

**2010 Illinois Manningham Contest**

**Winners of Senior Division**

**Loved...**

You wake up every day  
The same routine like always  
Get up, go to school, come home, and be alone.  
No one talks to you, but you don't mind.  
They all think

You're

Some kind of "emo" freak anyways.  
You like being alone.  
It's peaceful, calm  
But sometimes you wish to be

Loved

Wish to feel important  
Wish to be noticed  
You're tired of spending Friday nights

By

Yourself  
You think you're all alone in this world  
When you're not  
You glance over and see your Bible  
Open it, randomly coming to John 3.16  
You are loved  
Thanks be to

God

**First Place,  
Brianna Lucas, Peru, IL.**

## One

One night.  
That was all it took.  
One night of pleasure, passion, and love.  
One night of not thinking.  
No consequences, not a second thought.  
Just one night.  
It seemed so perfect.  
The circumstances were so right.  
Nothing bad had happened before.  
Only one night.  
What could it hurt?

One day.  
One visit to the doctor.  
One simple test, one scary result.  
What now? Where do I go from here?  
So many questions, so few answers.  
Just one day.  
The scariest day of my life.  
The day I had never expected.  
The day I had never planned for.  
Nothing bad had ever happened to me before.  
Only one day.  
It couldn't hurt much, could it?

One morning.  
One morning that will last forever.  
One morning that will never leave my mind.  
The fear, the pain.  
The thought that I am ending a life.  
So innocent, so unknown.  
Just one morning.  
One morning that will end it all.  
No more fear, no more pain.  
No more weight.  
The weight of a child.  
My child.  
Only one morning.  
It hurt so badly.

**Second Place,  
Lauren Tarpley, Springfield.**

## **Generation Gap**

Poetry to me is like my generation's future to the Past; it's all a lost cause.  
I only say that 'cause Dad says,  
"Keep your art work as a hobby, find something better."  
We're in the car driving opposite of my way, overcast weather.

In my right ear musical dreams are playing  
In the left ear is my dad; in the middle is my conscience,  
But my head is tilted his way.

That's my generation in a nutshell:  
Influenced and tilted in Past's favor.  
But my music plays so loud I can't hear its ego's flavor.  
So let me hold the beat, how 'bout you think for a second,  
Have a little courage, grow up for a session.  
Understand me before you judge my progression.

See I listen to Kanye but you critics of past time listened to James Brown.  
I guess hearing Stevie Wonder really blinds you with his sound,  
'cause you can't seem to see the things we go through.  
Why we blast Weezy and wake up to press Snooze.

Find it funny that we're lazy but you complain with no action.  
No shield and no sword but the first to verbally attack  
and criticize; minimize; devocalize the words that we say;  
put 'em in a pan, make 'em flip eight ways,  
then blame Us for your future mistakes.

We don't rep your future, we represent now.  
So blame it on yourself for ballin' too far out of bounds.

**Third Place,  
Christian Robinson, Oak Park.**

## **Baby Steps**

If I were to write a poem about the woman who  
married my father, I would leave out the part that says  
I have you.

I wouldn't add the line that says  
stepmom steps in, stepson left out.  
I wouldn't include how I disliked going to my dad's house  
or when my father strains his voice and says,  
"you don't have to be here".  
I would hide the eyebrows that flipped the bird and replace them with  
cheery smiles on past holidays.  
I would even throw in a lie saying I never went over her flaws  
with a magnifying glass on a sunny day.  
I would take back the days I burned her feelings by  
not eating the same overcooked dinner we had every night  
I wouldn't bother to put in the fights with my dad  
caused by her and solved by space.  
I would take the easy route and write about  
the two half brothers I showed whole love to.

But in the end, I would never look at the poem  
from her perspective.  
I could never think about marrying someone who  
has a child and trying to make them feel comfortable while still  
uncomfortable myself.  
I could never try to think about being a new parent  
to a 10 year old who already hates me and has no reason to stop.  
I never would think about writing  
the hardships she would go through.  
Raising two babies and a stepson, while going to work,  
and then running low on ideas and food so deciding to make  
the same dinner that we had last night.

