



2017

FIFTH ANNUAL
BATTLE
OF **BARDS**
POETRY CONTEST

WINNING ENTRIES



Poudre River
Friends OF THE LIBRARY



POUDRE RIVER
PUBLIC LIBRARY
DISTRICT

FIFTH ANNUAL BATTLE OF THE BARDS POETRY CONTEST AND POETRY READING

To celebrate National Poetry Month 2017, the Poudre River Public Library District is holding this special program to engage both adult and teenage creative writers in our community for a multi-generational poetry contest and poetry reading event.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

THE POUDRE RIVER FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY
WOLVERINE FARM PUBLISHING COMPANY & BOOKSTORE
OLD FIREHOUSE BOOKS

MICHAEL LIGGETT	<i>Battle of the Bards Host; Former Poudre River Public Library District Board of Trustees member; Fort Collins attorney who served on the Poudre School District Board of Education, and Fort Collins Baseball Club and Foothills Rehabilitation Center Boards.</i>
MELISSA BEAVERS	<i>Public Services Librarian; Battle of the Bards Committee Member; Adult Poetry Judge</i>
KEN DRAVES	<i>Deputy Director & Harmony Library Manager; Battle of the Bards Committee Member</i>
MEG SCHIEL	<i>Library Assistant; Battle of the Bards Committee Member; Adult Poetry Judge</i>
MOLLY THOMPSON	<i>Jobs and Career Librarian; Battle of the Bards Committee Member; Teen Poetry Judge</i>
DIANE TUCCILLO	<i>Teen Services Librarian; Battle of the Bards Committee Member; Teen Poetry Judge and Battle of the Bards co-host.</i>

TEEN CATEGORY JUDGES AND CO-HOSTS:

SAMANTHA YE and CC (Cecelia APOCADA	<i>Samantha and CC are both seniors at Fort Collins High School and participate in an eclectic array of activities. Music, one of their core interests, takes the majority of their school time, as they are involved with pit orchestra, chamber orchestra, symphony orchestra, and symphonic band. Outside of school, they are both members of the Interesting Reader Society in the Poudre River Public Library District, where they review/share books and volunteer at library events. Through the library district, both girls have presented at local community forums about various forms of diversity in today's world.</i>
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ADULT CATEGORY JUDGES:

WILLIAM HENRY FOSTER, III	<i>English Faculty at Front Range Community College for over 8 years and has taught a variety of courses in literature and College Composition; served as the Writing Program Assistant for the Rhetoric, Languages, and Philosophy (RLP) department at the Larimer campus; is Advisor for Writers on the Storm, a creative writing club at Larimer campus; currently the RLP department's Lead instructor for both Technical Writing and Concurrent Enrollment.</i>
CHLOÉ LEISURE	<i>Born and raised in Marquette, Michigan, Chloé holds an MA in Creative Writing from Northern Arizona University and an MFA in Poetry from Colorado State University. She currently teaches elementary enrichment creative writing classes and a poetry class through OSHER titled, "Inhabiting Poetry, Inhabiting the World." Her poetry has appeared in Matter, PANK, Paterson Literary Review, A Poetic Inventory of Rocky Mountain National Park, and Permafrost. She was the 2014 Fort Collins Poet Laureate, and is the author of the chapbook, The End of the World Again.</i>

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ADULT FINALISTS

TINY ATOMS

by Kristi Joy Buss

Spiraling in my belly
Now awake, now asleep
Corkscrewing her way into this world
Via my blood and flesh
Like a slick red bridge.

Tell me, where did you come from?
Spinning through space and time
Tiny atoms and molecules
Becoming flesh.
Spinning
Reliving the past
Folded over and quiet.

I don't know you, do I?
Have we met before?
Tender and swimming
Laughing and spinning
Tiny atoms made into flesh and bone.

THE DUMPSTER BLUES

by Suzanne Davies

My back parallel
to the wood planks,
I delicately side-stepped
past the dumpster, taking care
not to touch it, as I made my way
to the rear, where no one could see us.

It was a cool evening, perhaps too cool
for an infant, even if he was bundled in my arms.
It was peaceful here - free from contempt, so when I saw
the loveseat hidden from view, I sat down with our son willingly,
sinking low on its collapsed springs. Our grown son, an infant then,
turned his face into my shoulder and drifted off to sleep, unaware of
our circumstances and the too-cool air, wholly trusting, the way children do.

