

Premier Edition

APL's Teen Voices features original writing by Fox Valley teens. We received nearly 100 entries for the first edition. We would like to thank the students and educators that helped promote this new project. From the response we received it is obvious that the Fox Valley Community values the talents and creative endeavors of its youth. We look forward to future editions of **APL's Teen Voices**.

First Place: Allison - Tide Pools

Second Place: Rebecca - Humanity

Third Place: Joy - Flute Fight

Honorable Mention:

Tammy - Why

Marte - Art in Me

Jessica - Carefree Cloud

Carrie - Yellow Six-Point Star

Kerry - A Change in Weather

Ashley - What a Starry, Starry Night

Luke - WAR

Katie - I Am a Teen

First place

Tide Pools

~Allison

I remember my sixteenth summer. It was a summer that changed my life forever. I guess I should start out by telling you that I'm not exactly a model teenager. My grades are on the downside of C's, and "juvenile delinquent" is not a foreign term to me. I just find it hard to care about such things.

My mother, who has raised me all alone, (and not very well, I might add), decided that I was too much to handle. I guess she thought she needed more peace and quiet to watch her soap operas, so she shipped me off to Tide Island. My mother and I didn't get along too well. Ever since my dad left us when I was six, she got kind of strange. Nothing I could put my finger on exactly, but all the same, nothing was ever quite right again after he left.

"Mom, I refuse to leave. How can you do this to me? School just let out, and I made plans!" I chewed my lip anxiously.

"Honey," she said. "I just feel that you've gotten out of hand lately. I need some time to myself...to think about my life." My mom was always thinking about her life.

"Then you leave!" I exploded. In truth, I didn't really have any summer plans. Slider, Maine was one of the sleepiest towns on Earth, and I didn't really get along with people at school anyway. I just resented being shuffled out of my own home.

"I'm sending you off to your Grandmother's. She said she'd love to have you. The ferry to Tide Island leaves at 7:00 tomorrow morning."

And that was that. I sat there in a kind of daze as she whirlwinded around me, a flurry of clothes and toiletries. I felt too abandoned to even protest. The next morning I was up bright and early. I threw on some ripped jeans and loaded on the black lipstick, wanting to make a good impression on Grandma. Mom, being the sensitive person that she is, was singing joyfully in the kitchen. I suppose because she was envisioning three whole months without me around to bug her. We loaded up the car, and I slouched sullenly in the front seat, refusing to speak or even look at my mother.

"Oh, dear, I know you'll love it. It really is the most beautiful island. And it's so peaceful too. No one around for miles!"

"What!?" I jumped up, startled by her words. This was going to be worse than I thought. We got out of the car as the ferry pulled up to the dock.

"Bye honey! I'll see you soon!" I turned my back to my mother and boarded the ferry.

The trip was a long one. The ocean was calm and soothing. I was so bored that I carved my initials into about twenty places on the boat. Finally, we arrived.

Only three people got off at the island, and no one was waiting at the dock. I grabbed one of the men walking towards the pathetically small main street and asked, "Do you know where Catherine Stepper's house is?"

"Catherine Stepper? She lives in the mansion on the bluff." The man eyed me suspiciously. It might have been my nose ring.

"Well, can you give me a ride or something?" I figured I had better ask, because he sure wasn't going to offer. So I arrived at my grandmother's windblown and hay-covered, due to riding in the back of a pickup truck.

I tentatively walked up to the door. The huge house loomed above me, staring down ominously. The house was ornate and seemed to be the same color as the gray sea it overlooked and the gray sky it pierced into. The ocean breeze brought wafts of the tangy salt air to me. The very smell intimidated me. The house showed no signs of life at all. I wondered if my mom had accidentally sent me to the wrong island. Or maybe she did it on purpose. I knocked once, twice, and finally the door creaked open.

A tiny, shriveled up, prune of a lady peered out at me through a crack in the door. She glared at me for what seemed like an hour, and finally croaked,

"So you're Rebecca?"

"Yeah, " I mumbled in reply.

"You look like trash, " she said and slammed the door in my face.

