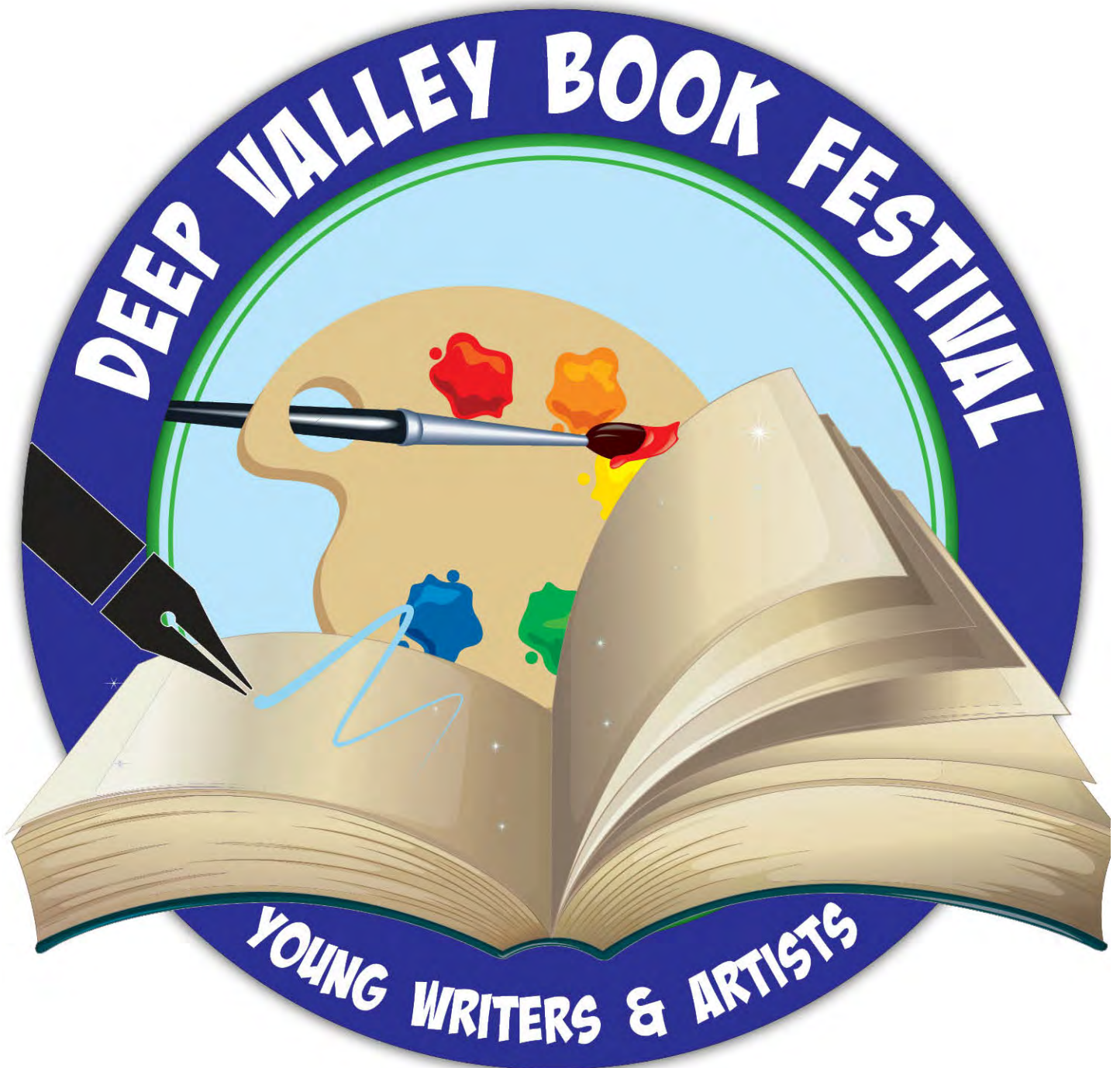


**DEEP VALLEY BOOK FESTIVAL  
YOUNG WRITERS & ARTISTS COMPETITION**



**2024 ANTHOLOGY**

**The Deep Valley Book Festival (DVBF)** is organized by an all-volunteer committee of writers, publishers, and book lovers. The festival gets its name from the setting of the beloved Betsy-Tacy children's books written by Mankato-born author Maud Hart Lovelace.

The DVBF encourages young people to express themselves through writing and art. An authentic audience is so powerful for students. The DVBF Young Writer and Artist Competition (YWAC) is an easy and inspiring way to give kids an authentic audience. The more a child writes or draws, the more confidence they will have in their abilities. Not only are they writing or drawing for a real panel of professional judges, but there are awards to strive for!

The Rules of Entry for the 2024 YWAC were: Young writers (ages 7-18): Write a story in 1500 words or less using the theme "Tradition." Young artists (ages 7-18): Create an original illustration of a scene from a favorite book and provide a quote from the book that describes your illustration.

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## **Young Writer Judge:**

**Rachael Hanel**

Author and professor of Creative Writing

## **Young Artist Judge:**

**Ann Rosenquist Fee**

Executive Director, Arts Center of Saint Peter

# YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS

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## AGE 7-8

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## AGE 9-10

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*Pg. 6 - Doggy Life: A Tale of Christmas Past*

**3rd (tie): Lydia Buda**

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## AGE 11-12

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## AGE 15-18

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## Cookie Baking

“Learn something!”

“I will!”

Hi, I’m Eloise. That was my dad. He always says that to me in the morning. I’m really excited because today I get to do my favorite tradition...cookie baking! I will tell you more after school.

[Later that day]

“Hi Mom! I thought Dad was picking me up?”

“No! We are going to Grandma’s house. Your cousins will be there.”

“Yes!”

Before we leave Mankato, we need to pack the car. Then, we drive to Pine Island, Minnesota where my Grandpa and Grandma live. I will tell you more after the drive.

[After the drive]

“What type of cookies are we making first Grandma?”

“Frosted cookies. You can go get the cookie cutters you want.”

“I’m back!”

Here are the steps we follow: We make the dough first. Then we cut them into shapes. Then we bake them. Once the cookies are in the oven we make a new batch of cookies. We do it for a long time before we can go home. And that is how we make cookies! Making cookies with Grandma is my favorite tradition because I get to spend time with my family and it makes me happy!