Now I have stepped away from hate,  
balancing on like,  
careful not to lean on love.

**Honorable Mention (also won 2<sup>nd</sup> Hon. Mention at national level),  
Kris Murray, Oak Park**

## **My Lined Paper**

In class the other day,  
Having a first person conversation with my pen and paper scattered across my desk.  
We're going at it.

Until my algebra teacher abruptly distracts us.  
Wrapping and twisting her crooked fingers, smacking my lined paper  
Black eyeing my thoughts  
Punching my poems.

She yells, "THIS IS NOT IMPORTANT!"  
I want to ask her,  
How dare she have the audacity to tell me what's important.

She doesn't know the slightest bit about me.  
That I'm born from a mother who let her drug addiction choke her up in local bathroom stalls.  
From a father who leaves me hanging, like  
Reading a book with the last page ripped out.

And her unwillingness has me sitting uneasy  
As she's creasing my lined paper  
Ripping my thoughts, spitting on my poems.

"CAILYNN STURKEY DO YOU HEAR ME!?"

And as she comes near, it becomes clear  
that my name never rolled off her tongue gracefully  
It kind of slithered through gritted teeth  
So instead of causing a scene

I hold onto my words, dry swallow verbs  
shoving them back down my broken throat.

Until 11:03

when the bells ring I collect my lined paper  
Hold them close like number 11

And I would like to thank my algebra teacher  
for giving me the equation to this poem.

**Honorable Mention,  
Cailynn Sturkey, Oak Park**

## When Color Lands on the Moon

There are no invisible stars, only black holes,  
and gravity pulls dark babies out of its stomach.

I watched an episode of *The Tyra Show*;  
one woman said that she would spit up craters of earth, to not be so dark.

So, she lightens her skin with creams.  
Doesn't want to be the only African American in her family, that doesn't look like a white swan.

Says she's the ugly duck-in an oil spill.  
Scrubbing her pores with Dawn, to un-flock her grip with DNA.

She prays to be light skinned like her brother;  
find her way to the moon.  
Connect an umbilical cord to its core

and feed her children the whiteness.  
Teach them to take the matrimony of bleach.  
Let it kiss their entire body, 'till each little black toe  
and round cheek, sucks lips with Clorax.

Her daughters are new moons.  
At age 4 and 2, they're broken street lamps.

Wishing on s hooting stars to be lit, or to be like their newborn sister,  
who is a yellow street light, sitting in between the color of envy and their blood.

Mother bleaches their skin.

Her son at 7 is half moon.  
White cream burned on skin 'cuz he was born with the face of gray smoke.

He'd rather be the tip of a cigarette,  
because at least when it dies out the ash might look white.

I wonder, if he becomes a full moon, will his tongue ever burn the sun out of heat and confront  
their mother.

If they will regret the galaxies of prejudice she orbited around her hips.  
If people will ask them

“Where'd your skin color go?”

Will someone ever bring them back to earth?

Tell the mother, that even a white moon doesn't shine during the day,

because its shimmer comes from the beauty  
of blackness.

**Honorable Mention,  
Kelly Reuter, Oak Park**

## Untitled

1

You comfort me with promises of happiness,  
kept frozen like a balloon solid like our friendship  
floating away from everything else, trying to keep its perfect shape.  
Arms tight around body like the ring on my finger.  
Your being is what stretched my lips to form a smile before I kiss you.  
Out of all the prizes for being perfect,  
my favorite was the black bracelet with my name engraved in purple.

2

You're controlling. I do as your say.  
Water drips in bathroom as you sleep  
and you want me to stop it before  
you're unable to prevent back of hand and side of face from embracing.  
I can't stop it quick enough.  
Silent screams pierce ears fist and wall become one.  
Instead of nose bleeding blood eyes bleed sadness.  
Next day, I'm not home on time—consequence is isolation.  
Years have passed.  
My mother's voice I don't recognize  
best friend's face appears only in old photo albums.

