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YOUTH POETRY– 1st PLACE

KANSAS

by David Holthous

The blazing sun rolls across the deep blue skies
And the temperature starts to drop to 75.
In Kansas at this time, I turn to the west.
The sun begins to settle just slightly above the crest,
And the green of the grasses becomes drenched gold.
Farther down the sun sinks, and there I behold
Rustic windmills, lonely trees, tips of wheat, and sunflowers,
All stretching above the horizon, glowing brighter by the hour.

The gaps and open spaces are all filled by colors,
Ranging from brown to orange and many many others.
They jump through the spaces as if trying to touch me.
Goosebumps form; my skin tingles; I feel the color's touch,
It brushes softly like a breeze not touching me much.
Wisps of clouds in the sky shift from white to all shades.
Glorious colors of pink, red, and orange, form a cascade
That envelopes all clouds within range of the rays.

But too soon the fiery orb is half gone,
Leaving behind only a few lonely rays of bronze.
Yet I continue to stare as the last of the sun fades.
Stars begin glowing as if attempting to invade.
The darkness begins to creep in towards the wall of light,
Each pushing and pulling engaged in a glorious fight.
The battle is at last won by the warriors of the moon
It's sad to watch as the fiery light is lost all too soon,

ADULT POETRY – 1st PLACE

ZEIGLERS FOUND THEIR PARADISE

by Nila LaRea Denton

In 1867, Frederick and Barbara Zeigler
Came from Germany to New York City
Then by immigration trains, they traveled
To Solomon, Kansas, Barbara's brother to see.

While there, Father Frederick drowned
In the main stem Solomon.
Because of this fatal boat accident,
Some might have thought their dreams were done.

But awhile later, Barbara and her four sons moved
To Rooks County where they all five homesteaded.
One of these four Zeigler's brothers,
The oldest was my great-grandfather, Fred.

The Zeigler's tell the story of when Indians stopped
The family hid little sister Rose under a wash tub.
Praying the Indians would not take her,
If their intent was not just to ask for grub.

But the Indians, possibly Pawnee,
Took an interest in the Zeigler men's leggings
Who gladly gave their leg wear,
To these curious, insistent Indians.

One day, the Indians did return
To pay back these pioneers with a delicacy.
A dead skunk they gave the Zeigler's,
To them, a fair trade for their generosity.

Later by horseback, Fred courted and married
A lady by the name of Matilda Wade.
The third and final house they built was limestone,
Along the Paradise Creek, they staunchly stayed.

Fred and Matilda had eleven children,
The youngest was Lorenzo Rea
Who married Mary Netherland,
And had two daughters, Geoa Mae and Marva Lee.

A few years ago, a distant cousin
Shared the following story:
Why the Natoma Zeigler's spell their name E-I
And the Collyer, Kansas ones I-E.

It seems two Ziegler families came to Ellis Island,
Fathers, mothers, and children with the same first names.
So they flipped a coin to spell one of the last names wrong
And my family lost, or so this relative claims.

No matter, descendants of the Zeiglers
Still live along the Paradise,
A few live northwest and southeast,
The way a meadowlark might fly.

Though now Fred's homestead property
Is now owned by a ranch called Liberty
The Zeigler legacy lives on in the hearts and minds
Of their descendants and in Rooks County, Kansas, history.

YOUTH FICTION – 1st PLACE

My Mind's Race

By Kent Willmeth

While running a cross-country race, my to sparks and crackles with a flurry of crazy ideas.

We fifty or so runners step up to the line.

The starting line...

The point of no return...

Our hearts beat, our breaths are heavy, and our eyes are focused on the funnel 100 yards in front of us.

I am a Runner; people like me are considered Average Joes on the course. We run to run, and that's that. Our effort is unmatched; our determination unchallenged. Our race times improve with every course we face.

Down the line, I spot several Lanks. They are very tall and yes, lanky. They seem to tower about 30 feet over the rest of the crowd. Races are easy for them; two steps, and they've already pulled ahead.

Below them, and even below the Runners, are the Beef Heads: short, stocky football players who think they're hot stuff; that a foot race is nothing to them.

They pose no threat in the department of speed, but I have to make sure I don't get stuck behind them, because they tend to band together and box people in.

A gust of wind shoots from behind me as the Speedster on our team takes his place. There are about ten of these guys, all of whom are vibrating with anticipation. It is impossible to identify any of them by face, for the high-speed vibrations that travel through their bodies blur their features.

From the hole, about 30 yards in front of us, a small, plump man in black and white rises from the ground.

