

About Our Judge: Dr. Gary L. Hauck is Dean Emeritus of Arts and Sciences at Montcalm Community College. He taught college courses in the humanities for more than 40 years, and was a visiting professor in China, Russia, and Ecuador. He is the author of nineteen books and twenty-six periodical articles. During his time as president of the Michigan Liberal Arts Deans, he served on the LAND planning council and participated in the organization of the statewide writing contest.

2020 Poetry Winners

1st Place – Analise Krawczuk, “The Day the Flowers Wilted”

Despite the frequently penned theme of unrequited love, this creative and metaphoric poem incorporates graphic mental images to address the inevitable decision of letting go. A worn-out swing set about to be discarded, falling autumn leaves, and the inference of wilted flowers all speak to the reality of certain change.

This free-verse poem follows the rhythm of natural speech, but in a pleasing pattern of words and phrases that artfully adds to its readability and feel. Its italicized line in the center of the piece boldly declares the writer’s thesis, “*you can not love someone into loving you.*” Having learned that heart-wrenching truth, the choice is made to move on – into a state of emotional change, which is “scary, but not as much as staying this way forever” in unrequited love.

2nd Place – Emma Skogseth, “Yesterday Yearning, Tolerant Tomorrow”

If poetry is the language of the soul, then this piece can be recognized as a yearning of the soul for a world of tolerance for diversity and cultural pluralism. It is a polemic against harsh judgmentalism, hate speech, bigotry and prejudice toward those who are “different.”

The traditional stanza format of the poem adds elements of parallelism within and between the strophes, having the first three stanzas begin with a similar antithetic couplet. The second line is the same in each case. This creates a sense of climactic energy that resolves in stanza four, with the yard signs, Facebook post, and poem morphing into the promise of change, and a new tomorrow.

2020 Short Fiction Winners

1st Place – Hannah DeVries, “A. Bradly”

In this delightful romantic short story, an immediate flashback gives what the reader needs to know of the characters and ensuing plot. The writer then uses a smooth and unencumbered style to develop a sense of tension mixed with expectation. After giving the reader an omniscient point of view, a twist of irony adds both an air of comedy and hope that eventually leads to a happy resolution. It is a charming and entertaining story that holds your interest and captures your imagination.

2nd Place – Emma Skogseth, “Cut”

This well-crafted story uses colorful words and dialects to artfully convey its down-home context and over-all setting. With vivid figures of speech and turns of irony, each paragraph is a treat. In a delightful mix of realism and invention, recurring parallel actions and phrases are used to communicate the moral of the story that in the human race, everyone is equal and worthy of respect.

2020 Creative Non-Fiction Winners

1st Place – Kaya Fisher, “A Day for Her”

This timely expose´ in the form of a short story sadly depicts a normal day in the life of an undocumented immigrant and her two girls, ages 12 and 17. Laced with accurate information, realistic descriptions, and emotional insight, the essay seamlessly moves back and forth from dialogue to third-person narrative, giving the reader a vantage point of careful observer. As a creative reporting of the travesty of justice, the writer skillfully shows how the exploitation of child labor occurs every day in America within the immigrant community.

2nd Place – Brooke Hopkins, “The Night Stalker”

Based on public-access documents of court findings in the 2016 murder of 16-year-old Emma Walker by ex-boyfriend William (Riley) Gaul, this essay is a vivid description of events that occurred just days before that tragic night. In fine detail, the writer recreates the thoughts going through Riley’s head, the execution of his intricate plan, and the conversations that likely occurred with Emma’s friends on this occasion. The account eerily foreshadows what lies ahead for Emma beyond the events uncovered here. As such, it is a clarion call to anyone experiencing the threats of a stalker.

Honorable Mention – Kaitlyn Hansen, “Why Travel?”

While many today are wary of travel due to the current pandemic and various threats abroad, the writer of this essay provides a convincing apologetic in defense of international exploration. Citing his/her own recent trip to the Philippines by way of Japan, this author details the thoughts, emotions and experiences that engaged him/her throughout the eye-opening adventure. In addition to self-reflection and narrative, the essay includes tidbits of research along the way that add to the weight of the experiential argument. In the end, the message is clear: travel undeniably leads to personal enrichment.