



GENERAL FEDERATION
of **WOMEN'S CLUBS**

GFWC 2023 WRITING AND PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST AWARDS

GFWC Annual Convention, Louisville, KY

Clubwomen Poetry Contest Winners

First Place, Patricia Mertens, GFWC Missouri GFWC Mina Sauk Club

Just Do What You Can Do

Once upon a while ago, when my eyes were bright and
new, I saw injustice, want and need, so many chores to
do.

My heart sought to seek remedies, the wrongs to turn to right.
But my mind felt overwhelmed and said, "Just do what you can
do."

Once upon a while ago, when my hands were young and
strong, I toiled to mend and change things as I moved along.
My strength sought to empower a better life for all.
But my hands still grasped this clue, "Just do what you can do."

Once upon a while ago, when my ears heard loud and
clear, I listened to voices singing out all their many
songs of fear. My ears sought to identify each soft and
whispered plea.
But kindred sounds echoed anew, "Just do what you can do."

Once upon a while ago, when my heart was bold and
brave, I felt the sorrows of Mankind with many lives to
save.
My passion sought to touch and know the human hearts of all.
But my spirit knew it still rang true, "Just do what you can
do."

With the wisdom of age, despite my diminishing senses, I still
strive To focus my abilities and tools to keep the volunteer spirit
alive,
No matter how simple or complex the task, I won't turn away in
fear, But feel that spirit deep within my soul and "Just do what I
can do."

Honorable Mention

**Tina Lambert, GFWC West Virginia
GFWC Woman's Club Of Hamlin**

Stand Up, Soldier

Stand up, soldier, be tall, be ready, be proud.
Even when enemy fire is exploding with powerful sound.
Lying in trenches, crawling across frozen ground.
Facing opposition where only hate abounds.
Stand up, soldier, don't waver, don't fall, don't bend.
Stay hopeful in letters to home that you send.
Even through the horrors of war, still pretend
To cling to the hope that it will end.
Stand up, soldier, keep silent, keep faith, keep still!
Use your logic, your training, and skills,
In order to win this battle of wills.
Freedom will reign, and people's hearts will fill.
Stand up, soldier, be able, be honored, be free.
Without your service, freedom could never be.
Red, white, and blue are the colors we see,
Because of the soldier, we all are Free.
So, stand up, soldier. The Best, The Strong, The brave.
So forever in freedom, our flags will still wave.
Medals and awards we gladly engrave.
This, to the soldier, and for all he gave.

Youth Poetry Contest Winners

**First Place, Category 1 – (K, 1st, 2nd grade)
Layla K.: GFWC Kentucky**

Life of a Diary

Entertained with excitement from all the words
Crisp pages flipping one by one
Lots of colors of the ink
Red, orange, and yellow
Green, blue, and purple, too
Holding many secrets in
Letting them stay within
Getting thoughts out from the inside
Likes and dislikes kept locked up
Keeping many memories safe.

**First Place, Category 2 – (3rd, 4th, 5th grade)
Alice P.: GFWC Pennsylvania**

My Baby Brother

The way his eyes sparkle in the gleaming light,
Is like stars twinkling in the night sky
Then way he laughs and talks so loudly,
Is like a babbling brook, swishing through the forest
The way he's eager to learn new things,
Is like a child waiting to open gifts on Christmas morning
The way he smiles up at me,
Is like an angel beaming down from the heavens
The way he plays and runs so proudly,
is like a bull sprinting through the streets
The way he watches and listens to people,
Is like a hawk watching the world from the tallest tree
The way he cares for everybody,
Makes me feel a spark in my heart
The way he loves everyone,
Makes me love him more

First Place, Category 3 – (6th, 7th, 8th grade)
Jessykah S.: GFWC Missouri

My Angel

I saw her today.
She was at the market buying fresh flowers,
Wearing a yellow sundress
With black curls flowing down her back.

Sun rays kissed her mocha skin
And her smile reminded me of summer warmth.

Gracefully, she walked around
Examining exotic fruits.

I noticed I was staring and tried to look away
But her beauty made me happy.

A reminder of everything she was and is.
I lost her.

It was my fault.
It's always been my fault.

**First Place, Category 4 – (9th, 10th, 11th, 12th grade)
Alyssa M.: GFWC California**

I Pray for my Brother.

I've always prayed for my brother.
Not sure if he's ever prayed for me.

Mama Prayed for brother
I believe a little harder than me.

Growing up I always felt the weight of Mam's prayers on my shoulders
but I know my brother felt her prayers a little heavier on his.