Looking up, a million stars glowed in the blue-black sky - the color of the asphalt beneath us.
That is where you found us, your eyes wide, startled that we would seek refuge here.
You wrapped us in a black sleeping bag, and with your arm around me,
ushered us out, and as we walked, at the end of my dream, I thought,
perhaps there is hope for us still.

SOARING

by Joan Hellmund

For my mother-in-law

You ask what I remember of Virginia's later years.

It is the dusky wheelchair rides
the promised glimpses of great blue herons at creek side
the golden light
the elegant, elongated throat
the graceful arms like fans unfolding
 flap and soar
above the treetops and second story houses with their cares
above the yet to be negotiated stairs

To watch, again
the quilted farmland spreading out
 muslin blouses waving on the line,
 lavender shadows lengthening their spread
 well beyond the cottonwood's slender waving arms
 and gnarled roots, that hug the brook stone
 and sip, with rooted straws
 puddles left from summer rain.

Here, on the ribboned bike path
 where the mountains meet the plains
Virginia nightly rises up
To soar—with the heron's enormous, pond-skimming grace—
 one blurred periwinkle line
 stretching across the rolling hills and prairie's ample waistline,
 reveling in the breeze's every note

Free in the hushed golden light
 To take wing

STILL HERE

by Diane McCrann

You eased your way through
the locked door that spring,
brushed aside cobwebs,
stroked brokenness
to sleep.

Like the incense of red roses
you placed on the kitchen table each week,
we rested
in the ordinary
generosity
of moments.

Above troubled waters,
we laughed,
got married,
watched dreams merge,
nodded yes to all
of life.

We stayed that spring
and forty others~
braided sunrise to sunset,
offered children to the night sky
and the moon
tunneled her gaze
upon us.

Breathless we pause ~
how much
longer?

MASKED BANDIT

by Larry Perez

On Sundays and Mondays,
Try as I might,
I can't seem to find
That old Loggerhead Shrike.

On Tuesdays and Wednesdays
I search high and low
But never discover
Where he likes to go.

On Thursdays and Fridays
Its more of the same,
With that Loggerhead
Playing his hide-and-seek game.

But on Saturday mornings when I grab the gas
To gas up my mower and cut short my grass,
I know I'll soon seen him at very long last
As I fire up the motor and make my first pass.

The roar of my engine is his cue to show
From his perch on my fence he just watches me go
Then tilts his heads slightly and focuses low
For a sign of some movement coming up from below.

See beetles to him are like Cool Ranch Doritos
and grasshoppers crunch like some salty Tostitos
Worms are spaghetti, and grubs are like fries;
Roaches are tacos, and lizards are pies.
And all of those spiders, and crickets, and flies
Come crawling out soon as my mower goes by.

That Loggerhead scoops up each miniature treat.
Without making a whistle, a song, or tweet,
While always on guard, staying light on his feet,
He feasts in my yard and finds plenty to eat.

Then he'll end morning brunch
with a lick of his beak
And retreat to the shadows
'till this time next week.

THIRD BIRTHDAY

by Joanna Rago

January 31, 1961

My mother works in a bank.
She leaves me with Ida,
the German woman next door.

Itchy sores cover my body.

Ida rubs pink lotion
on the pox,
singing “Ich liebe dich”.

My mother brings home
Chatty Cathy, almost as tall
as I am,

I brush and brush her shiny hair.

Looking into her blue glass eyes,
I sing “Ich liebe dich”.
and tell her not to scratch.

THIS MAN, THIS ME

by Erik Rock

Today I met this man
stepping off an overcrowded bus.
He walked head hung low,
footsteps sinking into concrete.

People around us wore rubber faces.
He wore none because his body was its own mask.
I offered him mine, but
he waved it away like he was praying.

I unzipped the man's coat and saw inside
the frantic beating of a little girl's heart.

I tried to carve away his scar tissue with my pocket knife.
"Leave me," said she,
"If you cut me out, he'll fall apart at the seams."

I closed up the jacket, my fingers aching
from pulling at the mismatched zipper halves.