## Sandcastle Billionaires

By Coralei Volden

Once there was this big family: two parents, five kids, and three dogs. Every year they go on a vacation to... drumroll, please... SPI (South Padre Island) Texas!! They go in their big, big RV. The RV has six beds, a dishwasher, an oven, a stove, cupboards for all their dishes, and two bathrooms with bathtub, shower, sink, and toilet. They always liked having a pool in their backyard. It was one of those that was underground, had a 10,000 foot slide, diving board, water cave, walk up bar, zip line, and most importantly, bungee jumping into the pool. So they got an RV that had a humongous pool on the top of it . You might be thinking, "How do they pay for all this?" Well, they're billionaires, the richest people on earth. When they go to SPI Texas, they always take sandcastle making lessons. Once they made the biggest sandcastle currently in the world. Every year when they go, they stay at this campground called Nature's Art. They have an oceanfront view from their camper. The food that they bring along is mainly Pop-Tarts, English muffins, blueberry muffins, chocolate chip muffins, cinnamon apple muffins, pancakes, waffles, and donuts (I'm not going to name all of them, but every single flavor you can think of in the world type of donut). They're trying to make a fairy garden out of sand. Their goal is to do this every year, but it never turns out. Other times, it turned into mountains that people were climbing, or it turned into waves crashing up on the ocean. Once, when they were in the middle of making a sandcastle, a humongous wave washed up on them. It destroyed all the progress that they had made, which was the closest they ever got to making a fairy garden. This year they just HAVE to make the fairy garden, they've been attempting this for 14 years. They dug a really, really, really, really, really, like a thousand times really big hole in the sand. They piled it up, packed it, piled it up, packed it up continuously until it was completely flat and compacted. They added water in between layers to make the sand stick together. The key is to always add water. Then they started carving. They made a big mushroom and added details like other mushrooms growing on the stem of the mushroom. It was kind of like one of those mushrooms that you see in Mario Kart. Then they made the fairy. Being really careful, they made the legs of the fairy. Then they made her a leaf dress. Next they made the crown and the hair of the fairy. Then they delicately made the face. You have to be really careful or else you might push too hard and make the whole head fall off of the fairy. First they did her eyes, then they did the nose, then they did the mouth. It took them a long time to finish. In the process, the hands kept collapsing on them. It kept looking like mashed potatoes glued to her face. It did not look good at all. They finally compacted sand hard enough that they could make the hands and fingernails. Then they added shells to make the final touches on their fairy. It looked like the most beautiful sandcastle ever to be seen in SPI Texas. After all, they did work really hard. This was their family tradition. They will always continue to make the fairy garden. If it collapses, no biggie. They always know they did it once, so this family tradition will go on, and on, and on, and on, and on. Their RV is going to stay with them unless they hit a deer or something. Let's hope they don't!

THE END

PAYTON WENDT

AGE 10

PAGE 1

Hello, I am Alyssa and this is my broth – “and I am Max.” And I wan – “we want to tell you a story.” Here is the story of – “Alyssa why is a tree being carried into our living room?” Oh Max that is a Christmas tree. Now the stor – “but Alyssa why is it being brought into the house and what are those things being put on it?” Ok, now Max how about I explain the answers to your questions in a story if you do not inter – “oh yes Alyssa please do.”

Ok, Max I’m going to tell you the story of my first Christmas. I was having a nice nap on my dog bed when all of a sudden I felt my dog bed was being moved! Our humans said that they were moving my dog bed for the Christmas tree. So, I was very confused at first. Then, I realized there were tiny dogs on that tree. I thought they were replacing me with those tiny dogs! So I barked and barked at those tiny dogs it turns out that they were just ornaments which you decorate the tree with. There were also these weird boxes being put under it. I thought maybe they were places to go potty because we pee on trees right Max? “That’s right Alyssa were they really places to go potty?” No Max they were not as soon as I tried to go potty our humans said no Alyssa those are presents and you don’t want to wreck your present do you? I was confused on what presents were but on Christmas I found out. But before I get to that I want to tell you about Christmas Eve because it was really chaotic.

Apparently, there was this big chubby fat man named Santa Claus who comes on Christmas Eve with even more presents and you hang a sock up on the fireplace. And then he fills it up with those presents. You’re also supposed to leave out cookies and milk for him and carrots for these big deer called reindeer. “t was hard for me to get to sleep wondering about this guy. Then right when I was getting to sleep I heard a weird noise coming from the chimney. Then Santa emerged and he filled those socks up, ate the cookies, drank the milk, grabbed the carrots, and headed right back up the chimney! Now there was also a lot of commotion on Christmas.

After the kids woke up they found presents underneath the tree that weren’t there before. They didn’t know what Santa Claus looked like but they were so happy to see his work! Apparently he did it along with the help of little people called elves who make toys. Each kid got what they wanted from Santa Claus and even I got some presents from him. There was a nice brand new ball that squeaked, I got a new dog bed, and lastly I got a bag full of dog treats! I would have eaten those treats right away, if it was not for the pesky plastic that surrounded them. But I was still so happy and the kids love playing with me and my new ball. For me it was the best Christmas ever.

“Hey Alyssa do you think that since everyone was still listening that your Christmas story was our story for today?” Oh yeah Max that would – “ooo shiny ball,” Max that is an ornament – “but shiny ball!” That story that we did would be the perfect story for today! But now should we go to help our humans decorate the tree?

PAYTON WENDT

AGE 10

PAGE 2

“Yes, Yes, Yes, come on Alyssa!” Ok ok Max – “come on,” I’m coming I’m coming Max. Goodbye everyone, I hope you come again soon to hear another story. Wait for me Max I don’t want you to wreck all the ornaments!

# Cynthia

By Lydia Buda, 4th grade, Mankato, MN

"Da-aaad. Cynthia is bugging me *again*," my little sister Lu said as Dad read us a story.

I'm Cynthia, like the title said. Cynthia Bridges. I put my hands in the air.

"No I didn't! She started it!"

"No, *she* started it!" Lu kicked her little first grade legs in the air.

"Ugh, not again..." Dad muttered.

As I was saying, I'm in 4th grade.

"Okay, kiddos, time for bed." Dad said.

"Daddy," Lu said. "Give. Me. Candy!"

"Sorry, Lu-Lu, but we *just* had dinner!" Dad replied.

"Give. Me. CANDY!" Lu repeated, but this time way louder. Then she started to throw a fit.

"Fine Miss *Veruca Salt!*" Dad said.

"Veruca Salt..." Lu said mischievously. Lu has watched *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* enough times to know who Veruca Salt is. "Daddy, I wanna PONY!!!!" She screeched.

\*\*\*

"Dad," I said after Lu went to sleep, "Can we visit mom for my birthday?"

