

The Winners of Our Personal Narrative Essay Contest

We asked students to write about a meaningful life experience. Here are the eight winning essays, as well as runners-up and honorable mentions.

By The Learning Network Jan. 7, 2020



Our main inspiration for this contest was the long-running New York Times Magazine Lives column. All of the illustrations we have used in this post are borrowed from this column. [Related Lives Story](#) Illustration by Melinda Josie

In September, we challenged teenagers to write short, powerful stories about meaningful life experiences for our first-ever [personal narrative essay contest](#).

This contest, like every new contest we start, was admittedly a bit of an

experiment. Beyond a caution to write no more than 600 words, our rules were fairly open-ended, and we weren't sure what we would get.

Well, we received over 8,000 entries from teenagers from around the world. We got stories about scoring the winning goal, losing a grandparent, learning to love one's skin and dealing with mental illness. We got pieces that were moving, funny, introspective and honest. We got a snapshot of teenage life.

Judging a contest like this is, of course, subjective, especially with the range of content and styles of writing students submitted. But we based [our criteria](#) on the types of personal narrative essays The New York Times publishes in columns like [Lives](#), [Modern Love](#) and [Rites of Passage](#). We read many, many essays that were primarily reflective but, while these pieces might be well-suited for a college application, they weren't exactly the short, powerful stories we were looking for in this contest.

The winning essays we selected were, though, and they all had a few things in common that set them apart:

They had a clear narrative arc with a conflict and a main character who changed in some way. They artfully balanced the action of the story with reflection on what it meant to the writer. They took risks, like including dialogue or playing with punctuation, sentence structure and word choice to develop a strong voice. And, perhaps most important, they focused on a specific moment or theme — a conversation, a trip to the mall, a speech tournament, a hospital visit — instead of trying to sum up the writer's life in 600 words.

Below, you'll find these eight winning essays, published in full. Scroll to the bottom to see the names of all 35 finalists we're honoring — eight winners, eight runners-up and 19 honorable mentions. Congratulations, and thank you to everyone who participated!

Nothing Extraordinary

By Jeniffer Kim

It was a Saturday. Whether it was sunny or cloudy, hot or cold, I cannot remember, but I do remember it was a Saturday because the mall was packed with people.

I was with my mom.

Mom is short. Skinny. It is easy to overlook her in a crowd simply because she is nothing extraordinary to see.

On that day we strolled down the slippery-slick tiles with soft, inconspicuous steps, peeking at window boutiques in fleeting glances because we both knew we wouldn't be buying much, like always.

I remember I was looking up at the people we passed as we walked — at first apathetically, but then more attentively.

Ladies wore five-inch heels that clicked importantly on the floor and bright, elaborate clothing. Men strode by smelling of sharp cologne, faces clear of wrinkles — wiped away with expensive creams.

An uneasy feeling started to settle in my chest. I tried to push it out, but once it took root it refused to be yanked up and tossed away. It got more unbearable with every second until I could deny it no longer; I was ashamed of my mother.

We were in a high-class neighborhood, I knew that. We lived in a small, overpriced apartment building that hung on to the edge of our county that Mom chose to move to because she knew the schools were good.

We were in a high-class neighborhood, but as I scrutinized the passers-by and then turned accusing eyes on Mom, I realized for the first time that we

didn't belong there.

I could see the heavy lines around Mom's eyes and mouth, etched deep into her skin without luxurious lotions to ease them away. She wore cheap, ragged clothes with the seams torn, shoes with the soles worn down. Her eyes were tired from working long hours to make ends meet and her hair too gray for her age.

I looked at her, and I was ashamed.

My mom is nothing extraordinary, yet at that moment she stood out because she was just so plain.

Mumbling I'd meet her at the clothes outlet around the corner, I hurried away to the bathroom. I didn't want to be seen with her, although there was no one important around to see me anyway.

