

POETRY

14TH STREET SHELTER

Hattie Clougherty
Chantilly High School, 10

Griddle sizzles
Underneath yellow eggs
I lift a plastic apron over my head
A roar erupts as the massive arms of the gray door open
Hordes with no socks, no coats, and sometimes no shoes
Gush into the heated haven of the 14th Street Shelter

Quickly scooping up a stack of Styrofoam plates
I plop potatoes, eggs, and colorless flour pancakes onto each tray
Thick, brownish syrup glops onto the pancakes
Oozing into air bubbles
Spilling over eggs

Carefully cradling the tray
I creep over to plastic tables with wooden benches
Eyes turn hungrily toward the soggy piles on the plates
I place the tray on a table

A woman
Tangled brown knots of hair
Bunched around her wrinkled face
Thrusts her arm towards me
Her sleeves are frayed
Patched at the elbows
A palpable grease spill splotches the faded *Office Depot* lettering
And bleach stains of her sweatshirt

Looking up with her brown eyes glinting
She smiles
Missing teeth among rows of yellow stains
Thank you she laughs
And rips at her syrupy potatoes

I step back towards the kitchen
A blur of laughter, chatter, and plastic forks
Seeps into the distance
As if I am no longer there
Tables and talkers start to spin

Is she okay?

Here...

Honey...

Sit down...

Over here...

Syllables smear together

I am draped onto a stool

The room shuts off

I am lost

Slowly objects become clearer

I make out the faces of worried countenances

The woman

With browning teeth

Runs her lumpy hands along mine

It's ok, Dearie

Murmurs in my ear

Cold hands

Chapped from years spent huddled under awnings outside Macy's

In the pews of St. Anselm's Church

And inside the 14th Street Shelter

Her rough fingers soothe my numb hands

The pungent odor of tobacco mingles with the smoky smell of fried bacon

As she breathes sweet whispers in my ear

I remember the black, plastic bags

Jammed with hats, socks, and gloves

Warm Clothes from Warm Hearts

A striped pair of gloves for a woman

Bleeding from chapped hands

A pair of woolen socks for a man

Whose red-peeled skin pokes out through worn-leather holes

A purple ski jacket for a child shivering

Threadbare shirt clinging to his arms

I come to bring food to the hungry

Kindness to strangers

Clothes to the homeless

Warmth to the cold

I come to bring charity

To the woman with hardened creases

In her weathered face

Whose stiff fingers still stroke soft patterns across my cheeks

I come to bring charity

She teaches me

Love

RAIN

Jeanette Dockins
Northwest Center, 10

Rain...
My heart's very desire
Reminds me of the tears I bottle up
As I look towards the cloudy sky
I open my eyes
To...
The tears I despise
They are the tears I never cried
Pouring down hard
Hard...
Now it's a storm
Rain ice cold
Feels so good
Patterns...
Of a drip drop
Like the tick tock
Of a wristwatch
I love it
Rain...
Matches the pain in my heart
People start
With me but I'm not one to mess with
Third floor
Of this hospital
Of this prison
Rain...
From the heavens
Let it wash my sins away
Let me fall on the right path for I am astray
Rain...

MONSTER

Taylor Gelinias-Galaise

Thomas A. Edison High School, 10

I have become a monster, a murderous, ugly monster.
Nobody sees that all I want is to be accepted, even if I have become a
monster—the monster that killed everyone's precious little girl.
I just want to hear that they love me; I just want to feel the warmth from
the hugs I used to receive.
I just want to be accepted by everyone.

The little girl in the mirror stares back at me with that stupid grin on her
face.
Then right before my eyes, she changes.
Her once shining blue eyes fade into a dull gray, her smile wiped from her
face and replaced with a smirk.
The strong, kind, and confident little girl has become an abomination.
Everywhere she goes she bleeds poison from her veins, everyone
cowers in fear after just one look from her.
Her fake smile ignites the suppressed flame of hatred and hurt inside me.

I feel so much guilt when I look down at my hands.
I can still remember the feel of the blood and the look in her eyes when
her last breath left her body.
I remember her screams; she did not want to die.
I killed her anyway.
I killed that little girl and stole her smile for my own.

I need no punishment for her murder; my body has already become my
jail.
The voices in my mind tell me the truth about myself.
My emotions are bottled up tightly and hidden behind the strong, sturdy
walls that surround my heart.
My life is not fake rainbows and butterflies anymore.
My fairytale dreams have become horrifying graphic nightmares.
Nobody seems to see that my soul is slowly drowning in my own
poisonous body.

Every time I think that I have found a cure for the poison, the little girl
shows up again in my reflection.
Nobody wants the true me, everyone wants that sickly sweet, innocent
little girl.