"Well bud, I don't think so..."

"But Dad! We *a/ways* go there for my birthday!" I cried.

"Your Mother is in a very dangerous place!" Dad said urgently. "Ukraine is a beautiful country, just like ours!"

"Cynthia, you don't get it! Ukraine is in a war, and it is not safe for you and your Sister!" Dad said.

"Well, if it was soooo unsafe, then how come Mom's there?" I said as I stormed to my room.



"Cynthia! You don't understand! I wish we could see her too, but we can't!" Dad called.

\*\*\*

I woke up to Lu screeching, "No, Daddy! I hate cheerios! Cheerios are for babies! I want cupcakes for breakfast!"

"Oh, Lu..." I sighed. I went downstairs and ate my Cheerios. After breakfast, I went to school, where my cousins Addyson, who's in my class, and Bryan, who's in Lu's class, were waiting for me and Lu.

"Happy Friday, little cousin!" Addyson called. Addyson is a month older than me, and she *always* calls me "Little Cousin."

"Addy!" Lu called, as she ran up and hugged her. Addyson laughed.

"Hey, Lu! How are 'ya doing?"

"I'm doing *awesome* 'cause tomorrow is Cynthia's birthday and we get to go see Mommy!" Lu replied excitedly. I winced.

"Oh! You must be so excited!" Addyson exclaimed.

"Actually, we can't go... But Lu doesn't know that, so please don't tell her. You know how... emotional she gets," I whispered to Addyson.

"Oh, Cynthia, I'm so sorry!" she cried.

"It's okay..." I said with a fake smile on my face. But when Addyson turned around, I sighed. This would be a *long* day.

\*\*\*

After school, Dad picked us up.

"Dad.." I asked.

"Yeah, Cynthia?"

"Why doesn't Mom live with us?"

"Well, she has to fight in wars. It's her job," Dad replied.

"No, I mean when she's not fighting in a war," I said.

"She has to stay at headquarters, just in case there is a war, like now." Dad said.

I sighed.

"Cynthia..." Lu said.

"Uh, yeah, Lu?"

"Can I give you My Little Pony toys for your birthday?" she asked excitedly.

"Eww! You'd better not, Lu!" I replied disgustingly. Dad grinned.

"I'll make sure she won't," Dad said, laughing.

"Thanks, Dad," I replied.

"Hey, Lu made me remember! We have to buy your birthday presents! Here, we'll drop you off at our house, and Lu and I will go get your presents." Dad said, pulling into our driveway. I hopped out of the car.

"Thanks, Dad!" I called after him. I went inside the house and turned on the TV. When Dad and Lu came home, they brought pizza. I could smell it from the couch.

"PIZZA!" I yelled.

\*\*\*

I woke up at 9 a.m. I yawned and stretched, and then I realized that it was my birthday! I'm 10! Double digits! I could get my ears pierced! It's also a tradition in my family to get your ears pierced on your tenth birthday! I ran out of my bedroom and jumped on Dad's bed.

"Dad! Dad! *Da-ad*. Wake up! Let's go to the mall to get my ears pierced!" I yelled, shaking Dad until he woke up. Dad looked at his alarm clock.

"Cynthia, it's 9 a.m.! I'm tired bud, and I want to go back to sleep. Plus, they don't open till noon. Wake me up at ten. Happy Birthday." Dad muttered.

"*Da-ad*. Can I at *least* open presents?" I groaned.

"Nope. But you can wake up Lu to keep you company." He said.

"Ugh, *fine*." I muttered.

"No peeking!" Dad called as I went into Lu's room. AHH! The pink and barbies *burn* my eyes.

"Huh, that's strange," I said to myself. Lu wasn't in her bed. I went downstairs and I realized that the whole downstairs was covered with decorations. There were so many balloons and streamers that I couldn't see the floor!

"SURPRISE!" Lu yelled. "Happy birthday!" She called and hugged me.

"Aww, Lu!" I cried. A few minutes later, Dad came downstairs and hugged me.

"Happy Birthday, Cynthia!"

"Thanks, Dad." I replied.

"Open your presents!" Lu called.

"Okay, okay, I will!" I opened the blue one first. It was small and had a golden bow on the top. Inside was my very own PHONE!!!!

"Dad! You shouldn't have!" I cried.

"Now you can text your friends all you want," he said, beaming. I hugged him.

"Aww, no fair!" Lu said, crossing her arms.

"Don't worry, Lu. When you're ten you'll get a phone, too," Dad said. Lu got me a fidget kit.

"Thanks, Lu!" I said.

"You're welcome," she said, beaming.

"If only Mom was here. Then it would be *perfect*." I said, sighing.

"You like your presents?" I heard a familiar voice ask. I spun around. Mom was on the computer, FaceTiming us.

"Mom! But I thought..." I started.

"I could *never* miss my baby's birthday." Mom said, smiling. "It's our little tradition."

"This is the best birthday ever!" I said, beaming. "Thanks, you guys!"

# The Silver Teacups

Nityan Sharma

"Keep it carefully!", my mother said, about this pretty little silver teacup, I placed in my luggage. I was packing for my move. It was a strange feeling. I was excited about going to boarding school. It was an honor. I was one of the thirty students selected from over three thousand who had applied for a full scholarship for the prestigious Academy of Chess and Academic Studies. I loved chess and this was an opportunity to be trained by the best in the field. In spite of all this excitement, I could not help feeling sad and apprehensive about going away from my family!

The teacup was one of the four my mother had, handed down to her and my Uncle by my grandmother who inherited them from her parents! It was like a tradition. They were precious and were always displayed at a prominent place in the house, especially during the holidays and other events. My grandma often used to say, "These cups will not let you get lonely!" "Oh! Do they talk?" my younger brother would ask her playfully. She would laugh. There were tiny markings on the underside of each of the cups. It was my great, great grandmother's name in our native language. My great grandmother had been given those by her mother, when she had to flee from her native land to escape political unrest and oppression and famine threatening her family's life. Their family was forced to separate and move away to distant lands to survive. Each of the kids got a few of these, as that is all their mother had. These had been custom made for her at the time of her wedding, her name engraved under. It was dear to her. To the generations after her, it just became a symbol of family, a tradition. I kept it because I thought of it as something that reminded me of my Grandmother and meant something to my mother.

My new surroundings were great. Although school was demanding, I loved playing chess, so I began liking it overall. But I missed home. The daily schedule was busy, and there were students from all over the country and the world. Many times, I'd feel lonely and then look at the cup sitting on top of my dresser and think of my granny's words. It looked so lonely itself, and I wondered how it would help me overcome my loneliness!