When I finally made my way to the outlet with grudging steps, I found that Mom wasn't there.

With no other options, I had to scour the other stores in the area for her. I was dreading returning to her side, already feeling the secondhand embarrassment that I'd recently discovered came with being with her.

I couldn't have been more wrong. Mom was standing in the middle of a high-end store, holding a sweater that looked much too expensive.

She said, "This will look good on you. Do you want it?"

It was much too expensive. And I almost agreed, carelessly, thoughtlessly.

Then I took a closer look at the small, weary woman with a big smile stretching across her narrow face and a sweater in her hands, happy to be giving me something so nice, and my words died in my throat.

I felt like I'd been dropped into a cold lake.

Her clothes were tattered and old because she spent her money buying me new ones. She looked so tired and ragged all the time because she was busy working to provide for me. She didn't wear jewelry or scented perfumes because she was just content with me.

Suddenly, Mother was beautiful and extraordinarily wonderful in my eyes.

I was no longer ashamed of her, but of myself.

"Do you want it?" My mom repeated.

"No thanks."

Pants on Fire

By Varya Kluev



Illustration originally created for [this Lives essay](#) Holly Wales

I never kissed the boy I liked behind the schoolyard fence that one March morning. I never had dinner with Katy Perry or lived in Kiev for two months either, but I still told my entire fourth-grade class I did.

The words slipped through my teeth effortlessly. With one flick of my tongue, I was, for all anybody knew, twenty-third in line for the throne of Monaco. "Actually?" the girls on the swings beside me would ask, wide eyes blinking with a childlike naivety. I nodded as they whispered under their

breath how incredible my fable was. So incredible they bought into it without a second thought.

I lied purely for the ecstasy of it. It was narcotic. With my fabrications, I became the captain of the ship, not just a wistful passer-by, breath fogging the pane of glass that stood between me and the girls I venerated. No longer could I only see, not touch; a lie was a bullet, and the barrier shattered. My mere presence demanded attention — after all, I was the one who got a valentine from Jason, not them.

This way I became more than just the tomboyish band geek who finished her multiplication tables embarrassingly fast. My name tumbled out of their mouths and I manifested in the center of their linoleum lunch table. I became, at least temporarily, the fulcrum their world revolved around.

Not only did I lie religiously and unabashedly — I was good at it. The tedium of my everyday life vanished; I instead marched through the gates of my alcazar, strode up the steps of my concepts, and resided in my throne of deceit. I believed if I took off my fraudulent robe, I would become plebeian. The same aristocracy that finally held me in high regard would boot me out of my palace. To strip naked and exclaim, “Here’s the real me, take a look!” would lead my new circle to redraw their lines — they would take back their compliments, sit at the table with six seats instead of eight, giggle in the back of the class when I asked a question. I therefore adjusted my counterfeit diadem and continued to praise a Broadway show I had never seen.

Yet finally lounging in a lavender bedroom one long-sought-after day, after absently digesting chatter about shows I didn’t watch and boys I didn’t know, I started processing the floating conversations. One girl, who I had idolized for always having her heavy hair perfectly curled, casually shared how her parents couldn’t afford to go on their yearly trip the coming summer. I drew in an expectant breath, but nobody scoffed. Nobody exchanged a secret criticizing glance. Instead, another girl took her spoon of

vanilla frosting out of her cheek and with the same air of indifference revealed how her family wasn't traveling either. Promptly, my spun stories about swimming in crystal pools under Moroccan sun seemed to be in vain.

The following Monday, the girls on the bus to school still shared handfuls of chocolate-coated sunflower seeds with her. At lunch, she wasn't shunned, wasn't compelled to sit at a forgotten corner table. For that hour, instead of weaving incessant fantasies, I listened. I listened to the girls nonchalantly talk about yesterday's soccer game where they couldn't score a single goal. Listened about their parent's layoff they couldn't yet understand the significance of. I listened and I watched them listen, accepting and uncritical of one another no matter how relatively vapid their story. I then too began to talk, beginning by admitting that I wasn't actually related to Britney Spears.