They want the little girl I used to be, but she is gone and she is never coming back.

My mind has become like one of my many graphic nightmares.
The one where the little girl is running around a labyrinth desperately trying to find her way out, but every door she opens brings her back to the beginning.

I feel hatred as I stare at that little girl running around my labyrinth.
I killed her, so why does she still haunt me?
Why can I not repress all of the dark memories?
The ones that forced the fake smile on my face, and all the lies that tell people I am okay.

Their words stick in my head constantly stabbing their knives into my heart.

“Worthless.” “Crying is for the weak.” “Ugly.” “You’re such a disappointment.”

I hate them, I hate her, and I hate myself.
I am lost inside my own labyrinth.
Stuck with nowhere to go but back, to the beginning, to the place that killed me.
I am lost and all alone.

Why is that little girl not dead?
I killed her, so why does she keep poisoning my heart?
I have to break out of the prison I have created for myself.
I have to destroy her once and for all, so I can finally let these walls down and keep out the hurt that comes with bringing them down.
Once she is dead, there will be no more pain and confusion.

Someday soon, I will break out of this jail and destroy their precious little girl for the last time and become accepted by everyone.

PUPPETS

Sarah King

Thomas A Edison High School, 10

As the stage lit up and the music swindled,
the cello thrummed, and the violin dwindled,
the curtain fell back revealing...black.
And there the spotlight settled and all was calm,
the audience stilled, and above the puppeteer gazed at his palms.

Quiet.

Then down flew the first mannequin blinking with glittering glass eyes,
face blank, indistinguishable between fiction's lies,
and as she began her dance, the puppeteer smiled...
from above, this reality seemed so mild.

So down plummeted the second, third, tenth inanimate being,
and out they gazed at their attentive audience through unseeing eyes,
such a simple, eloquent, pretty, demise.
And their gallery gazed, swayed, how beautiful this interpretation was,
and the dolls livened as they did what they does;
past, present, future spindled in a mirroring mirage,
as hypnosis grasped with clamoring fingers,
the soft aftertaste of chimera lingered.

The lights dimmed, then flashed, settled once more.
A final crescendo foreshadowed what was in store,
And the puppets scuttled back as they withdrew,
with such grace they grazed the stage as they slew,
and then jerkily they crumpled forward as if to feign a bow,
and up, up, upward they ascended, glimpsing, only briefly now.

Dismal eyes stared down at their still audience so sympathetically,
ironically indifferently, almost hypocritically.

And indeed, there hung the audience, unmoving, so deeply moved.
And the blackness behind, beneath, the stage expanded, loomed.
Then, one by one, eyes glittered, staring back,
And the puppeteer clacked his fingers,
"Ahh," he had such a knack.

“Appeal to their sensibilities,” he murmured as he descended from his
roost,
and as he collected their eyes, he cut his audience down from their
noose.

IS AMERICA STILL BEAUTIFUL?

Hanah Desherow

Loudoun Valley High School, 11

A faded flag snaps briskly in the wind
With dirt already in its creases
Held sturdy by a rusted metal pipe.

Once a newly sewn flag shone with pride
It once stood twelve feet high
And reached to the next galaxy,

Willing to seize any rising benefit
Opportunity was its name
Land of the free, home of the brave.

Now, with withered, frozen claws
Rusted flakes of corruption
Rain on our red, white, and blue fields

Bury the waves of grain
Bury the fruited plain
Bury them, he said

Grown, packaged, sold, and eaten
By innocents who just don't know
How alabaster cities once gleamed
Are now broken shadows of what they once were
Recall the promise,
Recall respect
Recall honor
America

A SOLDIER'S POEM

Sarah Matthews

Commonwealth Governor's School: Spotsylvania High School, 11

I stand my watch in silence
Between the steel-grey guns
Staring at the nothingness
Twixt myself and the setting sun

The stillness stands eternal
Till broken by a cry
A hawk—but still it sounds like
The comrades I've seen die

And as I stand in twilight
A flag above my head
The only thing that I still trust
The white and blue and red

I think about the convoy
And the chaos in the town
A horrifying memory
Etched in lights and smoke and sound

The shots from lonely buildings
Our fire in return
How the firefight continued
As the town began to burn

A child in a doorway
A gunshot in the air
Her terrified expression
And blood now soaks her hair

The corner that I crouched in
Away and out of sight
The paper that I saw and read
With barely any light

A thought I had not had yet
In this long and bloody war
A sentiment so widely shared
By the men who'd gone before

"What if we are wrong?"
And I, startled, caught my breath
If the blood but flowed for nothing
My heart quivered in my breast