I didn't have very many friends, there was hardly any time left with chess practices and academic work, I was exhausted by the end of the day. Moreover, I am more of a quiet person. It takes me time to mingle and adjust, unlike many other kids who are quick to make friends and get comfortable in an unfamiliar environment. James was one of the few people who I spent time together with, on the rare occasion when we had time off, and I was not busy catching up on my work. He was fun and friendly. He was senior to me and was at the end of his course and would soon be leaving. I was talking to him one day

thinking I would feel very lonely once he left. I wished there was some way I could get to know some other kids better. I found him looking very keenly at my dresser. I looked in the same direction as he remarked, "By Jove, I've seen this before with someone else!"

"Less likely. It has been in my family for generations. They do not make these anymore."

"I know, and that is why its amazing that I've seen two of them here in this building, I mean one real and another in picture."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well , I was talking to Jimmy in room 23 and he was showing pictures of his family, and a similar set was there sitting on the mantel piece of his house in many of them."

I was curious, we went to see Jimmy. He was a nice hardworking boy from another country. He spoke English well. We had had a few classes together last quarter. I had spoken to him a few times in relation to schoolwork.

Well, I was amazed when I saw the pictures. He too had these passed on to his family through generations and turns out his mother too was from the same place as mine. They too had the same tradition regarding the cups. He looked at my cup and was as amazed as I was. He called up his mother, grandma and great grandma who was ninety-four!

It was a rare sight, to see my great grandmother meet her sister, after over eighty years. My great grandma was besides herself. She could not believe that an event that she had always hoped for but never thought would be possible had in fact occurred! It was amazing the way they hugged, laughed, cried, and tried recognizing each other through their wrinkles. They had so much to talk about!

It was thanks to the tradition of keeping and passing on the silver teacups to the next generations that they had been able to connect after so long. Maybe, their mother gave them these in the hope that someday they would meet up the way they had.

For me, I found a great friend in Jimmy. We were fairly similar in our likes and dislikes. I sure felt less lonely with him around for the rest of my course. In a way, my grandmom had been right. The teacup did help with my loneliness.

We wonder about the traditions we follow and sometimes even laugh at them but perhaps, these have a hidden purpose which gets revealed at the right time!

## TALES OF TRADITIONS

It was a cloudy yet splendid spring morning after an exhilarating sleepover with my best friend Raj. His parents hadn't come to pick him up yet so we took a short stroll to the park in front of my house. As we were swinging we talked about school, but our quiet conversation was interrupted by a group of people in colorful costumes and fake skeletons wearing fiesta hats. There were some posters that said in bold letters, "*Dia de los Muertos*" or Day of the Dead in English. I was caught up in the moment, so I exclaimed, "I wish I knew about fun traditions like this!" That was all it took for Raj, my friend from India, who is a chatterbox extraordinaire, to start enlightening me about his own core traditions. Now it's time for you to sit back, relax and follow me through some fascinating tales about tradition.

Raj said that while traditions are fun, navigating them in a foreign land comes with its own challenges. He started by telling me about some hyenas in Lake Nakuru National Park, one of just two fully fenced national parks in Kenya. At first, I was completely bewildered by his introduction. I mean hyenas and traditions, where's the connection? But it would all make sense in a moment. He said, "The hyenas had to fulfill their requirement of eating certain meats and carcasses to survive, but that is easier said than done while living in an enclosed national park. To fulfill their needs, the hyenas had to adapt to their environment by first finding holes in the fence, then leaving the park, and finally eating butchers' scraps and carcass waste. When rangers came to fix the holes in the fence, the hyenas cleverly dismantled the repair." Here is the part where it all starts coming together. After telling me about the hyenas he started telling me about

himself and a theater troupe and how they adapted to their situation just like the hyenas adapted to theirs. "Theater troupe?" I questioned while scratching my head. He then explained that he was part of a group who does mythological plays. "We were thinking of doing a traditional play at a festival." He said. He further explained that this play is very popular in India and there are many intricate masks and costumes available for it. Since the play isn't very well known in America, they had to adapt to the environment by using markers to make themselves resemble the characters in the play. It seemed like the makeup artist might have embarrassed him by accidentally using permanent red markers instead of washable. Well, that's a funny story for another time. I was thrilled by his retelling of the experience, and I already knew what I was going to do once I got back home. If you think it has something to do with markers then you guessed right.

I was so intrigued by now, that I convinced Raj to tell me another story. As usual, he fell prey to my persuasive skills and I could see him pulling his phone out of his pockets to, of course, text his parents that we needed one more hour. Did you ever think that tradition could lead to everlasting relationships? Let me elaborate. Raj said that it has been a practice for him and his family to visit a temple every second Sunday. He said that slowly that practice has become one of his core family traditions. Although it sounds like it is a perfect time for him to bond with his family and to understand his culture, he said that he didn't always take that into consideration. He ruefully expressed that he used to be very disinterested in going to the temple. Correct me if I'm wrong, but no one would want to dedicate their weekends to driving two hours to a temple. Also, he said that he never understood why his family went to the temple. He shared that eventually his parents taught him that going there develops a social and cultural identity and

that it is a way to spend some “device free” family time. With shrugging shoulders, raised eyebrows, and a funny tone he mumbled “Well, moms are all about unplugged fiestas anyways.” He understood what his parents said, he expressed. However, in his opinion going to the temple was still not interesting because after the prayers in the temple his parents unleashed their superpower - chatting and discussing politics with other adults over tea for literal hours; but wait. The story takes a wild turn. He told me that one day he was exploring the temple and he found some kids who were bored for the exact same reason as him. They started chatting and playing games together. They all just clicked like puzzle pieces. Ever since then he has looked forward to going to the temple because it’s a chance to connect with the community and to engage with friends. Moved by this powerful story about tradition leading to friendship I could envision myself making new friends at the next neighborhood picnic.