Eggs and Sausage

By Ryan Young Kim

When first I sat down in the small, pathetic excuse of a cafeteria the hospital had, I took a moment to reflect. I had been admitted the night before, rolled in on a stretcher like I had some sort of ailment that prevented me from walking.

But the nurses in the ward were nice to me, especially when they saw that I wasn't going to be one of the violent ones. They started telling me something, but I paid no attention; I was trying to take in my surroundings. The tables were rounded, chairs were essentially plastic boxes with weight inside, and there was no real glass to be seen.

After they filled out the paperwork, the nurses escorted me to my room. There was someone already in there, but he was dead asleep. The two beds were plain and simple, with a cheap mattress on top of an equally cheap wooden frame. One nurse stuck around to hand me my bedsheets and a gown that I had to wear until my parents dropped off clothes.

The day had been exhausting, waiting for the psychiatric ward to tell us that there was a bed open for me and the doctors to fill out the mountains of paperwork that come with a suicide attempt.

Actually, there had been one good thing about that day. My parents had brought me Korean food for lunch — *sullungtang*, a fatty stew made from ox-bone broth. God, even when I was falling asleep I could still taste some of the rice kernels that had been mixed into the soup lingering around in my mouth.

For the first time, I felt genuine hunger. My mind had always been racked with a different kind of hunger — a pining for attention or just an escape from the toil of waking up and not feeling anything. But I always had everything I needed — that is, I always had food on my plate, maybe even a little too much. Now, after I had tried so hard to wrench myself away from this world, my basic human instinct was guiding me toward something that would keep me alive.

The irony was lost on me then. All I knew was that if I slept earlier, that meant less time awake being hungry. So I did exactly that. Waking up the next day, I was dismayed to see that the pangs of hunger still rumbled through my stomach. I slid off my covers and shuffled out of my room. The cafeteria door was already open, and I looked inside. There was a cart of Styrofoam containers in the middle of the room, and a couple people were eating quietly. I made my way in and stared.

I scanned the tops of the containers — they were all marked with names: Jonathan, Nathan, Kristen — and as soon as I spotted my name, my mouth began to water.

My dad would sometimes tell me about his childhood in a rural Korean village. The hardships he faced, the hunger that would come if the village harvest floundered, and how he worked so hard to get out — I never listened. But in that moment, between when I saw my container and I sat

down at a seat to open it, I understood.

The eggs inside were watery, and their heat had condensed water all over, dripping onto everything and making the sausages soggy. The amount of ketchup was pitiful.

But if I hadn't been given plastic utensils, I think I would have just shoved it all into my mouth, handful by handful.

First Impressions

By Isabel Hui

When I woke up on August 4, 2016, there was only one thing on my mind: what to wear. A billion thoughts raced through my brain as wooden hangers shuffled back and forth in the cramped hotel closet. I didn't want to come off as a try-hard, but I also didn't want to be seen as a slob. Not only was it my first day of high school, but it was my first day of school in a new state; first impressions are everything, and it was imperative for me to impress the people who I would spend the next four years with. For the first time in my life, I thought about how convenient it would be to wear the horrendous matching plaid skirts that private schools enforce.

It wasn't insecurity driving me to madness; I was actually quite confident for a teenage girl. It was the fact that this was my third time being the new kid. Moving so many times does something to a child's development ... I struggled finding friends that I could trust would be there for me if I picked up and left again. But this time was different because my dad's company ensured that I would start and finish high school in the same place. This meant no instant do-overs when I pick up and leave again. This time mattered, and that made me nervous.

After meticulously raiding my closet, I emerged proudly in a patterned dress from Target. The soft cotton was comfortable, and the ruffle shoulders

added a hint of fun. Yes, this outfit was the one. An hour later, I felt just as powerful as I stepped off the bus and headed toward room 1136. But as I turned the corner into my first class, my jaw dropped to the floor.