I had not thought about it
Ever in that way
But now the thought beleaguers me
Every second of the day

If every man that I had killed
Was for an empty cause
If all the innocents had died
Because our thoughts were flawed

A thought I could not handle
And so I tried to hide
But there is no place to run to
When the monster lies inside

"What if we are wrong?"
As I'm standing at my post
A single word from me tonight
And a man becomes a ghost

I hide behind my uniform
A husk of what I was
From the world that slowly bleached me
Of life and thought and love

Slowly I've become a shell
Held only by my will
For the world but sees the glory
Not the many I have killed

Now I stand my watch in silence
Twixt the deadly, quiescent guns
And wonder if I'll be here
When tomorrow's sunset comes

THE CONFLICTED CHRISTIAN

Abriana Neal-Donald
Colonial Forge High School, 11

We sleep with sin playing beats and lyrics in our ears
Cry with the devil as he wipes away our tears
We try to enter into heaven with fake IDs
We have dined with the Lord's sworn enemies
At school I question Jesus when he begins to teach
I raise my hand and give this conflicted speech:
If you love us, why do our families die?
If you exist, why does evolution say you're a lie?
If The Bible is so important, why does it seem so boring?
If the world is so bad, why am I tempted by its luring?
Finally I'll put my hand down and wait for Jesus to reply
Maybe He'll say "good question" or be an offended kind of guy
I guess I won't ever know till the end of my day
Until He puts a demerit on my desk and walks away
To the principal's office to seek forgiveness again
Without Him this school wouldn't know where to begin
So Principal God, you called, here I am at my best
He finished a cigar, pulled out my file and replied,
"Your mind is a conflicted mess."

SOLDIER

Mary Sun

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, 11

A wraith escapes you with no remorse
Bloody your knuckles, stay your course; Onward, Soldier!
To the Land that steals light, find the Bloodless exoneration we seek tonight

A heart strikes twelve upon the dead, but Bury them, bury them, hilt up to
head.

Collective is the march, binding the fear
The old smoke-clad friend leaves you Here

Blue raindrops wrap around ivory eyes
Unclosing, immutable, there is no fight
Left In the hours
To be wrested from the ages, Squeezed from the life-vein of
Fools and their sages.

Equalizer wrapped in a dusty velvet cape—Soldier! Blue is Gray, washed in
red all the same.

Pain, O pain...A wonderful companion
Accost him with musket, memories, the bullet left in Canyon!

Crystallized is the unfinished verse,
For shame, for sorrow, for the Vestal hearth
Care you not, dear Soldier, to kneel down and pray
To pray? is persecution, brilliance unequaled on Accursed day.

The eagle watches, but only the vulture sees
the Gunshots before gunpowder, death spattered on trees.
Light up, you stars, light light Light!
Onward, Soldier! Solidarity, the fight

You cry out for recognition of a sacrifice gained
Flank his inner tempest, while the outer is so Trained.
Battalion, regiment, cavalry core
All here are one—why do they call out for more?

Transfixed
under bloodless Earth's skies
His ground is soaking, the other man's cries.

Rays of sunlight trace over the dirt
The dirt supports ground both walk on, and work.
The ground that blankets the horizon for me.
The Horizon, the Horizon, that sets a Soldier-man free.

THE LOVERS

Peter Town

*Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology,
11*

The lovers sit, now speaking, now silent, trapped in their
own timeless world.

They lean on each other as the night draws on as
though they mean to merge into a single body, sitting in
each other's arms on the hillside forever.

In the spring they sit adorned with flowers and in the
summer their hair tosses in the warm breeze or whips
by in a summer storm as they sit.

Autumn comes and they sit, their coats red and yellow
against the blue sky.

Through the winter, though the icy wind cuts through their
clothes, the lovers sit in the open, finding shelter in
each other's arms as the snow settles in their hair and
on the ground around them.

Each night on her trip across the sky, the moon looks down
at the lovers, casting their long shadows on the grass
behind them.

She sets and they sit in the darkness, swaying softly together
as they await the sunrise.

PACE

Courtney Bryce
Brentsville District High School, 12

Swollen seeds that sprout in snow
Are raptured, captured, struck, then grown.
Winding roots that will diverge
Twisting, twirling, twining, merge,
A soundless, no toes to trod
A searching, lurching down through sod,
Partners doomed to meet and spin
Hiding, finding the weave begins.
Soulmates locked in a searing pace
The burning, yearning, blazing grace.
Fire to condemn, constrict, to deal
Enveloped in a cavern that cannot feel.
Land absorbs when the angel cries
For a world who suffers, loves and dies.