He raises his gun, and in a booming voice inconsistent with his body type shouts, "I will give you two counts! A mark, and then the gun!"

The Beef Heads smirk, and the Speedsters quickly nod about 300 times. The Lanks respond, but they are too tall to be heard. The Runners, including myself, simply take a deep breath. The oxygen fills my lungs and swirls around my brain. A shiver runs down my spine as my energy is transferred to my legs.

"Runners, mark!"

Silence engulfs us. We all wait for what seems like ages.

All we hear is a pop, and the race has begun. The crowd surrounding the starting line erupts with excitement, getting their fill of cheering in before they have to run to finish line and wait for the racers to cross. They would love to cheer us on along the course, but it gets a little hectic after we pass the first gap.

The Speedsters are off, already 50 yards ahead, while the Lanks stride after them. I weave in and out of their tree-stump limbs, careful not to get trampled, and am able to leave a few of them behind. I've pulled ahead of most of the Beef Heads, and my fellow Runners are right by my side. Like a herd of gazelle, we bound towards the funnel, and as we approach, we begin to draw closer to one another.

Each of us wants to make it through first, but we know this is impossible. The funnel, or gap, used to merge contestants together after the gun has sounded and place them on the line that we are supposed to follow, is an opening about three feet in diameter formed by two towering walls, which is just enough space for one person at a time to pass through without an issue. We runners have formed an unspoken, temporary truce amongst one another. To avoid accidents, we form a single-file line so that we are able to pass through the gap with ease.

After that, all bets are off. Every man for himself

A Runner makes a dash for the opening, but a Beef Head has other plans. Leaving potholes in the ground the redheaded ball of muscle covers the distance between him and the front Runner in under a second. The power behind the blow he delivers propels the Runner off the course. The momentum he had built carries him, not to the side of the trail, but forward, straight into the wall.

The Beef Head chuckles and slips through the gap. The rest of us Runners are outraged and extend our sympathies to our fallen brother. He rolls on the ground coddling his arm.

We were all hoping this race would be different from the others, but the Beef Heads never seem to respect the ways of the course.

"Gap!" somebody yells. A single file line is formed, some of the Runners curse at their bad luck, having been placed at the back of the line. I am placed behind four runners, an improvement from the last race.

We pass through the opening, and all bets are off. I pass two of the Runners in front of me; three Runners try to keep up with me, and a Lank steps over us as though we were bugs.

A white stripe that stretches from the opening, through the course, and to the finish line stands out amongst the bright green blades of grass. We must stay within three feet on either side of this stripe all the way to the finish line.

Violators are teleported back to the starting line.

The terrain is soft under my feet. My lungs are drinking in the air around me. My mind is clear of everything except the desire to run. I stride down the hill, making my way to the crowd of racers turning the 180-degree corner at the bottom.

"Aw, man!" a Lank striding past me bellows. "I can't make a sharp turn like that, not with all those people!" I look ahead at the crowd, and realize that he isn't the only one. Another Lank, about twenty feet tall with dark hair and an orange jersey, is pushed to the outer edge of the crowd of racers, all of whom are attempting to get as close to the corner as possible.

"No!" the orange Lank shouts as he is punched in the shin by a Beef Head. The Lank steps to the side.

All it takes is a toe.

In a flurry of blue sparks, he is gone. Teleported. Disqualified.

That won't happen to me.

Sliding in between Runners, jumping over Beef Heads, and dodging the towering Lanks, I slip through the crowd with ease and pull ahead.

I smile at the sight of three Runners and the group of Speedsters in front of me. Finding myself ahead of the majority of the crowd, a new energy surges through me, and I advance up to the first person in front of me – a fellow runner whose breaths are becoming labored.

I breathe heavily to make my presence known. He hears me, glances back only for a second, and picks up speed. I glance at his feet, listen to his footfalls, and I am suddenly running at the exact pace as him. In front of us, I see that there is a long straight-away that ends in a 90 degree left turn around a tree.

Perfect, I think to myself. At the corner, all I have to do is get on his left side and –

There is a strange noise from behind me: a whirr, a short scream, and then a crackling sound.

I glance back and curse at the sight of a frozen Lank standing in the center of weaving crowd. Terror is etched in the face of a Runner that narrowly dodges the Lank-cicle and picks up speed in a fruitless attempt at trying to evade the cur of every cross-country race: the Geeks.