Sitting at her desk was Mrs. Hutfilz, my English teacher, sporting the exact same dress as I. I kept my head down and tiptoed to my seat, but the first day meant introductions in front of the whole class, and soon enough it was my turn. I made it through my minute speech unscathed, until Mrs. Hutfilz stood up, jokingly adding that she liked my style. Although this was the moment I had been dreading from the moment I walked in, all the anxiety that had accumulated throughout the morning surprisingly melted away; the students who had previously been staring at their phones raised their heads to pay attention as I shared my story. My smile grew as I giggled with my peers, ending my speech with "and I am very stylish, much like my first period teacher." After class, I stayed behind and talked to Mrs. Hutfilz, sharing my previous apprehension about coming into a new school and state. I was relieved to make a humorous and genuine connection with my first teacher, one that would continue for the remainder of the year.

This incident reminded me that it's only high school; these are the times to have fun, work hard, and make memories, not stress about the trivial details. Looking back four years later, the ten minutes I spent dreading my speech were really not worth it. While my first period of high school may not have gone exactly the way I thought it would, it certainly made the day unforgettable in the best way, and taught me that Mrs. Hutfilz has an awesome sense of style!

Cracks in the Pavement

By Adam Bernard Sanders

It was my third time sitting there on the middle school auditorium stage. The upper chain of braces was caught in my lip again, and my palms were sweating, and my glasses were sliding down my nose. The pencil quivered

in my hands. All I had to do was answer whatever question Mrs. Crisafulli, the history teacher, was going to say into that microphone. I had answered 26 before that, and 25 of those correctly. And I was sitting in my chair, and I was tapping my foot, and the old polo shirt I was wearing was starting to constrict and choke me. I pulled pointlessly at the collar, but the air was still on the outside, only looking at the inside of my throat. I was going to die.

I could taste my tongue in my mouth shriveling up. I could feel each hard-pumping heartbeat of blood travel out of my chest, up through my neck and down my arms and legs, warming my already-perspiring forehead but leaving my ghost-white fingers cold and blue. My breathing was quick. My eyes were glassy. I hadn't even heard the question yet.

Late-night readings of my parents' anatomy textbooks had told me that a sense of impending doom was the hallmark of pulmonary embolism, a fact that often bubbled to the surface of my mind in times like these. Almost by instinct, I bent my ring and little fingers down, holding them with my thumb as the two remaining digits whipped to my right wrist and tried to take my pulse. Mr. Mendoza had taught us this last year in gym class. But I wasn't in gym class that third period. I was just sitting on the metal folding chair, waiting for Mrs. Crisafulli to flip to the right page in her packet for the question.

Arabella had quizzed me in second-period French on the lakes of Latin America. Nicaragua. Atitlán. Yojoa. Lake Titicaca, that had made Raj, who sat in front of me, start giggling, and Shannon, who sat three desks up and one to the left, whip her head around and raise one fist to her lips, jab up her index finger, and silence us. Lakes were fed by rivers, the same rivers that lined the globe on my desk like the cracks in the pavement I liked to trace with my shoe on the walk home. Lake Nicaragua drains into the San Juan River, which snakes its way around the port of Granada to empty into the Caribbean Sea. I knew that.

At that moment I was only sure of those two things: the location of Lake

Nicaragua and my own impending doom. And I was so busy counting my pulse and envisioning my demise that I missed Mrs. Crisafulli's utterance of the awaited question into her microphone, as I had each year in the past as one of the two people left onstage.

"... Coldest ... on earth," was all I heard. My pencil etched shaggy marks as my shaking hands attempted to write something in the 20 seconds remaining.

"Asia," I scrawled.