As the tale unfolded, I got drawn into it even more and it came as an abrupt drawback to reality when Raj finished retelling his experience. I was thinking of a way to start a new conversation with him when I realized that he was saying something about celebrating Diwali (also known as the Festival of Lights) which is a time honored tradition for his family. Then, before I knew it, I started saying something, sparked by a sudden recollection. “Hey Raj, didn’t you and your family talk to the kindergarten classes about Diwali back when we were third graders?” He seemed quite surprised that I remembered that day even though it was two years ago. “You still remember that?” He asked. I replied by saying that I remembered it like it was yesterday. By the way, if you are wondering how I knew about that day, it is because I had gone with Raj and his family to help pass out all the Indian treats they had brought for the kids to taste (mmm, yummy). Anyways, I tried to recall how Raj had described Diwali. I started telling him



how he had described it when I remembered how funny he sounded, unable to pronounce any strident sounds (Just in case you don't know, strident sounds are sounds that require your front teeth and he couldn't pronounce them because his front two teeth had just fallen out. Ok, let's get back on track.) I told him that I remembered how he described Diwali as being full of mouthwatering foods, blasting fireworks and lights. I also remembered him saying that it was a time honored tradition for a lot of other families than just his. Of course, like always, Raj could not resist adding more to what I was saying and he blurted out with a little chuckle that he still remembered how many questions the kindergartners asked. Agreeing, I expressed that I thought that, despite their young age, the kindergarteners showed openness and enthusiasm to a new tradition.

As if on cue, just as Raj and my conversation ended, we saw a white CRV pull-up to the now quiet park. "My dad is here, I have to leave." Raj sighed, as he noticed the familiar car of his parents. After I gave him a hug and said my goodbyes, I walked back to my house thinking of what I learned that day. I learned that traditions are way more than just time honored practices that you have to follow. Yes, sometimes they require adaptation and openness, but that leads to beautiful things such as everlasting friendships. What a perfect day to remind me of a quote from W. Somerset Maugham that I read during my last spring break: "Tradition is a guide, not a jailer."

## **The Immortal Gift**

### ***Chapter One***

Artemis looked at the clothes splayed out on her bed, dreading the purpose of them. There was a pure white dress that clung too closely to her body, begging to be stained in seconds, a light blue suit that didn't fit her, and a short green dress that looked too similar to the color of puke. Hearing a soft knock, she turned her focus to the door.

“Hey, Mom,” She muttered with a sigh.

“Have you chosen what to wear yet? It's been almost an hour.”

Artemis' mom said softly as she pushed open the door.

After her mom entered the room, Artemis motioned to her narrowed down choices. She decided this was the moment to speak up, hoping she would change her parents' minds.

“Do I have to do this, Mom?”

Artemis' mom laughed, but it slowly petered out as she realized that Artemis wasn't joking.

“It's what our family has done for as long as I can remember. It's a gift!

Can't you see that?”

Her mom tried to keep her cool, Artemis could tell, but she wasn't succeeding.

“But—” Artemis started to protest.

“No, this is what’s required of us. It’s our family’s tradition to accept this gift. You’re going to be immortal like the rest of your family. Isn’t this everything you could ever dream of? This is going to happen, you *won’t* disgrace us.”

At her mom’s words Artemis slumped against her bed, bunching her sheets up in her fists. She looked away from her mom out her window at the forest behind her house and thought to herself, *how could losing the appreciation for the moments in this life ever be a gift?*

“Right. thanks for reminding me,”

She replied instead.

Her mom smiled slightly at her and left the room, deciding she had solved the problem in front of her.

Artemis jerked off the bed once her Mom closed the door and rushed to her closet. She shook slightly as she slid open her closet door and grabbed the bag that she had packed earlier that day. Then she hurried over to the window, flinching when it made a clicking noise as she hastily pushed it open. She listened for any evidence that she had been discovered. After a few seconds of tense silence, she dropped her bag out of the window and slipped through after it.

After dusting herself off, she quickly walked to the edge of her neighborhood. After a moment’s hesitation, she decided to stick to her plan and

text Jessie. As she waited for them to respond, she headed to the ornate statue where she had told them she would be waiting. Not long after the car pulled up.

As she got closer, she saw the worried look on Jessie's face. She tried to explain quickly as she slid into the passenger seat.

"I can't stay here, I need a break."

She said as she wiped her eyes, trying not to look desperate.

"Hey, you're going to be okay, you will get a choice. You could go to the ceremony and walk away from it all. They can't stop you."

Artemis looked up, with a semi-forced smile.

"It's not that simple, Jessie. The moment I say I don't want the immortality that's being offered to me, I embarrass my parents in front of our family and, in doing so, I lose their respect."

Jessie fell silent, unsure of how they could support Artemis.

Artemis sighed.

"I came here to see you, not to make decisions. I'll figure it out, somehow. Could you just be here for a little while? I need a break from my family."

Jessie smiled down at Artemis and started to drive her away from the neighborhood.

## *Chapter Two*

Artemis blinked, stretched slightly and startled when she saw the time on her phone. She hadn't meant to fall asleep. As she looked down at the glowing screen she jolted up.

"Jessie!"

Jessie looked over at her, gripping the steering wheel tight.

"We have to get home,"

Artemis said, her voice shaking.

"Why?"

Before Artemis could respond, Jessie said,

"Is it your parents? Would they know you're gone yet?"

Artemis checked her phone again and the tightness that seemed to be squeezing her chest softened slightly as she responded to Jessie.

"I don't think so. I don't have any texts or calls from them. But if I don't get home soon, they're going to be furious."

Jessie nodded slowly and turned the car around to drop Artemis off.

After a drive that felt a lot longer than it was, Artemis stepped out of the car, gave Jessie a quick kiss as she said goodbye and turned back to her house. She quickly made her way along the side of it until she could look up at her bedroom window. She jumped up, the skin on her hands ripping slightly as she gripped the

ledge of the window. She slowly, painfully pulled herself up. Once inside, she immediately threw herself onto her bed, set an alarm for an hour later, then promptly fell asleep.

### *Chapter Three*

Artemis woke up to the jarring sound of her alarm and rolled over to turn it off. She caught a look at herself in the mirror next to her bed and cringed, seeing the messy hair and dark circles under her eyes. She pushed herself out of bed, groaning when a headache flared up. She trudged over to her bathroom, splashing water on her face and hair, trying to slick it back, and then pulled out the concealer. As she applied it under her eyes she only hoped her parents would pay no more attention to her than they normally did.

Moving back to her room she slid on her ill-fitting suit and sat down on the edge of her bed with nothing to do but wait. Half an hour later she heard a sharp knock on her door and as she went to open it the person behind it swung the door open. Standing in the doorway was her dad.

“Is it time?”

Artemis asked, hoping he would say no. Instead, he nodded and motioned for her to get moving, not uttering a word. She watched her parents leave the house and get into their car, driving down the road to the site of the ceremony. Part of the tradition of the ceremony is that the person making the choice, in this case Artemis, walks to the ceremony. She knew it symbolized something, but for the life of her she couldn't remember the history that went into the ceremony, despite all of the family that experienced the history still being alive.