Brother grew up as any man would.
Boys will be boys.

Partying with girls staying out late.
brother was still a kid by fate.

This would all change when the willow trees blew a little different that day
when brother was soon to hit the hay.

I knew something was wrong when Mama began to pray.
"Bless my son on this journey he's about to face,
and please bless those sleeping boys around him who are yet to know their fate."

Mama always prayed passionately.
this one was a little different
As tears rolled down her checks she prayed for brother.

Brother was being drafted the following morning.
That morning Mama and I would be faced with our own mourning.

I prayed for brother just like Mama.
I prayed that he would come home safe to us.
Without much fuss.

While brother was away I prayed just like Mama
This time I didn't pray that he was safe,
but this time I prayed that he would get to heaven.
The Army backpacks that brother was wearing must've weighed just as much as Mama's prayers.
the body's that brother had to carry to safety.
must have weighed just as much as Mama's prayers.
The guilt that brother had to live with knowing that he's killed people in this way,
must have weighed just as much as Mama's prayers.

But the gallons of Tears that brother was able to fill up by crying for God's forgiveness,

must have weighed as much as my prayers.

Boys will be boys,
but when they are forced to become men,
men will be men,
and they will feel their mama's prayers.

I pray for my brother.

Clubwoman Short Story

First Place, Patricia Boshears, GFWC Tennessee GFWC The Monday Club of Johnson City

The last time she had traveled had been hard on her. She wasn't as fast on her feet or as quick with problem-solving as she had once been. Today's scheduled reunion would be the last; of that, she was certain.

Time stood still for no one and surely, she had tempted fate more than most. She was too old for this; passing back and forth through the ages had worn her thin. She smiled at her own humor because she was also physically thinner than ever.

Today was a good day to say good-bye. Though the sun shone brightly, and the temperature was pleasingly warm, the umbrella and table she requested when she made the reservation now seemed foreboding and cold. Looking around, she reminisced about the countless times she had eaten here under these colorful; sun-shading umbrellas nestled among the giant oaks. How many decisions of the heart had had been resolved in the privacy of this beautiful garden restaurant. As she glanced around the well-trimmed boxwood perimeter, she saw smiling mothers and daughters, businessmen with portfolios spread across tables separated by tall glasses of iced tea, and empty tables just waiting to be claimed by the early lunch bunch.

She wondered about any menu changes. Previously, the brunch choices had been limited but especially good and well prepared. Soon her presence would be noticed, and a list of options brought to the table along with delicate glasses filled with orange slices and water.

She would ask for a carafe of coffee.

He would be running late, of course. She smiled thinking of him approaching the table with an apology which was never necessary. Even now in his thirties, he had never mastered the skill of jumping up on the first chime of the alarm. Instead, he had been known to hit the snooze button multiple times before forcing himself to put feet to the floor.

She hoped the hostess remembered to direct him to her obscure spot away from the more openly positioned tables. Young folks, she thought with a frown, only hear half of what old women like herself said, and old women only understood half of the garbled words which came out of young mouths like machine guns. He would need to be directed to her table today; he wouldn't recognize her.

As she sat facing the entrance watching and waiting, her mind raced back and forth in time. Although he was in his thirties now, she felt she had known him much, much longer. Time travel had some advantages.

They had first met in a city park nearby while their mothers read magazines and only occasionally looked up to check where they were playing. From that very first day, they had taken turns swinging, children wanting, even then, to please the other. Climbing the steep,

fifteen-step metal ladder and then careening down the curving surface of the slide had taken some courage on both their parts. But once he had mastered the feat, he assured her it was fun! How many times had they returned to their mothers with dirty bottoms soiled from hitting the grassless, bare earth at the end of the slide?

Although they had been friends from the start, it had taken their mothers much longer to find friendship. Having mothers who became best friends had been an important advantage. Because their families had come to spend weekdays, vacation days, and many holidays at the same events, they had grown-up best friends too. Childhood memories were shared ones of picnics, studying together, movies, and ballgames. No one was surprised when they became more than friends during high school. However, she had felt from the beginning that he would always be special.

The relocation of her family during their junior year of high school had been devastating for both of them. Later, she remembered hearing her mother crying about having to go. Yet her father was not persuaded to stay or even discuss it. She simply recalled his words that it had been an adventure, and they had already stayed too long. She had felt completely destroyed.

After finishing high school in the new place, she had spent five, long years trying to get back to him. She had written letters at first, but how does one communicate with another dimension? On her third attempt to travel back, she made it back only to discover he was away at college. But more devastating than his absence, she discovered he had forgotten her and was engaged to a beautiful and talented girl she remembered. Nothing could ever be the same.

