat.

And day after day,
You showed me how to be strong,
Because no matter what happened,
In your eyes I could never be wrong.

Now you've taught me all these things,
And your time has come and gone,
Your tail may have stopped,
But your love will forever go on.