At first I just stood there, too shocked to react. Then I began to pound on the door. "My mom sent me here to stay with you! You cant just slam the door on me!" Slowly the door opened again.

"You want to stay with me, you clean yourself up. What's all that junk all over your face anyways? You won't take a step into this house until you go down to the beach and scrub it off."

"It's called makeup. And no." I had to teach her who was boss. What happened to that sweet granny I had imagined? We stared at each other, each never faltering. It was a battle of wills.

When I came up from the beach my face stung from the cold water. I sullenly walked into the house. Grandma was waiting in the living room. I had never seen such a fancy house in my entire life. Paintings and artwork were everywhere. Everything reeked of money. The taste of the air was stale and unused.

"I've never seen such disgusting clothes in all my life," Grandma said. "Tomorrow we will go into town and find something suitable for you to wear. Show yourself up to your room."

I found my plain looking room upstairs, unpacked, and then sulked for an hour until I got bored. When I went downstairs, Grandma, or the witch, as I was thinking of her, was sitting rigidly on front of an antique chessboard, to better intimidate me, I guess.

"Play me," she demanded.

"I don't know how," I replied.

"Then sit down, and I'll teach you, " I sat there with a bored expression on my face as she lectured on and on. But the more she talked, the more interested I became. Finally, we began playing a heated game.

"I won!" I shouted. Then I quickly realized what I was doing and said, "Not that I care."

"Of course you care," Grandma retorted. "Beating me is no easy feat." From that day on, everything got better. Things weren't perfect every day. Grandma and I had a hard time getting used to each other's distinct personalities, but from that day on, Grandma always had something new to teach or show me. We went into New York to see Broadway musicals. We went fishing off the docks. Every day was something new. One of the most memorable days was the day we explored the tide pools on the beach.

That day Grandma had been brusque. She rapped on my door at 6:30 in the morning and yelled, "If you want to come, let's go." I threw on a pair of the new shorts she had bought me and a new sweater. We walked down to the beach in relative silence, only the raucous cawing of the seagulls disturbing the peaceful atmosphere. Suddenly, Grandma, who was looking very thoughtful, dropped to her knees quietly over a small pool of water in a rocky outcrop to get a better view of the beautiful pond.

The tide pool was incredibly beautiful. It was like a miniature world. Tiny exotic fish swam among the colorful anemones and spiky starfish. A solitary hermit crab wandered around aimlessly.

"Tide pools are incredible things," said Grandma. "Anything we touch in there could alter all of those creature's lives drastically. It gives you a sense of power, doesn't it?" I sat there listening quietly. "It makes me think of how easily someone's life can be changed, for the better or worse. All it takes is one finger to set you in the right direction." And with that she nudged the hermit crab towards the lush seaweed, where it settled in.

My grandma died that winter. But I'll never forget everything she did for me. People didn't recognize me when I came back to school that year. I brought my grades up, too. They still might not be the best, but they're a big improvement. And I even joined a community service club in my school. My grandma was the finger that nudged me towards the right path of life.

Second place

Humanity

~Rebecca

The rain came down in sheets, shrouding the woman standing at the corner. She squinted down the lamp-lit streets, searching for the bus. What better scene for a ghost story, she thought, than a rainy night at a bus stop?

She was waiting for the bus, that was for certain. What she did not know was where she would go once her transport had arrived. And was she really waiting for the bus, or for some other liberator to come free her from her nightmarish loneliness?

The woman patted her hair. It was ruined, definitely. Not that she cared. She had little use for the opinions of other people.

Humans! Such a petty, disagreeable race. The woman knew she was one herself, but to be a human actually brought a blush of shame to her cheeks. And she wasn't even a notably wonderful human. She had no occupation. It seemed that her lot in life was to wait for the bus forever.

Where was that darn bus?

Out of nowhere, a figure appeared in the rain. It approached her, slowly but surely. The woman glared suspiciously at him- her- it, no, him. It was a man. She could see him clearly now.

He wore no coat, just a long, plaid shirt and black pants. He was balding, probably in his late forties. He held nothing of interest except for a gray folder. And, the woman noticed with certain panic, he was not in the least bit wet.