She started the walk to the ceremony. As she walked, she weighed the pros and cons of each choice. She thought about the life she had experienced so far, what was amazing about it and what was hard.

Soon, too soon, she saw the ceremonial hill and shivered as she walked into a shadow that seemed to swallow everything around it.

At the top of the hill was several rows of seats filled by what was to be her audience; her family from the start of their immortality to her parents. In the front was a deep pool of shimmering water and near it a path that continued to the other side of the hill and led away from the ceremony. The water symbolized accepting the gift that was being bestowed to Artemis and the path symbolized the walk away from immortality and turning her back on it.

Artemis stared into the ripples of the water in the heavy silence that had surrounded her the moment she reached the top of the hill. She looked over to her parents, both smiling encouragingly at her.

She knew she couldn't stay with her family, and that she wouldn't forgive herself if she made the choice to accept this immortality. She simply wouldn't be happy if she had to leave the mortal world.

Artemis loved Jessie and all of the friends she had made in her 17 years, but she also knew that it wasn't and couldn't be her reason for staying. She loved the



world and knew that if she lived forever she would lose interest in learning more about it.

So she smiled back at her parents one last time before she stepped onto the path and started walking away. She tried not to listen to the whispers that burst out behind her as she fixed a smile on her face. Knowing that no matter how hard the choice was, in the end it was the right one for her. This path would be her new beginning in a life that was only hers.

## Maribeth (excerpt)

By: Elliana Neurer

The McKinley House was always a cheerful, beautiful home. It was an older house, with slightly faded sky-blue paint and elder perennials in the rockbed. The shingles were slightly rusted, and the shed had vines trying to creep up the walls. To the great gratitude of the neighbors, Mrs. McKinley kept those vines tame, and the house clean. The hardwood floors were of the finest cedar, and the windows were of the utmost splendid design.

The inside of the house had navy blue walls with rows of pictures and house plants, and a neat little fireplace to sit beside. The kitchen was always tidy, with a small island, and a wide counter space. The cupboards were always full of food for guests, and the pantry was the same. The basement cellar always had a couple bottles of the finest wine. The kind for the adults, and the grapefruit juice and the children's wine were always at hand. The furniture was worn but comfortable, the patterns faded, but not forgotten.

It was a large house, with four bedrooms and one bathroom, a parlor and a sewing room, an office for Mr. McKinley, and even a small library for the children to gather in. The parlor was the envy of the neighborhood, with wide glass windows to flood the room with light, and the finest of tea cups and garments at hand.

"Even though we may be poor," cried Mrs. McKinley to her husband one night, "I will not have us live like it! I shall never be happy if my home is inhospitable to any poor soul who sets eyes upon it, no I shall not! I shall plant a garden with perennials and the finest of roses- oh and the hedge will be tamed along with those wicked vines along the shed side! Oh, and God forbid it, if there should be any mice in this house or in the shed, I would lose my dignity!"

Mr. McKinley heard all of this, and he solemnly agreed to help if there should be mice, and proceeded to comfort his wife. He was a kindred spirit, wise beyond his years, and a good businessman. He was honest, fair, just, and kind. There was not a soul in the town of Prosperity that would not grow to respect and love him dearly. "And of course we shall turn that dreaded storage room into a proper bedroom for visitors. I will not have people thinking of us to be heathens, or worse!" And with that the missus dried her tears upon her unhappy face and set to work.

This was how the McKinley house became the most beautiful and somehow most homely house in the neighborhood. Now, there was a little girl about the age of thirteen, who lived in this house. She had the most beautiful chestnut hair, deep blue eyes, and tanned skin with just the smallest of freckles upon her face.

Her sister, Caroline, was fifteen and obsessed with mannerisms and fashion, as all normal girls her age were. But this little girl was different. She saw beauty as a gift given to nature. She saw beauty in her little backyard garden, in every structure in the town of Prosperity, and in every romantic book she had ever read. Time and time again, she would abide by the saying "True beauty lies within the soul."

Everyone in the town from there all the way to the city of Insight, and the town of Knowledge knew her name. She was the definition of grace and poise that are both key aspects of a true lady. Some called her Cinderella, for she loved to serve, helping around the house without having to be asked, and bringing gifts to neighbors such as Mrs. Blight. And her name was Maribeth McKinley, the girl whom some thought to be like the virgin Mary, and others to be just a simple little gift from the Lord, for she was one who did serve the Lord with all her heart and soul, and little did they know, that as she grew older, she would help to save many from the clutches of the Evil One.

To Be Continued

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

-2nd Timothy 3:16-17

# Tradition, The Word Without Meaning.

By Emerson Marsolek

Tradition...

Tradition...

Such a strange word, tradition.

Tradition is defined as the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way.

Hm, I always thought of it more like a rule. 'You have to do this because it's tradition.' 'You should do that because it's tradition.'

I've come to a general dislike for the word and the people that use it.

Don't get me wrong- if you enjoy your traditional style then don't let me stop you, it *is* your life. Just don't drag me into it, okay?

Speaking of disliking words, I also find that I tend to dislike words began or followed by 'tradition'

Traditional marriage.

Traditional family.

Traditional schooling.

Tradition.

Tradition.

Tradition.

...

Have you ever noticed that when you say a word too many times it stops having an actual meaning to you?

That's what I think I *really* dislike about traditional things.

Kathrine and Bob aren't having their wedding in the church because they're *Christian* or because they go to *mass* or because they have any association to the church at all.

Noo, Kathrine and Bob are getting married in a church of a religion that *they don't believe in*, because it's tradition.

Tradition doesn't seem to exist, not in my world, not something *real*, *something substantial*.

Why would we have used tradition to have a beloved and celebrated holiday where we respect our dead ancestors when we can use tradition as an excuse for Sammy not to marry Timmy.

Because it's against tradition.

...look. I'm not saying people aren't allowed to have opinions, but using your traditions, things that are passed from generation to generation by people long since dead to justify hatred is...

Well, it's not right.

Tradition is about celebrating. It's about history. It's about the *love* that people from long ago have for you, so much so that they left you away to connect with them.

Maybe you don't have any traditions, and if you don't want any, that's fine!

But if you do- just know that anything can be a tradition.

That silly dance you do on Easter with your cousin? That can be your tradition.

You and your friend making each other a cupcake for your birthday's? Tradition!

Watching a movie with your mom on Christmas- that's a tradition.