I left to retrace cemented footprints.
The man re-boarded the bus,
the horizon on his back.

I wept from two sets of eyes.

IN THE BACK OF THE FRIDGE

by Belle Schmidt

In the back of the fridge there's something black
I spied it in the back when I reached for a snack.
It could have been cheese, but it grew in the dark
Into something big like a man-eating shark.

In the back of the fridge glows something green
I imagine it's kryptonite, which I've never seen.
It shines like a spotlight and emits eerie rays
I remember it well from my comic book days

In the back of the fridge winks something white
With eyes that blink in the room's bright light;
A mummy sits there sipping curdled milk,
All wispy and misty and swathed in silk.

In the back of the fridge rests something red
It gives a high-five and shakes its bushy head.
What is it? There's no way for me to know
But, its hairy toes are gripping the shelf below.

In the back of the fridge burps something blue;
I wonder what it could be? I haven't a clue.
It looks like a centipede with a thousand legs
Oh yes, I remember! It used to be deviled eggs.

In the back of the fridge the blob is yellow,
It may be a dried-up bowl of sugar-free Jello.
It bounces like rubber and rolls in the dark
And I bet it's been there since Noah's ark.

In the back of the fridge pulses something purple;
It's shaped like a saucer and exhales with a burble.
I'm afraid it's an alien from somewhere in space
And I know I'll disintegrate if I look at its face.

In the back of the fridge is something gray
That sits on its haunches and shivers all day.
It's wearing a big fur coat of fuzzy mould
To try to keep out the refrigerator's cold

In the back of the fridge bubbles something brown
I see, in the putrid puddle, five flies have drowned.
"Yuck!" I say, then try to silently slink away;
"Right mom, I'll clean the fridge—but not today

THE OTHER EGGS

by Morgan Taylor

With the egg money I bought a kite,
strong and flat,
that would stand on its tail and
howl at the moon.
With gut twine and hope I flew it at night
and the strength of its heart poked holes in the
soft pupil of the blind lunar eye.

With a thrill and a cry, I felt its tug,
I knew not where,
and it danced out of sight and let me believe
that it was high in the wind and beyond,
that it was the jewel of my wandering dreams,
cast up from the far volcano of sleep.

We were awake in the night, my kite and I.

With a broad knife, and bold, I severed the twine
that spread between the moon and my sighs.

As a braque, high and wide my kite leapt
and it flew away on the tide of the wind,
swinging not on gut twine but on a rope of random stars.

And soft down we fell in the dark,
my kite and I.

With the dawn came the cock and the crow
and the hen and the egg and the clutch
and I stole the hen's new eggs . . .

and I sold them . . .

and with the other egg money . . .

I bought a kite.

FLOWER CENTERS

by Shelley Widhalm

Flowers all have centers,
but I don't.
Daisies blare happiness in the yellow,
an eternal hat around the middle
a geometric equation of this petal
so much distance from the next and the next.
No wonder they have it together.

Some like sunflowers
have petals radiating out
in preordained patterns
at times bending into seeming sadness,
tucking in their seeds
goodnight, good morning,
the little ones are safe.

All flowers have stems
a line between the ground to anchor
and the head to think and wonder.
They lift their faces to the sky
finding blue and warmth, sighing
with hunger.

Then there are the disorganized flowers,
dahlias with petals scattered about as if from
throwing salt,
caught on a stem without seeming completion.
Even so, they have their center where neck meets
stem meets sky.
The answers all in the unfolding of
accepting daylight.

Moon flowers, though, bloom in the dark
in the center of the night
when we're dreaming of other things
not whether we are all put together
in our lives.

ADULT HONORABLE MENTIONS

RELICS

by Stina Branson

We shamble with our eyes downcast,
Weighted by these things we carry.
We cradle them as brittle bones
In a golden reliquary.

We'd fight for them, these ancient shards,
Worshiped as the men we married,
Who crumbled from their pedestals,
Not immortal, nor yet buried.

Yet we hold dear these instruments,
Cruel tools that thrust and parry
And flay our wounded souls anew,
Render us forever wary.

