



LACEY LOVES TO READ 2017  
TEEN WRITERS COLLECTION



COVER ART BY BASIA COVERT

POETRY BY LIYANA ALAM, RACHEL BOOTH, NATALIE ROSE McVAY

SHORT STORIES BY NICHOLAS McCLELLAND, NATHAN REIMER,  
EMILY PREUSS



Partners of the 2017 Lacey Loves to Read Celebration, which include the Lacey Timberland Library, the City of Lacey, and North Thurston Public Schools, have created this work to recognize the authors and to promote the programs and organizations associated with Lacey Loves to Read. All creative works herein have been reproduced with permission by the creators and/or the creator’s legal guardian(s). All rights associated with the poetry, stories, characters, and art included in this work are retained by the creators for their own use, and may not be reproduced by other entities without their express permission.

### Table of Contents

<a href="#">Lost by Basia Covert.....</a>	<a href="#">Cover Art</a>
<a href="#">Songbird by Liyana Alam 1<sup>st</sup> Poetry.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Raining Again by Rachel Booth 2<sup>nd</sup> Poetry.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Hope by Natalie Rose McVay 3<sup>rd</sup> Poetry.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Snake Heart by Nicholas McClelland 1<sup>st</sup> Short Story.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Stronger by Nathan Reimer 2<sup>nd</sup> Short Story.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Human Nature by Emily Preuss 3<sup>rd</sup> Short Story.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>

## Songbird

By Liyana Alam

Songbird–

they might've caged you in metal bars, but those are flimsy paper  
compared to the abyss you've imprisoned yourself in,  
and since you haven't fallen to the bottom yet, I still have hope,  
and can see it fluttering like colorful ribbons streaming behind your wings,  
as you fall deeper;  
if only I could catch you, and bring you back to the surface of the murk.  
But you decide for yourself what's more beautiful:  
truth, or the sparkling veil of lies you wish to wear.

Songbird–

They aimed a bow to fire at you,  
but the arrow is nothing more than imaginary;  
so why have you fallen from the sky,  
simply because they slandered you, and your mellifluous song?

Songbird–

even though your wings are clipped,  
and your beak is bound by twine,  
and for nourishment, you've turned to the poison called self-loathing, listen:  
open your eyes, let in the dark, and see the resplendence hidden in the shadows;  
for darkness has its own, ethereal kind of elegance.  
Without darkness, radiance wouldn't be anything special.

Songbird–

see this light you breathe into the world?  
You may think that if you stop singing  
others will take your place in this dead earth; but you are the sun to me,  
even if you're an insignificant star to the rest of the universe.

Songbird– don't be afraid;  
there is a melody in the thunder, and brilliance in the lightning  
of the beautiful, chaotic storm that the world is, and if they can't find it,  
sing it to them.

## Raining Again

By Rachel Booth

Every day, we wake to rain  
And to it, fall asleep  
The clouds are hanging over us  
And every day they weep.

Now and then, a bit of sun  
Again makes life feel warm  
Melancholy melts away  
A calm after the storm.

It's raining again  
The tempest churning  
The outlook bleak  
Grey clouds returning.

But rain brings life  
Paints landscapes green  
Restores our strength  
Renews, makes clean.

So try to remember  
When clouds won't free it  
The sun's still there  
We just can't see it.

## Hope

By Natalie Rose McVay

A single spark grew to a flame  
Creating a fire that swept across a city  
Leaving devastation and destruction in its wake  
Smoke thickened the air  
People and animals fled; desperate to save their own lives

A city lies in ruins  
People's lives in ruins  
All seems to be in ruins  
Hope is but a bird  
Long since flown away

But the bird, Hope, returns  
Carried selflessly by the goodwill of others  
Longing to help a city in distress  
There is beauty in the way they give of themselves  
Offer Hope up like a gift

People offer prayer, money, time  
Materials, love, a friend  
Each gift kissed by Hope  
Each gift from the heart of someone  
Proving that Hope has not flown away

Cries of suffering ring out when loss is discovered  
But Hope still perches on a burned branch  
Her feathers singed, yet she is still alive  
There are jubilant shouts as well  
A wedding band, heirloom or photograph found

People cry with sadness and pain, but some cry with joy  
So glad to have escaped with their lives  
For some there is nothing left for them  
Nothing but a wispy bird called Hope  
And Hope is embraced with open arms

\*This poem is dedicated to all victims of the Gatlinburg fires. May the peace of God surround them in this tragic time.