So, for the third time in three years, I got it wrong, and for the third time, I didn't die. I walked home that day, tracing the faults in the pavement and wondering what inside me was so cracked and broken. Something had to be fissured inside, like the ridges and rivers on my desk globe that I would throw out later that evening, but fish from the trash can when the sun rose the next day.

Sorry, Wrong Number

By Michelle Ahn



Illustration originally created for [this Lives essay](#) Illustration by Melinda Josie

My phone buzzes. An unfamiliar number with a 512 area code — I later find out it's from Texas. It's a selfie of a 30-something man, smiling with his family, a strange picture to receive as I live halfway across the country.

For the past three years, I — a 14-year-old girl living in Virginia — have been getting texts meant for this man, Jared. Over the years, I've pieced together parts of who he is; middle-aged, Caucasian, and very popular according to the numerous messages I've received for him.

Throughout this time, I've also been discovering who I am. When I received the first text, I was a playful sixth grader, always finding sly ways to be subversive in school and with friends. With this new method of mischief in my hands, naturally, I engaged:

"My sweet momma just told me that BYU Texas Club is holding a Texas Roundup free BBQ dinner on October 10th! Thought y'all would enjoy," came one of the texts.

After staring at the message for a while, I responded.

"YUMMMMY"

As time went on, the story of the mystery man deepened. I was halfway through sixth grade, for example, when I learned he was part of the "Elder's Quorum," a rather ominous-sounding group. Looking it up, I learned that it was not a cult, as I'd initially thought, but rather an elite inner circle within the Mormon Church.

This was around the same time my family had stopped going to church. I'd started to spend more time taking art classes and trying out various sports — tennis, basketball, even archery — and soon church fell to the side. Instead, I meddled in the Quorum's group texts; when a message came about a member moving away, I excitedly responded, "Let me help y'all out, brother!"

I'm not sure exactly when it happened, but after a while I started to feel guilty about this deception. I wondered if I'd somehow ruined Jared's reputation, if his friends were turned off by my childish responses. I was also

dealing with changes within my friend group at the time; the biggest change being letting go of a close but toxic friend; I realized that I needed friendships that were more mutually supportive.

Shortly after, I got a phone call from a strange woman. She started talking about the struggles in her life; her children, her job, even about how she wanted to leave Texas forever. In comparison, my own problems — the B minus I'd gotten, the stress of an upcoming archery tournament, the argument I had with my sister — all seemed superficial. I timidly informed her I wasn't Jared, and her flustered response told me that I should have told her at the start of the call.

A while later, I got another text: "Congratulations on getting married!" It had never occurred to me how much Jared's life had changed since I had received his number. But of course it did; over time, I'd outgrown my prankster middle school self, gained the confidence to build a solid friend group, and devoted myself to my primary loves of art and archery. Why wouldn't Jared also be settling into his own life too?

Though I've since taken every opportunity to correct those who text Jared, it still happens every once in a while. Just last month, I got another random text; all it said was: "Endoscopy!" When I got it, I laughed, and then I wrote back.

"Hey, sorry, you have the wrong number. But I hope Jared's doing well."

Speechless

By Maria Fernanda Benavides



Illustration originally created for [this Lives essay](#) Illustration by Holly Wales

"Mayfier? Marfir?" the tournament judge called squinting her eyes, trying to find the spelling error, although there was no error.

"It's Mafer. It's a nickname for my full name, Maria Fernanda."

She stared at me blankly.

"My parents are creative," I lied, and she laughed.

"O.K., Mahfeer, you're up!"

I walk to the center and scanned the room before starting as instructed. I took a deep breath.

I reminded myself, "Use your voice."

I spoke loudly at first, trying to hide the fact that I was overthinking every single word that came out of my mouth. As my performance continued, the artificial confidence became natural, and I started speaking from my heart as I told the story of my experience as an immigrant woman, and I described

how much I missed my father who had to travel back and forth every weekend to see my mom and me, and how disconnected I felt from my family, and how I longed to have a place I could call home.