Tricky little pests, the Geeks are inherently slow and have the uncanny ability to freeze opponents with the touch of a finger. Blind as bats, they usually wear big glasses that set them apart from the crowd. There must have only been a few of them, for I had not seen any at the beginning of the race

I glance back once more and catch a glimpse of a pair of black specs making its way through the crowd, reaching out and freezing anyone that turns out to be too fast for them in their tracks. Soon, most of the crowd consists of ice-sculptures that already begin to thaw. Their freezing effect lasts only a short while, which is why officials have never caught the Geeks.

They always get away with it.

They always win.

But not today!

I pick up speed as we reach the corner and pull to the left of the Runner in front of me. I grab the little tree and use it to swing around the turn. I look to the left and see three geeks slowly picking up speed. Behind them is an odd cluster of frozen racers that block the remaining stragglers from passing. Ahead of me is a hill, the steepest on the course.

Short, choppy steps, I think to myself. With the rapid gait of a Speedster, I look towards the top of the hill, lift my knees, and climb as fast as I can. More crackling sounds from behind scare the adrenaline into my bloodstream, which carries me to the top in no time.

Instantly, I plunge into the downhill slope that follows, striding my legs out as long as possible. I pass a Runner and another. There are more crackling sounds as I surprise myself and catch up to the Speedsters at the bottom of the hill. Their celebrity status is unmatched on the course, and to catch up to them during a race is almost considered an honor.

But I don't get star-struck, as there are more serious matters at hand.

"Geeks!" I gasp.

"What?" a Speedster in a red jersey yells. "I didn't see any –" a crackling sound interrupts him. It is much closer this time.

"Oh no," the one in blue next to him murmurs.

"I am not freezing up again!" a green speedster yells and dashes ahead of the group.

"Look out!"

The warning from behind me is short, and its origin is unknown, but my reactions take over, and I leap into the air back-flipping and landing on the shoulders of one of the Geeks.

"Hey!" he exclaims just as I jump off to avoid his touch. I hit the ground running, and before the Geek can glance back at me, I kick his trailing foot behind his lead one.

"Ahh!" he trips, tumbles, and I jump over his sprawled-out form. There is a flurry of blue sparks as I peak and hit the ground.

Disqualified, I think with a smile.

There is a cheer from behind me; the previously frozen racers had witnessed my act of valor. I would be beaming, but the remaining two Geeks are still behind me. I pick up speed, once again catching up to the speedsters.

We pass through several turns and hills, all the while avoiding the frostbitten touch of the temper-mental Geeks. The race, coupled with evading my pursuers, seems long and drawn out – the most exhausting race I've ever competed in.

With a flush of relief, I see the finish at the end of another long straightaway.

And I'm still with the Speedsters!

Boom, boom, boom!

The Geeks have suddenly become the least of my worries; I look behind me as a pair of Beef Heads, one in black and the other in purple, bound ahead of the crowd and around one of the Geeks. The little frosty jerk reaches out and attempts to freeze the slower of the two Beef Heads, but it has no affect. With a swing of his mighty arm, the Beef Head sends the Geek careening from the course in an explosion of blue sparks.

The last Geek picks up speed, but it is no use. The faster of the Beef Heads tackles him, brings the screaming Geek to the ground, and then rolls off and continues running. More sparks erupt from behind them as they advance towards me

I brace myself for the impact, but when there is none I look back.

"Go!" one of the Beef Heads yells as the two of them fall behind two striding Lanks. My reaction is instant, and I pick up speed.

The last stretch of the race – about 500 meters of dead sprinting.

All of the energy left over is put into propelling me forward at top speeds. My legs burn and my arms pump; my lungs gulp for air. I can hear the heavy footfalls of the Lanks behind me. They try to catch up, but never succeed. I can hear the crowd beyond the finish cheering for the racers. The finish line is fast approaching. 200 meters...100...50...

Finish.

The sudden stop makes me want to collapse right then and there, but doing so would get me trampled by the racers behind me.

I smile to myself, beaming at my success.

I am handed a bottle of water, and as the cool liquid races down my throat, my insides are cooled, and I begin to relax. Several hands of the spectators lead me down a funnel marked by two strings of flags. I exit the funnel and shake the hands of my fellow racers

"Good race," they say to me, breathless.

Yeah, I think to myself. I can't wait for the next one.