## Snake Heart

By Nicholas McClelland

Rena nonchalantly kicked the shiny red ball against the stone wall. She watched as the ball thudded against the surface and then, almost elastically, ricocheted speedily towards the earth below. Rena had decided to play with her ball over here, where it couldn't ruin any of the elegant flowers huddled around other small temples. Instead of mutilating white roses and bursting against the sharp thorns protruding from the stem, the ball landed peacefully on a rectangular patch of neatly trimmed grass.

Rena hoped the owner of the property wouldn't mind if a bit of the uniform grass was flattened.

She bounced the ball against the wall a few more times, sighing occasionally when the red orb found its way out of the boundaries of the grass. She was bored out of her mind. Her mom was in the hospital, having been diagnosed weeks ago with an unidentifiable illness. Conveniently, Rena's dad worked as a medical assistant at that very same hospital. But it wasn't that convenient for Rena. For eight hours a day, she was left with nothing to do. She couldn't bear being trapped inside her own home. So every day she found somewhere new to travel to, a new abyss to explore, an unfamiliar territory to trek through. Today that place was the Matsugo Palace, as indicated by the bright purple sign that marked the beginning of a stone path.

The ball nimbly slipped out of Rena's grasp as she hastily dashed forward to catch it, only to be disappointed when it struggled out of her hand. She watched it bounce along the stone path like a flat rock skipping across the still waters of a pond. Her goal was to catch the rock before it plunged below the depths of the pool.

A determined expression dominating her face, she raced down the path; a dragonfly dancing around the water. She saw the gleam of the crimson ball as she continued to run. She could see it winding down, threatening to stop. Rena's face hardened more as she gave one final push towards her goal. She was almost there....

A rough hand clamped firmly around the ball, almost popping it. Rena's fit of fierce persistence came to an abrupt halt. Her eyes slowly traveled up the body that belonged to the hand, spotting a ragged shirt and a golden necklace. She gulped heavily as she met the ball capturer's eyes. Jarring blue irises burned through Rena's placid brown eyes. Her hand twitched. She wanted to reach for the ball, but she knew better.

The man sighed and ran a hand through his unruly black hair. He let the ball drop to his side as he grabbed Rena's wrist tightly. She squealed and started to kick, but the man dragged her down the stone path, until they came to a wooden bench on top of a grassy hill.

"Sit," the man grumbled, looking off into the distance. Rena nervously took a seat on the edge of the bench. The man slumped down, taking up most of the room. Rena felt uncomfortable.

After a thick silence that not even a thousand-degree knife could cut through, the man used a strong grunt to bash the quietness, breaking it beneath the sound's battle-scarred fists.

"Do you know why I brought you here?" the man asked, his hands on the bench.

Rena said nothing.

"This hill is the home of a mouse. Do you like mice?" the man inquired.

"Am I in trouble?" Rena whispered. The man shook his head.

"Do you like mice?" he repeated.

“Mommy doesn’t like mice...” Rena muttered.

“Ah,” the man replied, nodding slightly. After another period of prolonged uncomfortable silence, the man spoke up again. “Would you like to hear a story?”

Rena opened her mouth, but before she could say yes, the man began his tale.

“Once upon a time, there was a rich, fat mouse. He lived beneath this very hill, in a huge mansion. From all around the garden, word had spread of his wealth, and everyone envied what the mouse had. One animal in particular really wanted to be like the mouse. He was a snake. A small green one, with black scales. He was really envious of the mouse.

“One day, the snake decided to peer through the window of the mouse’s mansion. What he saw amazed him. Stacks and piles of gleaming gold littered the room. The snake licked his lips, dreaming of how many golden scales he would have if he got ahold of the golden treasure. So his yellow eyes darted around, making sure no sneaky bugs were cloaked by the waving grass, until he was sure he was alone. Even with all his precaution, there was still one animal roaming around. And that animal was a bird, who had perched on a nearby tree.”

Rena looked around for trees. She didn’t see any in sight.