THE SEAHORSE

by Suzanne Davies

A tiny Geisha
with downcast eyes
came to mind as I watched
her glide past coyly,

propelled, it seemed,
only by the delicate fluttering
of a rice paper fan,
securely fastened

to her curved behind.
Crowned in regal coronet,
she complements her world
of sand and sea grass

adorned in sea foam green,
though she changes color often,
like those in silk Kimonos do.
Then, in a moment,

she paused,
fixing her eyes on me.
There was intelligence -
a connection;

these weren't fishes, I knew,
but rather droplets
of our human soul.
And like dew on a petal,

translucent and pale
but without such ceremony
of an orchard in bloom,
she is no less important.

WATCHING YOUNG BUDDHA PULL WEEDS

by Dennis McDonald

She crawls on hands and knees
Face to the earth
Scoring parallel lines in black soil
Next to the turquoise row
Of onion spears

She does not think
Of the food they will be
Only listens to the bulging melody
Of their growth

She seeks out other green sprigs
Plucks them
Feels their soft tug
The exuberant suction
Of their roots against the earth
And gently places each
Between the rows
So they might live again

She pulls stinging nettle
With her bare hands
And smiles at the soft tingle of life
That will last forever

She savors the velvet leaf
Of the button weed
Brushes it against her cheek
Only for a moment
And smiles again

At the end of the row
She rests in a tranquil pose
Green exploding all around
Erupting from the earth
Toward the cosmic sky
And the cotton puffs of clouds

Across the road
She hears the hollow thrum
Of a tractor
Spraying death mist
In the low shimmering air
Doing her work faster

She sips water
From a Mason jar
Warmed by the sun
Feels it set in her belly
And glides back on hands and knees
To crawl another row

PHASES OF OUR DYING SUN

by Erik Rock

A sun in its death throes swells up and out;
It starts when we're young and luminous.
You tell me to ignore this peelback of fate's skin
And to tether us to one spot so we can make it through.
/ Have you noticed the stars are gone? /

Umbras break through and I lose every color, every moment.
I don't recognize myself in the reflection of you,
irises turned to cateyes from the sun's strobecast.
/ You ask me, what will we all do when the sun leaves us?/

Hewn sepia tones waltz to and fro on your skin
as I'm pressed into the steam of failing oceans.
You release yourself out to the universe in bursts.
Incandescent pockets of light and tephra fill us
and we crawl around the inside of each other's skin.
Gravity plummets and flees, too weak to make us stay.
We twirl in the air, suspended like ghosts.
/ What happens when rogue meteors fall to Earth? /

I'm the last man alive on a withering planet,
lingering while the sky tumbles from your lips.
We're waiting for your body's atmospheric reentry again,
stalling for wholeness and a sunrise that never comes.
I tell you, they can't hold back our atoms forever.
/ Do you no longer wish you were dying? /

GRANDMOTHER

by Joseph Sterling

The floors in her house were cool even in burning times.
When they creaked I wondered, had the matriarch returned?
Her Egyptian cane lingered, leaning in the musty hallway corner
with its Anubis head grinning.
The hieroglyphics bore carved canals that ferried dust along its
ravaged hull tinted yellow with aged varnish.
Small hands sought its surface, hoping to conjure her smile
or maybe her sugar cookies.
Yet the hall held only gloom, a sort of Stygian night bloated
with family secrets that meant to hold immortal sway
as the front yard baked brown and her prized carnations faltered
during the drought that followed Grandmother's wake.

TEEN FINALISTS

BURNING BALLET

by Emma Boice

I watch a flame on kindling fire
Dancing in the wind
I feel a spark upon my chest
And feel again as though I'm pinned.

I'm trapped. I see a glowing light
Beyond the eye can watch
And though it seems impossible
My heart plays short hopscotch.

The spark has grown a fire
Whips my body to and fro
Attempts to try and suffocate it
The fire resists and grows.

I pat my embered skin
And my tears turn into steam
I'm further away
Soon no one will hear me scream.

I sit alone in silence
In my vaporous cloud of tears
Then realize every pain is gone
Fire burned my fears.

My hands are still ablaze
My feet calmly burning
I'm a flame of fancy-free
And my feet are slowly turning.

I twirl and dance a tune
I hum along with a beat
And dance a graceful movement
Every move emanating heat.

No worry of a fire
No more problems to dread
A plié upon a pyre
I'm a spark, human form dead.