"The rain is terrible," said the man.

The woman was taken aback. "What?"

"The rain," the man repeated. "The rain is terrible."

"That it is," agreed the woman. "And yet you, sir, are not wet."

"Rain doesn't bother me. However, you look completely drenched"

The woman narrowed her eyes. "Yes. I'm wet. And cold. This has not been a good night for me."

"This has not been a good life for you," said the man.

The woman was caught off guard. This was not someone whom she knew. And yet he seemed to know, in his matter-of-fact way, exactly what her problem was.

"You are considerably unhappy with your life," the man went on. "I have come to you with an offer."

"An offer!" snorted the woman. "Nothing you can offer me will change my life. I'm a street mouse to these people."

"These people," echoed the man. "These people: humans. Humans don't appreciate you."

"They don't," the woman said bitterly.

"But surely you have realized that *you* are human."

"Of course I've realized I'm human. That doesn't mean I have to like it."

"You don't. You don't like it and you don't have to. However," the man held out his folder, "I have an offer. I can change your life. Not your past; your future. I can reverse your destiny."

The woman's eyes widened. Now she was genuinely afraid. "Reverse my destiny? How? To what?"

"Your future, as you must know, does not look pleasurable. I can change that. I can make you rich and successful, with a good husband and a nice house." He paused. "I understand these things are desirable to... humans."

"Yes." The woman nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, they are very attractive to me. But I'm no fool. You want to make me rich and successful, fine, agreed. But you want something for yourself, too."

"I am in want of nothing."

"You're going to reverse my destiny. In exchange for what?"

"Your humanity."

The woman's heart gave a horrible jolt. "My humanity!" she gasped.

"Yes. You will live as a human, look like a human, act like a human, be a human- but human things will not be known to you. No sadness. No loneliness. No anger or frustration. But at the same time," he stared hard at the woman, "no happiness. No comfort or satisfaction. No love."

"No emotions whatsoever?"

"Yes. That, and no memory of the past as you have now."

"No memory of my past? I don't want that!"

"Your past is not a happy one."

The woman hesitated. It was true. There was little to celebrate when regarding her experiences. But still...

"There are happy memories," she argued. "My childhood was no party, but I had good times. Friends. Parents."

"So, you will sacrifice a successful future for a few insignificant memories?"

"Yes," said the woman simply. "I will sacrifice a successful future for a few insignificant memories of happiness, comfort, love and many memories of humiliation, anger, and hate- for my *humanity*," she added with a cold smile.

"You have made your decision, then?"

"Yes. I'm sorry .I guess your mission has failed."

"No," said the man, withdrawing his folder. "My mission has been completed." He smiled for the first time, nodding down the street. "The bus is coming."

The woman followed his gaze, and when she turned back, he was gone. Simply disappeared into the rain.

She stepped carefully onto the slippery steps of the bus. She told the bus driver, "I'm headed toward the library."

The woman sat down, surprised at herself. The library? What was she going to do there? She didn't know. But she felt like going to the library.

And she had never felt so like a human.

Third place

Flute Fight

~Joy

The day the flutes fought
was a deafening disarray,
and things turned terrible
when trumpets joined the fray!
"Your saxophone squeaked!"
a clarinet cried.
"Did not!" snapped the sax.
A horn tried to hide,
but oh, the calamity
wrought on the band!
She managed to knock over
everyone's stand!
The peeved percussionists
banged drums and bells.
The band room was filled
with terrible yells!
Our frightened director
yelled "What's going on!?"
but and angered trombonist
snapped his baton.
Then our conductor
ran from the room-
our big bass drum
had crashed with a Boom!

The oblivious oboe
played peacefully on.
The piccolo wondered
when band would be done.
He sat there in silence,
forming a plan.
He knew it was perfect
and so he began
to play his most horrible,
terrible trill,
the loudest, the highest,
obnoxious and shrill.
Then all the noise

stopped

and everyone stood
with their hands in their ears
except for our tuba,
but she was in tears.
In came our conductor;
his roar resounded,
"Detention for all of you!
That's right, You're grounded!"