YOUTH ESSAY – 1st PLACE

Falling in Love: Teenager's Perspective

By Bailey Freeman

"Falling in love is a lot like death," or so said Addison Moore. Personally, I think that's a bit of a drastic comparison. I mean, we're young, or I guess, I'm young. Do I know what love is? Sure, or at least I have a pretty good idea what it is. One thing is for sure, death doesn't come to mind when I think about falling in love. Instead, when I think of falling in love, I compare it to learning to ride a bike. Time after time, someone can fall off his or her bike when he or she is first learning to ride it, but eventually he or she will know how to keep balanced and ride his/her bike all around town. After falling in and out of love many times, a person will still continue to look for a person to love. Soon enough, the time will come that a person will find another that they truly love, and they will be kept "balanced."

Young love. We're all victims to it. Some may say victims; others say they enjoyed the experience. Many people have told me to stay out of relationships during high school; boys are just a waste of time. Yes, I understand, we, as teenagers, are naïve and very careless when it comes to love and feelings and relationships in high school. This leaves us very vulnerable to be taken advantage of or getting heart-broken. As many studies show, girls mature faster than boys, so to have a non-serious relationship in high school is common. What is the point of dating then? Yes, we're young, but ultimately, aren't we looking for a future with someone? That's what I want anyway. High school sweethearts? Not common, but one day he or she could be your husband or wife. That's a lot to think about in high school. In middle school, dating someone was to say he or she had a boyfriend or girlfriend; maybe a hug or two and holding hands. Dating in junior high is nothing but to show popularity. In high school, it's for different reasons.

If involved in a serious relationship, there are many pros and cons to it. First of all, one can't choose who they fall in love with. Say one falls in love with a boy or girl who doesn't make the best decisions; certain consequences could reap from that relationship that could haunt the other's future forever. That's why it's important to fall in love using one's heart, but also his or her brain. Don't fall into the common saying "love is blind." It may seem important to stay with a person he or she fell in love with in high school forever, but ultimately, the main point is to protect him/her from harm and heartbreak. Make smart decisions. That may be hard to do when one is wrapped up in all the positives of the relationship: having someone to love him or her at his/her worst, give him/her compliments when he/she needs them the most, and just someone to always be there. It can be a confidence booster and make personal problems seemingly disappear, but as mentioned before, there is a drastic negative side.

My favorite artist, Taylor Swift, sings a lot about love; either the feeling of falling in love or falling out of love. Recently, I attended one of her concerts. She opened the concert by explaining her newest album Red. She mentioned a lot about how her personal experiences inspired her songs. Then she proceeded to say that if someone finds himself/herself falling out of love and his/her heart gets broken, if he/she can move on, he/she will find he/she is much stronger and better off without the one who broke his/her heart. That stuck with me. She was famous, a world-wide known singer. She faces the same problems my 17-year old self faced? It struck me as crazy.

That piece of advice that Taylor Swift said at her concert has gotten me through a lot of situations involving the well-being of my heart. Relationships can be for the better or for the worst, last forever or last a short time, but falling in love is an experience that will never get old; the rush, the feelings, and the adrenaline. Nothing will beat those teenage years.

ADULT ESSAY – 1st PLACE

SCISSORS

by Suzanne Waring

I have a very personal relationship with my scissors, and it's a good thing because I find that I use scissors much more frequently than I used to. Keeping house—and that includes cooking—calls for four pairs at a minimum, or at least that's what I find I need.

Those four pair must always be in their proper place. In fact, my jaw sets and my words turn to steel when my scissors are missing, but I usually have only myself to blame for allowing them to be left under a stack of papers on the kitchen table, down in the chair where I had been hand sewing, or outside near the compost pile.

Years ago when another teacher left behind in a classroom a four-inch, lightweight pair of scissors, I fell in love with the delicate feel and appearance and took them home to be in my hand sewing bag. My husband takes the blades apart periodically and sharpens them so they will cut yarn, thread, and other little clipping needs. I have another pair for cutting fabric.

When I was in 4-H, I was taught to treat my sewing shears with respect. I keep my sewing shears hidden away from other scissors users who might cut paper with them. They are to be used only for cutting fabric. Years ago when we were living on one income and I always had my sewing machine out, I invested and at that time it was an investment—in a pair of excellent gold-handled Chateau Solingen sewing shears made in Germany. I noticed recently that the gold paint on the handles is starting to wear thin, but the shears are as trustworthy as ever. Even though they have never been sharpened, they have served me well on sewing days for over 25 years.

My everyday kitchen scissors have seen a turn over during the years that I have served as the kitchen queen. I often take them to the garden to cut away the exterior leaves of garden produce. If I'm not careful, I will lay the scissors down on the ground or on a post. They will likely be forgotten until I need them again. It is then that I have a hard time retrieving the memory of when I last used them. One time I lost a pair in the garden only to be tilled up three years later. They were beyond even my husband's skillful repair.