My performance came to an end, and I made my way back to my seat with newly found optimism as I reflected on how performing had consumed me.

I used my voice. Finally. I had found my home in the speech program.

Waiting for the speech tournament to post the names of the finalists was excruciating. I jumped off my seat every time a staff member passed by. I didn't care about accumulating state points or individual recognition. I wanted the chance to speak again.

Finally, a girl walked up to the oratory postings with a paper on her hand, and the entire cafeteria surrounded her, impatiently waiting to see who the finalists were. Then, I saw it.

My name. Written in dense, black letters.

I smiled to myself.

This time, as I walked to the oratory final, I did so by myself, as I had finally acquired self-assurance needed to navigate the quiet hallways of the high school. I could only hear the heels of the two girls behind me.

"I heard that Saint Mary's Hall freshman made it to oratory finals," one of them said, obviously speaking about me. "She broke over me. I didn't see her performance. Did you? Did you see her performance? What is her speech about?" she questioned the other one.

"It's about being a Mexican immigrant."

"Oh, so that's why she broke."

"It's the same pity narrative, there's nothing different about it."

Suddenly, the confidence that I had acquired from the previous rounds vanished, and I found myself wishing that I had my older, more experienced teammates by my side to help me block the girls' words. But no one was there.

I thought my narrative was what made my words matter, what made me matter.

But they didn't matter. Not anymore. From that moment on, I knew I would be recognized around the circuit as the Mexican girl whose name no one knows how to pronounce. I didn't even need to speak about my identity to be identified. Everyone would recognize me not for my achievement or my being, but by the peculiar way I pronounce words. I could speak about different topics, but it felt like it wouldn't make a difference. It felt like my voice didn't make a difference.

"Mafer, how did it feel?" my coach asked me after the round. "It felt amazing!" I lied.

I didn't feel anything. Not anymore. Speech gave me a voice, but it also took it away.

The Man Box

By Gordon Lewis

We're all average boys: hard working in school, spending every minute together in the summer, and doing our best to pretend we don't have a worry in the world. The facts are no different as the sun is beginning to set on a warm July evening. Sam and I say goodbye to Ben, stepping out of our best friend's house.

"My sister is going to pick me up while we're walking, is that O.K.?" I ask.

"Yeah."

"Actually, she can probably drive you home, too."

"Sounds good," says Sam, but lacking his usual upbeat, comedic energy. Neither of us says anything else, but I'm O.K. with it, we just keep walking. I look around, admiring the still, peaceful park as the warm summer breeze brushes across my face. The crickets are chirping and an owl sings along between the soft hum of cars rolling along nearby. It's nature's tune of serenity.

I almost forgot Sam was with me until he asked, "Can I ask you kind of a weird question?"

"Sure," I say, expecting a joke in poor taste as per usual.

"You don't have to answer if you don't want to," he says before asking.

More hesitantly, I say, "O.K."

"Do you have someone that you talk to about like deeper stuff ... Like more emotional stuff?" Silence hits us like a brick wall: The crickets stop chirping, the owl stops hooting, even the cars stop driving by. It's deafening. I'm only shocked at the question because it's Sam, one of the happiest and funniest people I know.

I'm wondering. My disappointment takes over just as quickly as my hope fades as I fail to come up with a name. In the end, the closest thing I can think of is the book I occasionally write in when I'm feeling sad or stressed.

"Huh," I say quietly, "I've never really thought about that, but I guess not."

"Yeah, I didn't either, but at camp we did activities and had talks that led to more emotional conversations." I'm silently both jealous and proud of him, but it's mostly jealousy.

"It's funny," I say, "in English we always joked about that TED Talk guy

talking about the man box, but it's actually so true. We shouldn't feel like we can't talk about deeper stuff like that."