Honorable Mentions

Why

~Tammy

I wonder why so many have so many woes.
Why heads stoop to the ground and life turns sour?
Why all hope is lost and life goes bleak?
Why do they blow out life's flame?
So their laughter heard no more.
They could not see past their troubles
To the promise ahead and now it's gone
Now their eyes close in hope of blissful escape
For they did not want life's obstacles
So they made a fatal choice ending it all.
Forgetting that today's problems are not tomorrow's.
Now they lie under the fresh turned earth.
Never to awake or see the pain they
Have caused to their families.
No they see nothing evermore.

Art in Me

~Marte

i feel you
you're crawling in my skin
and pumping in my veins.
you are part of every thought,
i breathe you in with every breath.
you are the tears that i do not cry
and the wounds that i do not create.
you are the beauty in everything,
you leave a trail of honey in my lips and on my soul.
i can taste you in my every crevice,
and feel your warmth crushing the cold.
you are my comfort, my desire.
without you, everything is broken.
and i can see you when i close my eyes, for
you are the art in me

Carefree Cloud

~Jessica

A carefree cloud just floating on the wind,
With all the busy people down on earth.
You would have thought that this was just a sin,
And no one knows what carefree clouds are worth.

For who wouldn't want to be a carefree cloud,
Just soaring on the wind with blue skies 'round-
With no care in the world, while earth is loud
And up there in the sky without a sound?

The world is rushed with little time to think.
No time to spare, and not a moment lost.
But think, that carefree cloud a missing link
With peace and quiet, what that would ever cost.

Some people need that quiet carefree cloud,
A different plan for once, for them, right now.

Yellow Six-Point Star

~Carrie

We were labeled with numbers,
And a yellow six-point star,
All because we weren't considered racially pure.

They took us away from our families,
They took us to an unknown place,
All because they thought they were superior to our race.

They tormented us,
Our scars are deep with pain.
By doing this, what did they gain?

They made us suffer,
They put us down,
It made them feel good when we were on the ground.

Physically and emotionally,
We were hurt,
Because they didn't think we had any worth.

When can we come together as sisters and brothers?
When will we figure out that no one is better than the other?

A Change In Weather

~Kerry

Looking back on that day, I don't think the sun shone at all. As a matter-of-fact, I don't think it had for weeks. Oddly enough, it was one of those days you never forget, you can't forget, the kind you carry with you until your last breath escapes you, always wishing you had acted differently but knowing you couldn't have.

I remember also how everyone reacted, and how everyone kind of ignored, for a while, that I was even there. But, in all fairness, I wasn't all there I guess. Physically, I watched helplessly, wide-eyed and unbelieving as my own life flip-flopped and turned itself inside out. Mentally, I had checked out -gone to a place inside where nothing could hurt me and I could sort out all these strange emotions and facts and maybe, if I was lucky, get a grip on myself.

On the outside, I looked like a tiny girl who was completely oblivious that so much tragedy surrounded her. On the inside, I cried, kicked, screamed, and begged for answers.

As clear as ever, I remember that desolate, freezing January. I remember my little brother's incessant, annoying whines as, sometimes when I sit still long enough, they echo in my head. More importantly however, it was as though someone had taken all emotion from that interval of time and replaced it with a hollow void.

Now, as I reflect, I guess there were signs I should've seen, but maybe I'm just picking at the situation too much. Maybe I'm looking for answers to which there are no real questions.

One of these 'signs' happened as early as two weeks before that day. We were walking home, my brother and I. He had just finished another average first grade day, myself a fourth grade one. All of a sudden, as if pulled by an invisible marionette puppet cord, he fell into a midsize snow bank. He didn't trip, I didn't push him, he just fell. After that, he started to scream, cry, and yell that he couldn't go on, he was in too great an amount of pain. My cheeks burned in embarrassment for the scene he was causing.