I'm a flame on a kindling fire
Dancing in the sway
I send a spark upon a chest
And perform the burning ballet.

SPARE ME A WISH?

by Janessa Chenot

Noon finds me sitting on tired, parch'd streets
Excuse me ma'am, spare me a golden piece?
My longing voice inquires on repeat,
With ev'ry no, my hopes begin to cease.

I close my eyes, tip my head to blue skies,
And think of all the things that I long for,
While praying to stand strong despite their lies,
Remember everything I need to soar.

A golden emblem of my hope in palm,
The fiery sunlight catches wisps of dreams.
It sinks through sparkling waves into the calm,
All of my coins at the gold bottom gleam.

Another piece in wishing wells I spent,
Excuse me ma'am, spare me another cent?

WALKING THE STREETS OF LIFE

by Janessa Chenot

You, skipping down the street;
Look in the window shop reflections,
What do you see?
Pretty, pink dress and
Shining ribbon shoes,
Long brown hair
Cascading in curls.
Brightest smile,
Eager eyes.
You, pause.
Look in cracked windowpanes,
What do you see?
Torn black skinny jeans,
Battered combat boots,
Straight blond dyed hair
Pulled into war braids.
Bitter smile,
Sad eyes.
You, pay attention.
Your battles are not over yet.
Look in your scuffed armor,
Tell me what you see.
Long black sleeves to hide your
secrets,
Shoelaces dragging in the street,
Wild now-black hair

Cropped short in unfeeling haste.
Tight lips,
Cold eyes.
You, wait.
Wandering dim lit halls,
White gown trailing dusty floors.
No windows, no mirrors.
Look at yourself.
Bare feet,
Wrinkled hands,
Wispy white hair hangs
In tentative curls,
Asking if it's okay to return
To what they once were.
Soft smile,
Lost eyes.
In the end,
Your decisions
Make or break you.
Look inside yourself.
Now what do you see?

PENCIL

by Dominique Chesson

Who is the one to ease your pain?
and erase your mistakes?
To pick up and correct the damage you made.
Who is the one to tell your story?
Your lips have been zipped from the hand of fear,
But I'm here to help you yell and scream your story,
So, when they read this they will hear you loud and clear.
You use me, and I let you.
The harder you push on me, the more I break.
This is my only purpose, to please you.
Eventually I break until I'm unfixable.
Can you fix me?
I am nobody, yet I do everything for you,
I kill myself slowly everyday just for you in the end to leave.
I thought you needed me, but you left.
I thought you were looking for me, I've been by your side
This whole time.
Yet I feel
Stranded.
Alone.
You found something new,
I guess I will always be number two.
At a push of your fingertip, you now have exactly what you need.
An upgrade mechanical pencil.
A better me,
I was too much work, I see.
You didn't realize they break more easily.
I could handle the weight...but you couldn't
You dropped me and turn the page.
Pick up someone else, I guess I've been replaced.

SIGHT

by Amber Kranz

We walked down the path
And you marveled at every little thing
That was all so natural
Yet so beautiful to me.
Each little flower,
You bent to touch,
Caressing fingers,
Fingers that could see.
You whirled round
Beneath the ocean of blue,
Laughing.
Every stone by the pond
Was beautiful to you,
Different as the many faces
You had never seen.

Now you are busy.
You turn your grey back
On the small miracles
That were so wonderful, long ago.
You used to laugh
But now
You see the misery in the world,
Drowning out
The little things.
Now you walk
Wilted.
A flower snaps
Beneath your heel.

BURNING MAN

by Cameron Montague

The playa calls,
And we are brought together
Breathing the dust,
And blowing the fire.

The man calls,
He whispers his love,
Intertwined with the wind
Fueling the flame

The temple calls,
Burning our anger,
Burning our pain,
Until there is just ashes,
Upon a smoky grave

BEFORE DAWN

by Gabrielle Nadig

Inked darkness has no bite—
Fell shadows flee from song—
You dwell in spheres of light.

Falsey-veiled good nights
Conceal teeth like prongs—
Yet inked darkness has no bite.

Armed against the fight
With a sword, sharp and long,
You dwell in spheres of light.

You will not die, despite
Fear charging on, headstrong,
For inked darkness has no bite.