I have my grandmother's kitchen scissors, but I don't count them as a pair of usable scissors. They represent a very special person in my life so I keep them along with my other all-purpose scissors in a kitchen drawer. Many other women had a pair of these silver with green-handled scissors during the depression. The brand name on Grandma's scissors is almost rubbed away but appears to be Clauss and they were made in the U.S.A. I have no idea how many years they served my grandmother, but at a minimum it must have been at least forty. They have ridges within the handles that can be used for opening bottle caps and canning jar rings. There's also a protrusion on the side for flipping open canning lids as well as soda and beer bottle caps. My husband tried to repair Grandma's scissors so they could be my all-purpose scissors, but the metal has worn away so that, except for paper, they don't cut well. For nostalgia purposes, they will remain in my kitchen drawer until someone else cleans out my things someday and wonders why I kept them. Without a second thought, those scissors that carry memories of making paper dolls and cutting out snowflakes will be dropped in the metal scrap bin.

My grandmother was still using her scissors, when I found a pair of scissors for sale in a store one day. These Wiss scissors had a green handles just like Grandma's, so I had to have them. They were a twin to Grandma's except there was no protrusion on the side for removing canning lids. By then women had tacked on an out-of-the-home job to their long day, and most no longer processed food in canning jars with lids and rings. As a result, the protrusion was no longer needed to flip off canning lids. The Wiss scissors were my everyday scissors for years until I received a nifty pair as a Christmas gift.

These red, rubberized-handled scissors made by Chicago Cutlery and imported from China arrived just in time for the change in packaging of commercial products. I find that I use them almost every meal to cut open plastic and paper. Fresh and dried vegetables, nuts, and chocolate chips are sealed in paper bags, frozen vegetables are sold in plasticized bags that need to have a corner cut away, and cheese is now sealed in plastic. Women—I'm included—no longer make their own pasta. Instead they buy processed dried noodles in paper packages that have to be cut open with scissors.

Replacing butcher paper, plastic wrap covers much of commercial food, and it has to be cut away with a pair of scissors.

Most of us believe that once scissors have been used around food, especially meat, they need to be washed. Another feature of the red-handled scissors is that they pivot on a notch instead of a screw, so the blades come apart by lifting them away from each other, and they can be thoroughly washed, dried, and put back together. They aren't as sturdy as the green-handled scissors and will likely wear out faster, but they certainly are user friendly.

Right now, I am hoping my scissors are all in their expected places. Alongside those used in sewing and cutting paper, scissors are as standard in the kitchen as a knife, spatula, and can opener. I find that if I take care of all my scissors, they will always be there ready for me to use.

ADULT AUTOBIOGRAPHY – 1st PLACE

MAGIC AT THE MERRY-GO ROUND by Joyce Koops

It was 1941, the year of my tenth summer. We'd come to town for the last band concert of the season. Scrubbed, brushed and starched, I stepped from our Model A and headed for the center of our metropolis, the Main Street Intersection. Four streets joined there; The Beehive Grocery Store on the street to the east, Kooiker's Manufacturing to the west, North Main led to the high school at the edge of town, and South Main ended at the depot. Every Saturday night in the summer a bandstand appeared on that intersection. Actually, it was a hayrack. A high, double-wide hayrack painted white. Folding chairs stood in straight rows upon it.

The concert hadn't started yet so I waited there for my friend, Marlene. Town people who played in the band drifted in, all wearing red jackets with gold buttons. I watched them mount the little steps and find their places on the "bandstand." Seated on their chairs, framed by the white boards of the hayrack, they made a pretty picture.

I liked pretty things. I liked new oilcloth on the kitchen table. I liked yellow clover in ditches, fireflies on a summer night, my gold locket, Stephina DeWitt's Sunday hat, and the minister's oldest daughter. Her name was Gertrude and she was very beautiful. She was kind, too. Sometimes she smiled at me when she caught me looking at her in church.

Marlene popped up in front of me. She had a funny way of doing that. One minute she was nowhere to be seen, then suddenly, "Poof!" there she was. Her short brown braids stuck out from behind her ears like horns. "Let's go to the Co-op," she said. That was always our first stop.