“The snake wormed his way into the room, and stole all of the gold, storing it inside his mouth. He began to stroll through town. First the snake passed a butterfly. ‘Hello, snake,’ he said, in a deep, royal voice. The snake gave a friendly flick of his tail, and the butterfly gracefully flew away. Next came a weasel. ‘Where have you been, snake? I was looking all over for you,’ she asked. The snake struggled to hold back from gold exploding out of his mouth, but he regained his calm stride and pointed with his tail towards the hill. The weasel nodded and ran in between the trees. The snake continued through town and almost reached the end, when the bird plopped in front of him. The bird looked the snake right in the eye and said, ‘Your teeth look quite shiny today.’ The snake gulped, swallowing a dangerous amount of gold. He sputtered and choked, pieces of gold spraying out from his jaws. The bird picked up the gold and took it back to the mouse, who was furious at the snake, but rewarded the bird with golden feathers.”

Rena looked into the man’s gleaming eyes. “The snake wanted the gold really bad, and now he was punished for it. The gold he had swallowed weighed him down to the ground, so that he stayed at the edge of town for all eternity. But after all those boring, drowning years of waiting, the gold had traveled. From his stomach, the gold had made its way up to the snake’s heart. He had spent years watching the town grow up, hearing people talking about their struggles, hearing people talk about their lives. Weasel’s kids had died, the butterfly had lost his wings, and even the bird’s wings lost their shine. He grew sympathetic listening to people’s problems, and started to worry about others rather than himself. And over these years, the cruel, deceptive snake had finally learned the meaning of sorry.

“The snake was sorry.

“The snake began to wish harder and harder that people’s lives would get better again. All the gold in his heart slowly began to drain away, until there was none left. He became a dry, flaky skin who was nearing the end of his life. When he was on the brink of death, he saw that out of the shadows, a weasel came.

“‘Hi. My mom said that you were a great friend.’

“The snake smiled, bits of gold lodged in his fangs.

“Then came the butterfly. He just looked at the snake. Then, with a magnificent swooshing sound, wings of pure gold stretched out from his back and he flew away.

“The snake chuckled. His soft laughter was twisted into loud coughing.

“Then came the bird. He unfolded his wings, his feathers gleaming despite the darkness.

“The snake raised his tail, and then dropped it to the ground.

“His eyes closed peacefully.

“He had spent his heart on the others he cared for.

“And that cost more than gold.”

The man looked at the setting sun.

“Don’t forget about yourself, Rena,” he said.

And he dropped the ball into her hand.



## Stronger

By Nathan Reimer

I got off an airplane from southern California to Germany. The moisture in the air made it heavy, which compared to California was like breathing water making it hard to breathe. The air reminded me of my chest. Heavy. Filled with sorrow. Sadness tugged at me. Sadness was the only thing in my mind. Moving to a new country was hard for me since I did not know anyone. I got into a car with my family and drove to the new house.

New. I hated that word. Ever since I was a child, change was not something I liked. New schools, they were the thing I hated most. Not knowing anyone and having to adjust to new rules. A new country seemed like a step down from a new school. The people in this country may look like me, but the way they talk and how they acted...that was the most uncomfortable change for me. Needing to change myself to fit in did not feel comfortable at all.

I was at the new school. The bullies in class were yelling curse words,(the only English they knew well) and insults. I was done putting up with their behavior. I knew the kids would ignore me, but I had to at least try to get them to be quiet. Still looking down at my paper, I asked, "Leise bitte" (*please be quiet*). They ignored me. Typical. I continued with my work, trying to block out the sounds around me. Now throwing paper wads and running around the room, my classmates were only getting louder. The whole school probably heard the cursing by now. And once again, no one did anything to stop it.

"Leise bitte," I said once more. If the others could hear me, which I doubted, they didn't care. "Leise bitte," I implored. No decrease in the noise level. "LEISE BITTE!" I yelled, hoping for the slightest bit of recognition. Now, I was angry with the people who surrounded me, like a tornado of chaos, with a center that wants it all to end. I stood up and banged my clenched fist against the table and yelled with all the courage left within me, "SHUT UP!" (Another phrase I'm sure they knew).

I could have let them be. I could have gone and joined and made a ruckus and gone home like it had never happened. I could have left without all the trouble I had gone through. But I decided to leave with a few extra bruises. Why? Why did I have to go and get myself hurt? I guess anger made it hard to think straight.

One day, I walked out of the classroom to go to recess. I had gone to the bathroom, but turned around when I saw what kids were doing in there. I walked down to the swings, which to me was the place where people were less likely to bother me, when all of a sudden I heard people chanting, "FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!" All the ugliest words were in English it seemed.

There were two boys surrounded by a chanting crowd. One looked angry and the other looked as if it were a game and he was having fun. For a moment I stared, scared of what might have happen next. I felt sorry for the angry one, being intimidated, and then forced to fight. If he left he would be looked upon as a wuss.