So stop the tradition of hate, and start your own.

Begin a world where tradition has meaning. Where tradition holds value.

Where you never have to listen to another rando rant about tradition through a creative writing project again.

## A Simple Chat

By: Autumn Pipes

It was a bitterly cold December day, and a group had gathered at the frozen banks of the Minnesota River in Mankato. A solitary figure stood apart, hands buried deep within the pockets of his warm winter coat. His breath hung in the frigid air, forming ephemeral clouds that dissipated into the atmosphere. The coat he wore was adorned with intricate beadwork and subtle patterns.

Amidst the muffled sounds of the crowd and the distant murmurings of an old man recounting tales of a bygone era, the lone man, Ted, positioned himself at the forefront. He peered into the distance, anticipating the arrival of horses that held a significance known only to a select few.

A rosy-cheeked man with a warm Minnesotan smile approached Ted, his breath visible in the chilly air. "Hey, what'cha waiting for?" he asked, genuine curiosity in his eyes. "Well, I don't understand what the fuss is about; it isn't like we're running out of lakes or anything. I mean, betcha, we've got plenty to spare up here!"

Ted only slightly furrowed his eyebrows, uncertain whether to engage with the man. He glanced at him briefly before returning his gaze forward.

"Oh, jeez, did I say somethin' wrong there?" the man inquired.

"No, this is the Dakota 38 + 2 Memorial Ride. The ride of my people," Ted explained, his tone measured.

"Oh? It is?" the man responded, his eyes widening.

Ted narrowed his eyes slightly; he glanced back at the man as he chuckled, "What did you think this is?"

"I didn't know," the man replied, putting his hands up in a soft show of defeat. He smiled, his gaze shifting to the path ahead.

As Ted surveyed the road, he couldn't help but reflect. The once dirt trail was now a paved road marked by the relentless march of progress. Concrete and asphalt covered the earth, and buildings rose around, erasing the sorrow that once lingered in this space. The natural terrain, once untouched, had given way to urban development, leaving behind remnants of what once was.

The man spoke again. "Well, if I may be so bold, I don't rightly understand this. Ya know, what's the point of all this?"

Ted sighed, "It's about remembering." The road is now a bustling thoroughfare. As the wheels of progress turned, sometimes, the shadows of history stretched longer than the early morning sun.

He gestured to the surroundings, "This isn't just a road; it's a bridge between worlds. We walk it to honor those who came before us."

"Hmm." The man nodded. I guess I just don't see it. What is it for you?"

"For me, it's personal. It's about reclaiming our history and culture, ensuring that our children and future generations understand where they come from. It's about healing, acknowledging the pain, and fostering understanding between communities. And, above all, it's a symbol of hope—a hope for a future where the shadows of the past no longer define us." He paused. "This is important because it's a step toward reconciliation, toward a shared understanding, even if it be a small one. It's a way of saying that, despite the changes and challenges, we let it live on."

"Oh, so you just stand here in the cold every December? Well, that's gotta be a tad annoying or somethin', don'tcha think?" The man softly laughed.

Ted furrowed his eyebrows, and a soft chuckle escaped his lips as he shook his head. "It's not about annoyance, friend. It's a commitment, a way of standing with those who can no longer walk beside us. The cold, the wind, the biting air – they're all part of the journey, reminders. The gusts of wind carry whispers of stories etched into the very fabric of this place. And the cold, it's more than just a physical sensation; it's a tangible link to the struggles and sacrifices of those who came before us. So it's about the upholding of practice, my friend."

"Is this somethin' ya have to do, then? I mean, don'tcha have a choice in the matter, or what's the deal here?" The man asked.

Ted felt a subtle unease stirring within him at the man's question, a question that probed the very core of his actions. For as long as he could remember, Ted had lived his life according to the rhythms set by his family, a succession of customs and rituals handed down through generations. There was a profound sense of responsibility woven into the fabric of his existence, a duty to uphold the traditions that had defined his people for centuries.

The notion of why he did what he did had always been anchored in the legacy of his ancestors. It wasn't a matter of personal preference; it was an obligation, a tether to the past that he willingly embraced. Ted found comfort in the familiarity of these annual rituals, the assurance that he was contributing to something larger than himself, something that transcended individual desires.

However, as the man's question lingered in the frosty air, Ted began to ponder the essence of his actions. The realization dawned upon him that it wasn't just about blindly

adhering to it; it was about understanding the importance of it, acknowledging the profound depth that lay beneath the surface.

In that quiet moment, Ted closed his eyes, allowing the bite of winter to seep into his bones, embracing the elements as he embraced the weight of history. The frozen ground beneath him held the footprints of countless journeys, each step a testament to the struggles and triumphs of generations past but now brought him here.

With a newfound clarity, Ted turned to the man and, with solemnity, he uttered a simple yet resolute "Yes."