"Yeah," laughed Sam. Silence drapes over us again, but this time it's more comfortable. I'm lost in my thoughts trying to think of what to say next, but there's too much. I've never had an opportunity like this before. However it's not shocking or overwhelming, even though it's with Sam of all people — instead it's therapeutic.

The silence is broken once again by Sam:

"Like I never told you guys that my parents got divorced."

"I'm-I'm sorry," I say, "That really sucks." I'm disappointed in myself for not saying more.

"It's O.K.," Sam says, but I know he's lying. I can feel his sadness.

Drowning in my thoughts, I try to pick out something to say. But there's too much to say. There are too many options after being silent for 16 years.

Headlights appear in front of us, and for a split second I'm relieved, but it rapidly turns into regret.

Knowing it's Rose, I quickly tell sam, "If you ever want to talk again just let me know."

I say hi to Rose, masking my solemn, thoughtful mood as tiredness. The warm breeze gives my cheek one final kiss; nature resumes her number, and the cars roll by again as Sam and I reluctantly step into the car.

Finalists

In alphabetical order by the writer's last name

Winners

"Sorry, Wrong Number" by Michelle Ahn

"Speechless" by Maria Fernanda Benavides

"First Impressions" by Isabel Hui

"Nothing Extraordinary" by Jeniffer Kim

"Eggs and Sausage" by Ryan Young Kim

"Pants on Fire" by Varya Kluev

"The Man Box" by Gordon Lewis

"Cracks in the Pavement" by Adam Bernard Sanders

Runners-Up

"The First (and Last) Time Speedy Wasn't Speedy Enough" by Maya Berg

"Searching for Air" by Sydney Do

"Fear on My Mind" by Daytona Gerhardy

"Under the Starry Sky" by Letian Li

"Chinatown Diptych" by Jeffrey Liao

"They" by Haven Low

"The Vigil" by Beda Lundstedt

"How My Brother Taught Me to Drive" by Sarah Shapiro

Honorable Mentions

"The Six in Mid-August" by Liah Argiropoulos

"Those Aren't Scratches Are They?" by Casey Barwick

"Brown Is Beautiful" by Tiffany Borja

"I Am Ordinary, After All" by Rebecca Braxley

"Torn" by Melanie D.

"The Stupid Seven" by Madeline G.

"Speak No Evil" by Amita Goyal

"Building My Crown" by Ambar Guzman

"Me, Myself, and a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich" by Zachary Hommel

"The Tomato" by Raymond Huang

"Out" by Michael H.

"Cold Noodles With a Side of Birdballs" by Audrey Koh

"Banya in Siberia" by Arshiya Sanghi

"Traffic" by Kecia Seo

"The Power of Ambiguity" by Marcus Shallow

"Land Mine" by Geneve Thomas-Palmer

"How to Fall Asleep With the Lights On" by Caroline Wei

"The Taste of Tofu" by Amy Zhou

"The Newcomer's Journey" by Maria Z.

Thank you to all our contest judges!

Edward Bohan, Amanda Christy Brown, Elda Cantú, Julia Carmel, Elaine Chen, Nancy Coleman, Nicole Daniels, John Dorman, Shannon Doyne, Jeremy Engle, Tracy Evans, Ross Flatt, Vivian Giang, Caroline Crosson Gilpin, Michael Gonchar, Lovia Gyarkye, Annissa Hambouz, Karen Hanley, Christine Hauser, Susan Josephs, Shira Katz, Dahlia Kozlowsky, Megan Leder, Miya Lee, Debbie Leiderman, Shauntel Lowe, Keith Meatto, Sue Mermelstein, Amelia Nierenberg, Anna Nordeen, John Otis, Ken Paul, Pia Peterson, Natalie Proulx, Nancy Redd, Kenneth Rosen, Rebecca Rufo-Teppe, Kristina Samulewski, Meghan Stoddard, Brett Vogelsinger, Bonnie Wertheim, Jack Wheeler, Lena Wilson, Sanam Yar

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