It only took about five seconds for me to jump off the swing, run through the crowd, and get in between them. They were both much bigger than me, but I stood my ground. Both looked confused and the crowd had stopped cheering. I was getting nervous on how much longer I could keep these guys from fighting. Luckily, a teacher came out to stop the fight. She talked to the two boys and sent them on their way. No punishment at all.

After, a German kid came and introduced himself. "Hi, I am Lucas." He spoke a surprising amount of English.

"Hi. I'm Nathan," I replied.

“I am the one who got the teacher after you broke up the fight,” said Lucas.

Lucas invited me over to his house. He showed me his favorite video games and shared some of his favorite chocolate with me. Germany didn't seem quite as gloomy to me after we became friends. The kids at school were still as annoying as ever, but then I could talk to Lucas about it and not have to be alone during recess. Just having a friend can turn your entire point of view around. He also introduced me to some of his friends, so that I had quite a few friends. He took me to the miniature wonderland, which is a place where they make and display tiny cities. Just having a friend helped me to notice the good things even when he wasn't there. Instead of being depressed about not having friends, I could enjoy myself knowing that I did have friends. To me friendship is one of the most important things on earth.

## Human Nature By Emily Preuss

They say not to interact with active shooters unless you know you are completely safe. Oops.

*“You know, you’re pretty cool.”*

I lay there going over those last twenty minutes. Twenty minutes of confusion. Twenty minutes before my world went black. Twenty minutes of terror. Twenty minutes of insanity. The same black that I see now behind my closed eyelids, I replace it with my memories, even though I know it’s not really gone. It’s still there, waiting behind their soft glow.

First I see a light blue wall, then I realize it’s a part of my home. That small space that provided me with solitude. Whenever I needed it, it was there, just like it is now. The view quickly shifts to two people hugging in a kitchen, my kitchen. One seems to have just arrived as he is still wearing his coat and holding his lunch box. Classic Dad. My parents were kind people. They made enough for the necessities, but my life was undoubtedly a plain one. My schools pop up one by one, Roosevelt Elementary, Kenwood Middle, and...*Jennice High*. I saw the building for just a moment and then it flashed to the inner chaos of that day.

They said he was inside for a full 45 minutes before the lock-down. Third period was just about over when they announced it; we were finishing a project and the dropping of school supplies created a simultaneous harmony with the secretary’s voice.

She was returning from the bathroom and didn’t know what was going on. As her partner, I thought it was my job to fill her in. I motioned for her to come and sit with the rest of us in the back of the classroom and she turned to face me. My eyes widened to show the urgency of the situation, but her pace was slow due to the awkwardly strewn desks in the way. Seven minutes. In those seven minutes all hell broke loose. She was almost there but not quite, and that was as far as she’d get.

Because the door didn’t close all the way behind her, and if there’s one thing a shooter can find, it’s an open door.

\*\*\*

Like a great storm he slammed open the door and shot around the room.

None of the bullets had hit anyone, thank God, but after the third we made eye contact. Then he changed his aim. I don’t know what he saw in those eyes, but before I knew it I was up and the barrel was pointed at her. The worst part is I don’t know why. I don’t know why he decided to bring that gun to our school. Why the door didn’t close all the way. Why we were picked to be partners. Why she seemed to freeze when she finally understood what was happening. But mostly I wish I knew why I stood up.

I knew the odds, there was no way both of us would survive unharmed. I stood up anyway. I stood up to help a girl whose name I don’t even remember. I stood up because I cared. I cared about this stray classmate. This girl that I barely knew, let alone loved enough that I would lay down my life. Yet I still cared. I cared and so I moved. Not only did I move but I was moved. Moved to make a difference, so this girl’s family didn’t have to go through that sadness. That heart-wrenching grief that I went through all those years ago. I cared, because humans

protect each other from the bad things, and so I stood. I stood between life and death, and was chosen by death.

I remember hearing two cracks. The first from the release of a small bullet, the second from the same round object hitting my ribs. I knew they were broken before I felt the pain. I heard a scream, then brushed my cheek against the rough carpet.

Hi, my name is Jacob and I just got shot. The people standing by that house are my parents, so if you excuse me I'm going to go home.

I feel my whole being smile, and see the blue walls one last time. Letting out a final satisfied sigh in harmony with the flat line, I know that now I'm finally home.