Yet on the sinister battle height,
As you wrestle with wrathful wrongs—
Remember, you dwell in spheres of light.

On creeps the gloomy blight
Loud rings the baneful gong,
But inked darkness has no bite—
I dwell in spheres of light.

AND IN AN INSTANT

by Alexis Reese

And in an instant
She was red
A sizzling sunset
Burning up in flames
She roared
Loud
Louder than thoughts
Than reason
Billowed up,
She turned
Into crimson smoke
Encompassed

And in an instant
She was blue
Deep like the ocean
Dark like the night
She welled
Up
Up until the swelling
Was a wave
A tsunami
Coming down
Crashing down
Collapsed upon herself
Numb

And in an instant
She was white
Light as a cloud
Free as a dove
Above emotion
Blank
Floating down
She was snow,
Soft and sparkling
Blanketed across
A peaceful realm
Cold

And in an instant
There was black
There was void
Lifted into nothing
She was
Gone

WORKING TITLE

by Tate Thurgood

My teacher tells me to write about something I love,
so I write about space.
I ask the stars how it feels to become beautiful
only when they are crumbling apart;
Gather lyrics from the devastation of a black hole,
and wonder if the melody inside the chasm is sorrowful, too.

My teacher hands me my paper and asks for something more human.
So I write about hope.

I hold it in my hands like the baby bird in my yard
whose paper wings were not strong enough for their fall;
Patch together the ragged blanket I wore down as a child,
and tell myself it's okay for dreams to be scared, too.

My teacher gives me my paper again and asks for something more realistic.
So I write about my brother.

I write him letters about the empty spaces he left
in conversations at the dinner table;
Finish the lines of duets he was supposed to sing,
and pray that someone over there will miss him, too.

My teacher holds out my paper once more and tells me I am missing the point.
So I write about words.

I pull them from the parts of me I wouldn't share
without a title to hide them;
Spin the galaxies of possibility beneath my fingers
the way my brother spun me on his shoulders
and asked if I could see my troubles from up there.

My teacher doesn't give my paper back again, because I never finish it.
I write about the things they tell me not to
until my fingertips are painted the color of my heartbeat,
the color of my brother's folded sheets,
the color of the sun if you look close enough to see
not everything is what we thought it was.

We are not writing words,
we are writing letters to the stars we used to be,
to the brothers we wish to become,
to the hope we pray we'll have when the words run out.
We are writing to what we love.

So if they give it back to you,
you did it right.

MOM

by Lesly Vargas

My world is a black and white film,
With very few people in color,
But my mom,
My mom is the color.

I am an old soul,
And She the young one.
One look at her and you see her bright,
Beautiful soul sleeping through her smile,
Through her eyes.

Her beautiful eyes,
They're as smooth as Dove chocolate,
And carry the light of a thousand suns.
Her smile is the moon,
Bringing light into my darkest nights.

She is cafe con leche,
Her skin the warming color of cafe
And her accent as thick and sweet as the con leche.

When faced with difficulty
She is as strong as a boulder.
When faced with rejection
She is as stubborn as a bull

She has had doors slammed in her face
But still she stands strong and tall,
Like the empire state building,
Refusing to be knocked down.

But despite everything she is still able to smile
And tell us how lucky we are to be where we are.
Every day she says:
“Tienes que estudiar duro, mijia
So you won't end up like me.”
How does she not know
That she is the woman I aspire to be.

TEEN HONORABLE MENTIONS

THE DAY'S LOST LIGHT

by Colin Christensen

From the mountains comes a ray
A last golden bit of day
The chiseled mountains, black and dark
Against a heavenly orange mark
Above is an ombré black cloud
Making Mother Nature proud
Soon descending to the darkest night
But the sun won't go without a fight
Leaving the day's lost light

SPELLING

by Nicole Dille

I will win the Spelling Be.
As you can plainly sea.

I can spell from egggs to aples,
Kichen and galore.

Zoologist, an easy one,
And raptor even more.

I will win the spelling be
As you can plainly sea

With one last hora!
Of my favorite word of all-irony.

MY GALAXY

by Ryan Green

I watch the planets revolve,
the storms Jupiter can't resolve.

I observe the beauty on Earth,
carrying life forms of immeasurable worth.