Accepting this as one of his dramatic fits, I told him he was lazy, a burden to others, and simply too overly dramatic for his own good. He had always been one of those people that are physically weak and to him, everything was a crisis. Therefore, his unwillingness to pull himself up and walk two blocks angered me. Quickly, I became very frustrated with his behavior.

Within ten minutes and completely coincidentally, my mom appeared at the street's end in her rusted midnight blue minivan. She stopped and asked if we would like a ride home. With a sigh of relief and a few grumbles about my brother's laziness, we rode home.

Later in the week, my dad announced he was taking the family sledding. The house abruptly became pleasantly chaotic as everyone in it bustled about searching for his or her other mitten or favorite blue hat.

After only a few trips down the hill, my brother again threw a fit of stubbornness and an apparent unrelenting pain. This agitated me because here he was, preventing me from having fun. In my mind, I regarded him as selfish and mischievous. I saw him just pulling pranks on all of us for his own childish amusement.

For minutes and minutes, my dad tried to convince him to just walk up the hill and then sit in the car. All of this proved to have no effect on the extremely adamant little boy who refused to move from his seat at the bottom of a snow-covered hill, and only further upset me, the little girl who paced around angrily near him.

Finally, after I could've sworn I'd grown a gray hair, he decided the pain had receded enough to face this treacherous mountain. But, sure enough, after every few steps he would stop and wait for his so-called 'pain' to cease.

Being a person of a rather impatient nature, I became cross and angered fairly rapidly, but I wasn't surprised because I was so used to him being the 'Little Boy Who Cried Wolf.'

A good half an hour passed before we set foot at the top of the hill, which might as well have been an eternity as far as I was concerned.

Once that ordeal was over, I was only allowed one more trip down the hill because now my brother had become bored and at the same time wrapped in blinding pain. Go figure.

I remember being so disappointed in him, in my dad for not letting us stay longer, and just in general because, to me, that day had been a lot of excitement over nothing. Now though, that all seems so selfish and shallow and I'm ashamed of not giving him more credit.

After the walk home from school, and the sledding charade, my parents agreed they would take my brother into the doctor's office to prove to him that he was fine, and probably to settle their own stomachs also.

It's funny how on days like that, everything becomes imprinted forever deep inside your head, but I can't even remember what I ate for lunch today.

My dad and my brother went into a clinic around nine the next morning. At eleven o'clock, an official-sounding doctor called and asked to speak with my mother for a moment.

Now, I wasn't your average fourth grader, as I had a much clearer line of thinking than most my age did. So, naturally, I wasn't going to let the doctor off quite that easily. I demanded to know what was wrong. Honestly though. I didn't believe it would be anything but a perfect health affirmation.

"That's cute, little girl," he said with a chuckle that only further angered me. I hated when people laughed at me, well, I guess I still do.

"Hey, can you put your mom on the line for me?" It wasn't so much of a question as a command, but I didn't want to pry so I handed over the phone, upset that I had to give in.

A part of me wished I had hung up the phone, or woke up from a dream, or kept talking to the doctor, anything else. For the better part of 15 minutes she argued and then begged to know what was wrong.

But, he utterly refused. He claimed he didn't want her to be too upset on the drive to the hospital to see my brother and get into a car accident on the way over. But, as if it would comfort her, he promised to tell her once she got there.

Of course, this only upset her to a greater extent and she slammed down the phone in an attempt to cover her frantic worry with anger or determination, I couldn't quite tell and I don't think she could either.

In one swift motion, she threw on a coat, and pulled me and her into the van. For the first few minutes an unsettling silence drenched the crisp winter air. Then, muffled sobs choked back the silence. After that though, a flood of tears escaped her, tears she made no attempt to conceal.

The next few days were a blur. They rushed by and blended into each other like colors on a morbid painting.

My grandparents came to my house, with my grandma crying like my mom; and, call me crazy, but I think I saw a few little watery drops escaped my dad's eyes too.

Someone's tear-soaked voice cracked enough to tell me to pack a suitcase. Obediently as possible, my heavy feet dragged me upstairs and my hands lifelessly packed a suitcase for me.

When I came back downstairs, my parents were gone and I was left standing in a room that now felt unoccupied even though my new temporary elderly caregivers were there with me.