After returning to town, she landed a job at the same restaurant where she now sat. Here in this same restaurant-garden, she waited tables until he came home for Thanksgiving break. Hoping to talk and reconnect, she finally decided it was pointless. After stalking and watching him and his fiancé over the holidays, she realized he was obviously in love.

Every bone in her body had ached as she waited their table, hoping he would remember her. Yet neither of them seemed to notice or recognize her. On his last night before returning to graduate school, they finally had a conversation. Reintroducing herself was awkward at first. Speechless, he stared at her. Neither he nor his fiancé believed their eyes. Finally, he remarked she seemed so different and more mature than their twenty-three years. And he was correct.

She was different from them; she was a time traveler.

When she completed her shift at the restaurant, she walked the short distance to the small apartment she had leased for the summer. Overwhelmed with sadness and blurry eyed with disappointment, she trudged slowly toward home. When she felt the vibration of her phone in her pocket, she was tempted to not answer.

It was his voice on the other end; suddenly, her heart pounded, and silently she gasped for breath. He had gotten her number from the restaurant's owner; he wanted to meet and talk. Almost immediately, they resumed their relationship, discovering that neither of them had ever really forgotten the feelings they had for each other. Within a year, they were engaged to be

married with big plans for their future, and as soon as he completed his degree, they married in front of his family and a few close friends in the city park where they first played together as young children. Of course, she was asked about her parents, but honestly, she could answer they were no longer around.

She always loved him, but she sometimes grew impatient with his boyish behavior. As she seemed to mature at lightning speed, he seemed to remain the silly, funny, goofy kid from the playground. Never wanting to exclude her, he found it confusing that she didn't still enjoy the reckless, carefree interests of young adulthood. When he carelessly yelled that she had turned into his mother during a meaningless argument, she was badly wounded and cried for days.

There's no control in Time Travel, and she had known this all along. Finally, she admitted to herself that the five years they had spent apart were much more than just five years of 365 days; those 1,800 plus days were abusers of her body, mind, and spirit.

Now, she didn't fit in either place or time. She was too old for him. Always unsure if she might be sucked from this beautiful dimension and returned to the one she escaped; she lived on edge. What had seemed so glamorous and exciting now seemed just sad. The people she had left would have now readjusted to her absence, so she didn't fit there either.

And no one would or could possibly understand; she was trapped.

And she always returned to the same overpowering thought; what was best for him? Loving him more than her own happiness, she decided she would offer him release. After a year of arguing, he'd accepted her offer of freedom, and she left.

Twenty years had passed since they last saw each other. He would definitely not recognize her now. She had used the name of one of his grandmother's friends when she extended the invitation for brunch. His deceased grandmother nor he would ever know.

She planned to enjoy the pleasure of his company, hearing him tell of his lovely wife, his three daughters- one grown and married with a child, and the two other girls now near-grown. She would listen to stories of his wonderful life. Like a once favored toy now tossed away, his first marriage was a vague and distant memory.

She imagined how it would go...he would pull out pictures, or maybe have their images on one of those menacing mobile things. He would brag of his family's accomplishments and surely mention his first grandson who was named after him. Without doubt, he would speak of his company's plans for the new municipal building out near the park where so many of her memories were buried. She would ask if he still enjoyed swimming and hiking...

Later on, he would glance at his watch and marvel at how quickly time passed; how much he enjoyed seeing and talking with someone who knew his grandmother. He would thank her for her delightful invitation to brunch.

She would smile when he stood to embrace her with a customary good-bye hug. His captivating grin and twinkling eyes would sear in her memory for the last time. She felt as she always had -

fulfilled and happy for all their shared moments. Before being whirled away *the last time* into that other place, she was pleased she had chosen to live for love, his not her own...

It would be enough; it had to be.

Honorable Mention
Lauren Bates, GFWC Kentucky
GFWC Jackson's Club

Sometimes, the things you think you are meant to save end up saving you.

Let me introduce you to the Layloa Walking Club.

Three men, who generally attend under the duress of their wives. Ten women.

Average age: 67.5 years old. Oldest member: 82.3 years of age. Youngest member: Me, at age 22. The youngest member also began attending under duress, until I realized that those other eleven individuals were saving my life.

Three years ago, I was a college student waiting tables at the local hole in a wall diner as I attempted to muddle my way through school. I had no idea what I was going to do with my life, and that was making concentrating in class even more difficult. It was like a large cloud was looming over my head. I knew this would be my last semester, anyway, because my GPA was in the gutter, and I couldn't afford to pay out of pocket.