And her sister Venus,
Lies in the space between us.

The furthest, the hottest, the ones with rings,
The closest, the largest, they fly as if with wings.

The stars all around,
Twinkling without a sound.

When they look at me,
What do they see?
My children all revolving around me.

I AM WATER

by Saige GriffisWest

I am water.
I seep through sturdy stone,
I carve through tall mountains.
I am the pulsing heart and vessels of this earth.

I am water.
I bring both life and death, fear and joy.
I am salty but at the same time sweet.
I am both gentle and raging.

I am water.
I fall from high above,
Flow deep beneath your feet.
I shape the face of this earth like a sculptor hard at work.

I am water.
At my feet there is sand and silt, plants and sunken ships.
My icy fingers extend to the North and to the South.
My soul is filled with creatures from the depths of your imagination.
At my face there are birds and thirsty wanderers.

I am loved by so many, yet my tears still fall from the sky.
In the Pacific, islands of waste and trash float through me,
tangled with the carcasses and remains of my animals.
In the Gulf I am coated in a slick of oil.
In the Atlantic, my fish are gone.

I am water.
If you need me so much,
Why am I dying.

TO STAND UP TO DEATH
(BASED ON THE TESTIMONY OF HOLOCAUST
SURVIVOR, MRS. SARA OSTRZEGA)
by Audrey Moehring

The claws of evil patiently wait in shadows,
So constant and apparent and unseen.
To strive to lock this growing midnight away where it belongs
In Hitler's mind, is an impossible dream.
Yet strength comes from delusions of hope like these, and
I will not die young.

And out of this infinite sea of black
Leaps desperation, the beast of the mad.
It lurks in the ghetto where I must dwell
And wash with the souls of the dead.
I am alive yet cannot say that I am living, but
I will not die young.

They say the chimney is my final destination,
That the laughing flames are my only fate.
I taste the sugar and kindness a boy has brought me;
He is left to the taste of death and shame.
But what's gone is gone, Auschwitz slaughtered it with ease, and
I will not die young.

Midnight lurks in the eyes of the hopeless.
Desperation creeps from empty stomach to soul,
But the sound of hammer and pan and breaking hearts
Is a beautiful sound to behold.
The hammer is the heart that must forever pound, pound, pound, for
I refuse to die young.

But desperation has haunted, hunted me skillfully.
With my final train ride comes its long desired feast.
Shot or starved, how will I die?
Starvation chooses the hopeless flight of my feet.
I run to greet death.

Perhaps I will die young.

Yet somehow torment is dead, not I!
How the forest floor smells of freedom and hope!
With each snap of a twig, I snap a Nazi's back
Thanks to desperation, my deceptive hero
And the courage few had to stand up to death, the strength to believe that
I will not die young.

THE LAST DAY OF POMPEII

by Gabrielle Nadig

I saw it all. The day Pompeii burned—burned.
Jove's fury reigned, and scoured with molten fire
The town. My uncle I still see against
The prow, as he sailed on into the hell
Pompeii had then become. Then it began.
The screams—ye gods!—I beg, I plead; spare me.
They haunt my dreams. The lightning-laced black cloud—
The Hound of Hades rising o'er Capri
Did knell the end of dreams, of hopes, of lives.
Forgive me, uncle. We left you, and fled
The falling ash, that threatened death for all.
As our ship crested tainted waves I thought
Of you. The sun shook off its gloom and I—

I thought of you. Vesuvius, unquenched
In mockery attempted to bury
A single snowy dove with choking ash.

GLASS

by Mariah Reis

An unmelting shard of ice
Breaking into a thousand pieces
Capable of infinite forms
Shaped any way a person pleases

An object given many names
Water that's been stopped and stilled
The clearest of the clear
An unused jar waiting to be filled

Sharp when broken
Shielding against wind or bullets
Stained to any color desired
Pointed edges grinded to dull it

Liquefied grains of sand
Hardened with no smell or taste
Able to withstand
Light reflecting from its face

A window letting in light
Allowing a glimpse of the outdoors
Sculpted into marble form
With still much more to use it for



FIFTH ANNUAL
BATTLE
OF THE BARDS
POETRY CONTEST



CONNECT
TO CURIOSITY