SIGNATURE

Julie Burkhardt
West Springfield High School, 12

It's the last time I'll see you for a while
But sure, I will.
I signed your yearbook last year, right?
I can't remember what I said—
Probably something like
I'll miss you.
Can't wait to see you again!
Nice knowing you.

Eyeliner runs to greet my black dress
As I sign with silver sharpie—
Miss you so much already, Collin!
XOXO
Julie

I hold tight to the handles of your coffin
As I await your funeral.

ONE TRUTH

Nadia Laher

Lake Braddock Secondary School, 12

We the naturally hopeful,
With longing born in us
By the placement of double X chromosomes,
Think “Maybe next year,”
Every year.
Watching bouquets of cheap flowers
Parade around bright hallways on the arms
Of the type of girls who are born with boyfriends.
We imagine future fourteenths of February,
To stave off yearning on this one.

And the years pass,
Our hopes dwindling like sand
Rushing through our fingers,
Without regard for our efforts to hold on.

And then we the naturally hopeful,
This nation of girls with Prince Charming ideals
Instilled in our heads once upon a time,
Begin to realize.
That everything looks better when you don't have it,
That what most of us are searching for
Is everything but the 10 dollar bouquet affection.
That love is not what you parade down the fluorescent-lit hallway,
But what you let grab your hand in the darkness,
When nobody else is watching.

IF I TOOK MY HEART

Coleman Merenda
West Springfield High School, 12

If I took my heart
And held it over my head
Opening its valves
To let the issue of my cares
Upon the world

Then all could see
My timid thoughts run wildly
Into the crisp and frigid air
To settle and crystallize
In perfect symmetry

Were it possible, I'd relieve
My soul of my body
And send its nucleus soaring
As a borealis
In the night sky

As it were, I must withhold
My self to my own
And prick myself—blood runs
Down my fingers
Through the pen
Onto the paper

FASHION STATEMENT

Jessica Moon
West Springfield High School, 12

As I walk through the hallways,
People comment on my “cute” dog tags,
Oblivious to the meaning behind them.
Inscribed on metal is a six-year-old boy’s name.

Because he is a child soldier in Burma,
Given a gun as if it were a toy,
He is treated like a slave,
Making him nameless.
He is denied existence by the government,
Making him faceless.

Taught to kill at the age of three,
He holds the AK-47,
Wishing to be rescued,
To be given back his identity.

POETRY 101

Chloé Poulson

West Springfield High School, 12

Forget all that I have taught you,
At least for a little while.

Today we're going to sleep under azure skies,
Writhe in antagonizing rain,
Discover something new,
Relearn what we already know,
Laugh,
Cry,
Arch our eyebrows,
Punch holes in the walls,
Fall in love,
And open our eyes.

We're going to write exaggerated, long, never-ending, stretching-on-to-
infinity epics.

Or just...
One.
Word.

We're going to spit on the rules.
We're going to step on regulation's spotless shoes.

We'll define the proper

s

t

r

u

c

ture.

We'll let punctuation off
With a little less than a warning.

We'll realize that words don't have to rhyme,
But if we want them to, that's fine.

Let's lose the spelling computishuns,
But still hold a trophy of our own.

Everything we do today will mean something.
Everything we do today will mean everything...
To someone.

ELEGY FOR A YOUNG GIRL

Giuliana Reynolds
West Springfield High School, 12

Awaken, young girl, blind to loss
Of your true beauty,
Reveling in life that seemed to be glossed.

Every step forward
Forever anticipated;
Every step back
Forever abandoned.

When years have gone,
Wrinkles lie heavy;
Dusk replaces dawn.

You will look back—
At pages stained and faded,
At life once strong and radiant—
An old woman lamenting a young girl.

PAINTING MY NAILS

Katherine Sandfry

Lake Braddock Secondary School, 12

*The brush flicks over another fingernail
leaving parallel flashes of gloss.*

July has settled here, flat on her back
and is getting things caught in her hair.

*Still, he wears black in the sun on his porch,
a black t-shirt and heavy black denim.*

People coupled to fans and lawn chairs
ferment in their houses, new thirty years back.

*He surveys the mirrors of still-wet polish,
pleased at the sight of his face.*

Someone fumbles past with a sunburn and a hound
and the wrist tied into the leash.

*He sets his nails with a casual breath
cool as a wind from the sea.*

Someone turns a corner and spies
a man's painted nails in the open, in sight.
That sunburned someone stops and stutters as the other holds up
his hands to the light.

*Yes, I am painting my nails on my porch
and wearing full black in July.
My AC is out and fresh air feels fine;
there's no way your staring can shut me inside.*