The band started up, and we started off. Down North Main Street we went, past the vacant lot, past Starrett's Dry Goods, past Mr. Meerdink's Harness and Shoe Repair Shop, and on to our destination: the Co-op Gas Station. Two bright gas pumps stood like sentinels in front of the station, but we took no notice of them. We had something else in mind. Behind the building a homemade sign said, "Ladies Rest Room."

I let Marlene go in first. I figured she wouldn't take long. She never took long at anything. I was right. She was out in no time and it was my turn. I knew what I would see before I opened the door. The walls and floor were all gray cement. The once white toilet was gray, too, and the little round sink in the corner. I didn't care. The sink had faucets with running water, and the toilet had a chain above it what made it flush. That was luxury unheard of at home and I reveled in it. I washed my hands once and pulled the chain three times.

That order of business taken care of, we crossed the street to a big white building. There, in front of the Opera House, Marlene told me something I have never forgotten. "I don't like Aunt Ida," she said. "She's crabby." (She walked on a few steps.) "She got real mad and yelled at me." (A few steps more.) "And all I did," Marlene's brown eyes looked earnestly into my face, "All I did was drop her baby."

Drop her baby? That was all? It seemed to me that dropping a baby was a pretty serious offense. I thought she was lucky to get off with a scolding. I was on Aunt Ida's side, but I didn't say so. To this day, however, when I see a too-small child handling an infant, I mentally rush forward, arms outstretched, to save the child from the likes of Marlene.

Back at the intersection I looked for the boy in the wheelchair. He was there, sheltered by the State Bank's corner steps. His three "mothers" were there, too, fussing over him like clucking hens. One smoothed a blanket on his lap. Another carried a sweater in case of a breeze, and the third gave him loving pats. The boy was thin and pale and couldn't walk. I felt sorry for him. I smiled at him when we walked by, but he didn't see me.

We made a detour to the Beehive Store. They sold things for a nickel, and Marlene and I each had a nickel to spend. There were four options, but in my mind, two had already been eliminated. Ice Cream cones were gone after a few delicious minutes, and chocolate candy bars melted. That left a package of gum or five penny candies. I decided on a package of spearmint.

We were ready now for the exciting night life of South Main. Grown-up voices and laughter mingled with music as the band played on. Girls in flowered dresses walked up and down in front of clumps of boys who said things and shoved each other and acted goofy. Sometimes the girls stopped to talk to them but mostly they didn't. The boys were brave because their mothers were sitting on benches in front of the Beehive Store, and couldn't see what they were doing.

Marlene and I set out for the merry-go round at the end of the block. (It was, in fact, a carousel, but we didn't know that word.) We walked straight ahead, but stopped when we came to the pool hall. "They sell beer there," I told Marlene. We made a wide half-circle around that questionable establishment, careful not to look at the big Budweiser sign pasted in the window.

Having thus escaped the clutches of sin, we picked up our trail again. Just a few more shops, and there it was—set back from the sidewalk in a large open space; The Magnificent Merry-Go Round! All winter it had been covered with gray canvas, only to burst forth in glory in time for the summer and the band concerts.

We knew we couldn't have a ride. We didn't have money, and a ticket cost a nickel. It was fun anyway to watch the dazzling animals gallop past us, round and round and up and down in time to a tinny tune. The striped canopy, the bright lights and the carnival music made it seem a magical place. Magic did happen there. It happened that very night.

It had to be magic, so suddenly did she appear before me. The Beautiful Gertrude! And can you believe it? She was talking...talking to me!

"You may have these," she said. "I can't use them." She handed me two tickets. Two tickets to the merry-go round! Oh, the wonder of it. Ten cents! A whole dime! It was like something from a fairy tale. I managed to stammer my thanks, but I don't know if she heard me. She was gone as suddenly as she came.

Marlene and I hopped on the merry-go round in a hurry. Marlene climbed on the zebra. I chose the horse with fire coming out of his nose. That marvelous ride lasted longer than usual. Now I know it was because it was the last ride of the season. I thought then it was part of the magic. Finally it slowed to a stop and we got off. The music stopped, and the lights dimmed. I looked back as we walked away. All was dark, the magic gone—Cinderella's carriage only a pumpkin, the butterfly but a cocoon. The band started to play "God Bless America," and I knew the band concert was over.

Walking back to the car, I realized that this marked the end of summer. In a few days school would start. I was sad, but only for a minute. I thought of the new dress I would wear on the first day of school. My mother made it for me. I thought of my new pencil box with two pencils in it and a ruler. I smiled. Life was good. I had a package of gum in my pocket, a fine story to tell my friends, and tomorrow in church I would see the minister's beautiful daughter.