3

I come home late for the second time and forgot to call.  
As I walk through the door I smell your rage, your fist hits my lip.  
I'm sorrys lost meaning when clock tic toc struck one two blows in each eye.  
Arms no longer wrap around waist, but  
fingers around neck cutting off air like too small ring cuts off circulation.  
Black eye covered by hand with purple wrist, bracelet is on floor.  
With each step you take your scent lingers more.  
I inhale you don't love me.  
You beat me like I hate you.  
Anger melts, pops, empties balloon.  
As I lay there deflated, we're back at

1

You comfort me with promises of happiness kept frozen like a balloon.  
One day after fingers release neck  
I won't inhale your scent and we won't return to 1.  
I'll lay there deflated like our balloon on the floor next to my bracelet.  
The ring won't be what cut off my circulation.

**Honorable Mention,**

**Taja-Nia Horne, Oak Park**

## **New Year's Façade**

the party has started  
and guests have arrived  
Rolls Royce, Ferrari,  
Lamborghini  
in the drive

a Fraudulent Mosaic  
of happiness

midnight toasts  
to all their bliss  
to the years to come

to the Manic Depressive Millennium

to the Elegant Fowl  
(but no one likes meat)  
to the Goat Cheese Slinky  
set out to eat

to their plumped egos  
how fake could they be

as they celebrate  
Financial Vanity.

**Honorable Mention,  
Veronica McGathey, Lisle**

## **Fold and Unfold**

I see your cards pulled towards your chest  
Why do you cling so tight?  
I cannot peek, nor will I try  
Yet your knuckles crack with white

Secrets deep inside those cards  
You play them carefully  
One giant bluff, your confidence  
So as long as no one sees

The real you, your past, your thoughts  
Disguised in pairs and straights  
Though I know just as many tricks  
I won't dangle them as bait

And yet you raise! The bet is high  
I stand strong beside my hand  
Your eyes reveal such splintering faith  
You're running out of sand

I can't bear to see you collapse within  
So I fold to call a tie  
Instead of exposing naked cards  
You bury them, with head held high

I will not cheat to see your hand  
The cards of life you've never told  
But I will play, time and again  
Until you're willing to unfold

**Honorable Mention,  
Colette Wehrli, Lisle**

## **The Luckiest Man**

At old Yankee Stadium  
the icon stood center-stage,  
before the people  
not as the star  
but as a man.

CLAP, CLAP, CLAP, Clap, Clap, clap, clap...

“The Iron Horse” of baseball  
stood before the people  
helpless and humble  
too moved to speak at first.

Walking up to the podium, he stood, stoic

CLAP, CLAP, CLAP, Clap, Clap, clap, clap...

The 100,000 people went silent  
and the floor was his  
to give his farewell address

After a

long

moment,

He stood up to the podium,  
determined to make a statement.

“For the past two weeks you have been reading about the bad break I got.”

Going on to thank his teammates,  
the crowd would interrupt

CLAP, CLAP, CLAP, Clap, Clap, Clap, clap, clap, clap...

with their applause.

He stood, stricken by the moment,  
stricken by the realization that, for the rest of his days,  
he would never set foot on a baseball diamond.  
NEVER again.

Sweat ran down his forehead  
and the debilitating effects  
of the disease that gripped him so tightly  
became widely evident.

Some people wept  
Some remained silent, in shock  
but most cheered him on.

He stood, and calmly delivered the final line  
with the spirit of a true champion,  
the grit of the “Iron Horse,”  
but the inflection of a mere man:

“So I close in saying that I may have had a tough break, but I have an awful lot to live for.”

He stepped down from the podium,  
with tears streaming down his cheeks,  
waved to the masses cheering his name  
and gave his final goodbye.

The “immortal Lou Gehrig”  
was human after all.

**Honorable Mention,  
Christopher O’Reilly, Lisle.**