They acted oddly, as if this was just another weekend excursion to Grandma's. But I was a fourth grader, I wasn't blind, deaf, or clueless; I understood that something was horribly wrong.

I remember the week I spent at my grandparents', isolated, and considered unaware of this awful turning point. Even worse than that however, was the Monday after that week when we all drove down to the hospital in Madison where my brother resided for the time being.

The car ride down was over-stuffed with false, sugarcoated conversation and emotions that no one could hide. Once we arrived in my brother's room, the people there seemed unfamiliar. My parents looked drained of life, as if someone pulled the motivation from them, as if their will, their reason to get up in the morning had disappeared. But once my eyes passed the maze of wires, IV's and machines, they were greeted with an emotionally scarring image.

The kid brother that was always a step behind me was now figuratively so far back that he was difficult to see. He had an IV in his right arm, which, in turn was secured to a board to hold it steady. The eyes he had once kept so bright and full of imagination and the head he had always carried with such certainty and confidence had fallen from grace and altered into a color the same deep gray was the pigmentation of the most lonesome skies.

However, the worst part of that day wasn't the pain, the agony, or the depression that lingered in the stale air. The worst and perhaps most life altering part of that day was one word. Written in barely legible handwriting on a chart beneath my brother's toes on a sheet of hospital paper and under his name was written the one word that can unnerve anyone's life - Leukemia.

Now I won't pretend I was completely taken aback. I had heard bits of hushed conversation about it before, but that was the moment where I realized one of life's greatest epiphanies. For the first time, it hit me that life is short, too short even, and no matter how indestructible or immortal of a person you see when you look in the mirror, you're not. It was the end of my childhood and the beginning of a struggle for my family that, at times, seemed only uphill. But, that moment wasn't the beginning of the end. A better way to describe it would be the end of the beginning. My life

didn't end there, it just changed, and change isn't always as repulsive as it's made out to be, it's just different.

So the moral of my story is to live, just live because you don't know what tomorrow or any other day brings. The future is unknown and that's what makes life worth living. You have to just take it as it comes and learn to live with all you cannot alter because those who can do this always lead the fullest and happiest lives, and that's what I intend to do.

What A Starry, Starry Night

~Ashley

Smiling sunbeam streaks up high
Marbled twinkles flashing by
Stars suspended in a moonlit sky

Bright golden yellow as the sun cradles the moon
Fiery red flames encircle the frenzy
Smiling sunbeams streaks up high

Swirling obis tumbling across frozen fireworks
Bursts of stars imprinting life in a violet haze
Stars suspended in a moonlit sky

VanGogh a man ahead of his time
Strong in faith but lost without sight
Smiling sunbeam streaks up high

Pierced in the center by his own hand
To fall on the dark field casting eyes upon
Stars suspended in a moonlit sky

Lingering by to look upon magic,
Mystical movements swirling to a daze
Smiling sunbeam streaks up high
Stars suspended in a moonlit sky

WAR

~Luke

To walk into death you have to be brave
No fear, no love as these stone soldiers fight
Millions and millions were brought to their grave

The great battlefield young bodies now pave
And the battle continues until there is light
To walk into death you have to be brave

Men of very young ages become enslaved
They are to fight the fight with all their might
Millions and millions were brought to their grave

Soon to kill and kill is all they will crave
Their souls now black will n'er again be white
To walk into death you have to be brave

Some will still love and care, they will always save
But those some will be gone the next long night
Millions and millions were brought to their grave

The biggest battle of all, where none will misbehave
These boys turned to men that cold, ugly night
Millions and millions were brought to their grave
To walk into death you have to be brave

I Am A Teen

~Katie

I am a teen,
Therefore, I must be bad.
Because I'm a teen,
The life I lead is sad.
All the teenagers; they
Belong to a gang.
We steal, lie, hit, kill,
And guns we bang.
Don't ever trust us,
We're up to no good.
We don't shop without stealing.
Be locked up, we should.
We all are satanists.
In jail we belong.
I am a teen,
Therefore, I'm wrong.