# YOUNG ARTIST AWARDS

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## AGE 7-8

**1st: Zhiyu Cai**

*Pg. 34 - Summer of the Sea Serpent*

## AGE 9-10

**1st: Madeline Mehlretter**

*Pg. 35 – Betsy Tacy*

**2nd: Bearet Meerbeek**

*Pg. 36 - Hoot*

**3rd: Hazel Timmons**

*Pg. 37 - Wings of Fire: The Poison Jungle*

## AGE 11-12

**1st: Synnove Volden**

*Pg. 38 - Tuck Everlasting*

## AGE 13-14

**1st: Clara Loeffelmacher**

*Pg. 40 - Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

**2nd: Evalynn Tucker**

*Pg. 41 - Heaven Official's Blessing*

**3rd: Xander Meerbeek**

*Pg. 42 - I Survived the Sinking of the Titanic*

## AGE 15-18

**1st: Jadyynn Meerbeek**

*Pg. 43 – Dune*





# SAVE THE ENDANGERED SONES! SONES!







Alice in Wonderland

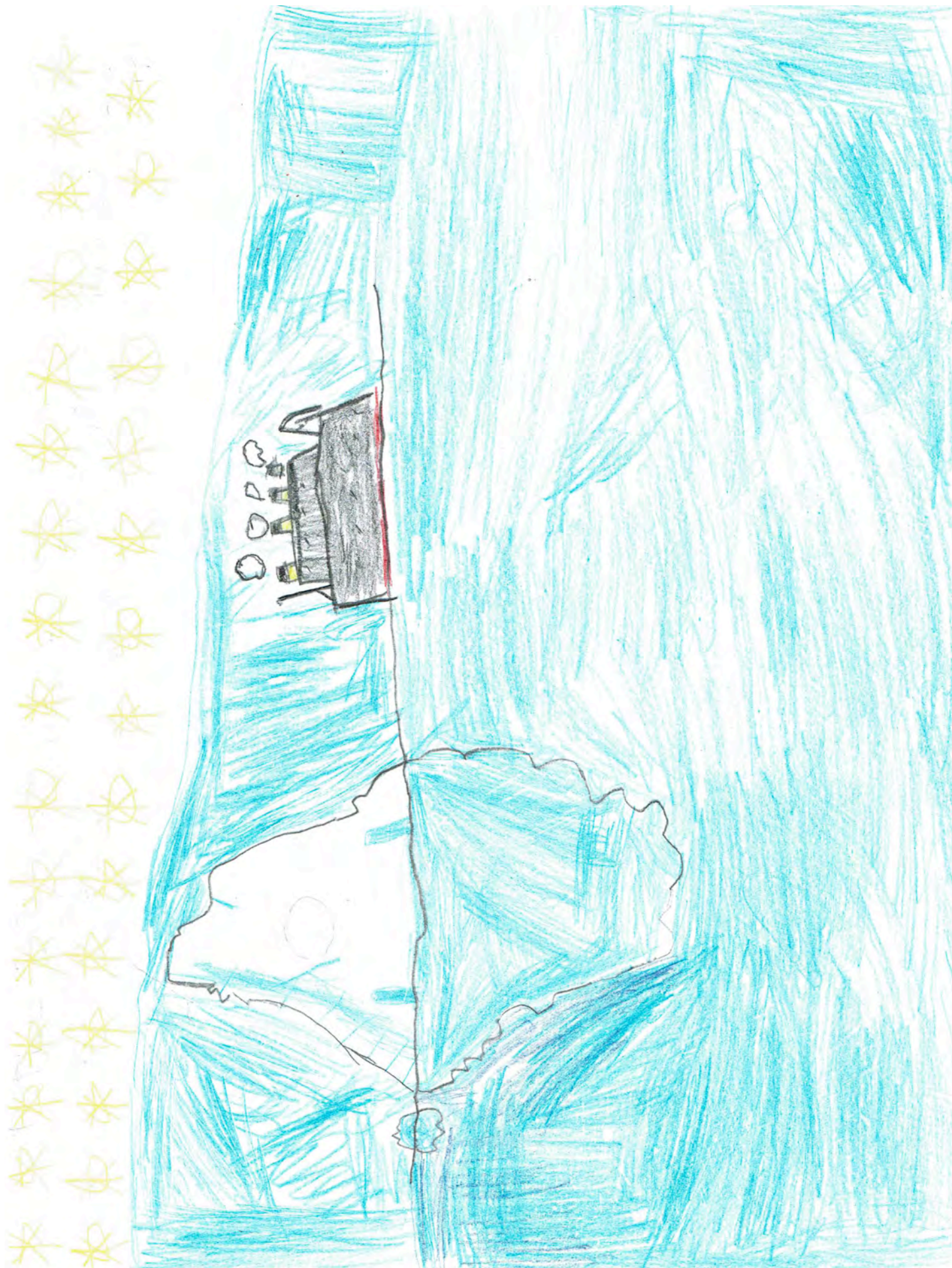








ET





Jadynn Meerbeek

# Deep Valley Young Artist favorite book and quote to describe their illustration

**Zhiyu Cai** – age 7 – pg 33

Book Title: *Summer of the Sea Serpent* by Mary Pope Osborne

Quote: A monstrous head rose above the surface of the water.

**Madeline Mehlretter** – age 9 – pg 34

Book title: *Betsy Tacy* by Maud Hart Lovelace

Quote: Then they would walk up the hill to the bench where Tacy had stood the first night she came...While they ate they watched the sun setting behind Tacy's house. Sometimes the west showed clouds like pink feathers; sometimes it showed purple mountains and green lakes; sometimes the clouds were scarlet with gold around the edges.

**Bearet Meerbeek** – age 10 – pg 35

Book title: *Hoot* by Carl Hiaasen

Quote: A few of the school kids started chanting in support of Roy and Beatrice's soccer teammates began waving their hand-lettered signs.

**Hazel Timmons** – age 10 – pg 36

Book title: *Wings of Fire: The Poison Jungle* by Tui T. Sutherland

Quote: And yet her scales prickled with anticipation as Hazel carefully unfolded the secret note: 'It's a map.'

**Synnove Volden** – age 11 – pg 37

Book title: *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt

Quote: Pa carved a "T" on the trunk, to mark where we'd been.

**Marielle Brinkley** – age 12 – pg 38

Book title: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll

Quote: ...when suddenly a white rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her. There was nothing so very remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear Rabbit say to itself 'Oh dear! Oh dear, I shall be late!'"

**Clara J. Loffelmacher** – age 13 – pg 39 – Book title: Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix by J.K. Rowling

Quote: They had finally started to work on patronuses, which everybody had been very keen to practice...

**Evalynn Tucker** – age 14 - pg 40 – Book title: Heaven Official's Blessing by Mo Xiang Tong Xui

Quote: He believed, this man would die for him again and again and would be reborn for him over and over; even if he fell into the depths of hell, he would break through the abyss. Last time, they spent 800 years running to each other. This time, it only took an instant to fall into each other's arms.

**Xander Meerbeek** – age 13 – pg 41 – Book title: I Survived the Sinking of the Titanic, 1912 by Lauren Tarshis

Quote: The Titanic was sinking.

**Jadynn Meerbeek** – age 16 – pg 42 - Book title: Dune by Frank Herbert

Quote: Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past me I will turn to see fear's path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I remain.

Thank you to all of our entrants!

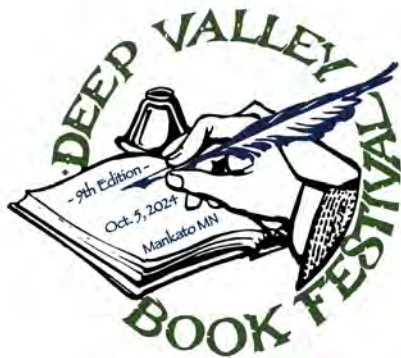
Watch for news regarding the next YWAC Competition beginning in January 2025.

Find updates on our Facebook page (Deep Valley Book Festival) or website

[www.deepvalleybookfestival.com](http://www.deepvalleybookfestival.com)

The 10th Edition of the Deep Valley Book Festival  
will be held Saturday, October 4, 2025.

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