Then came the call that ended in me walking laps in an abandoned shopping mall three times a week.

My granny, who had raised me after my mom gave in to substance abuse that had plagued her since her teenage years, had suffered a stroke. It didn't look good.

I drove the two hours home in a zombie-like state. When I arrived at the hospital, things had taken an upturn, but I couldn't help but cry as she smiled a drooping grin. One night led to two, which led to five, and when she was discharged home I followed her there. She didn't even argue when she found out I had dropped my classes, and that's when I knew maybe things were just as bad as I had thought they were, because pre-stroke Granny would have bent me over her knee if I had even talked about quitting.

We settled into a quiet routine. I'd get up and make breakfast, helping her to the kitchen table. We'd get ready for a day full of busyness, first in-home therapy, and then as her strength improved, we graduated to the physical therapist's office three times a week. I was in charge of the driving, the errand running, and the exercises on the days when she didn't go to see her usual "torture master", as she jokingly referred to the trim, peppy Joselyn, her physical therapist.

Insurance maintained that routine for a couple of months, and her strength gradually returned. Joselyn made her promise to get some regular exercise, and that's how we ended up at the Riverview Mall five days a week for at least thirty minutes a day.

Granny had learned about the walking club through her news source for everything from local breakups to international espionage takedowns. Her best friend, Mary Martha, had learned about the walking club from her pastor's wife. Mary Martha went for the gossip. Granny went to please Joselyn, who she was convinced needed to marry my cousin. I went because I didn't have a choice; Mary Martha had never learned how to drive, and Granny hadn't been cleared to drive yet.

The first couple of weeks I treated it as the punishment that it was. My laps were my penitence, but unlike a prisoner, there was no obvious date of release, just endless trips around the area I had used to go with my middle school friends to see who could blow the biggest bubble as we acted casually bored and looked out for Jimmy Valdez, the high school heartthrob we were all pining after. I thought often of those days as I circled. It saddened me to see the empty storefronts.

On my second week of attendance, I had stopped to tighten my shoelaces when Sally caught my eye. Actually, she cleared her throat as she stepped around me, indicating that I was obviously in her way. Sally was the oldest member of the walking club, but you wouldn't know it to look at her. She marched in the mall promptly at 9:32 AM every morning, dressed in her velour-sweatsuit, makeup perfect, blonde hair from a bottle pulled up neatly in a bouncy ponytail reminiscent of a 1950s teeny-bopper. She could lap everybody in attendance, and made a point to call it to your attention as she did so. She was the President of the Library Guild, and was responsible for setting up the recent book fair the walking club had coordinated. She moved with a purpose, swinging her arms as she made the trek around the area that used to be the indoor playground.

I wondered what her story was. I really didn't know her, or her family, which was unusual for a small town. I asked Granny and Mary Martha as we climbed into my car to head to Junie's, the local diner they insisted we stop at after each walking session, defeating the purpose of burning off any extra calories. I could tell it in my hips.

Mary Martha leaned in toward me in the conspiratorial way she tended to do. "Oh, honey. She tries to act like she's got it all together but her husband left her three years ago for his secretary. They had been married for 57 years and the affair had been going on for most of that time. I swear, though, it's just mad her stick her nose up higher."

That made me think. Each person at the walking club had years of life experience on me, and if I was going to walk with them, I might as well take advantage of them, in a positive way. I vowed to learn something new every day.

I started with Johnny and June. I thought their names were hysterical but I'm not making them up. Johnny was one of the husbands who actually enjoyed the walking club. He usually lifted weights before they came to the mall. June was a petite, silver-haired former Layloa beauty queen. They held hands while they walked and were just the sweetest couple. I sped up a little to keep in step and tried to make small talk. Unfortunately, I've never learned the exact art of making small talk, so my questions came out in the form of an interrogation, but June just smiled, sweet as sugar, and answered every inquiry honestly. She laughed when I asked for her best piece of advice.

"Find someone who is selectively hard of hearing."

The next day we were there I targeted George. He was married to Betty, and was not happy about being a member of the walking club. He wore one of those navy jackets that every grandpa his age seems to wear, and it was always zipped, for the entirety of his walk. His small talk consisted of, "I could be watching Andy Griffith, but no, we have to be worried about heart health." Surprisingly, though, he became friendly as we continued our walk and by the time Granny was finished he had me in stitches laughing at his stories of his grandkids.

"Remember this," he said as we parted ways, "Sometimes what you don't want to do is exactly

what you need to do...but don't tell Betty I said that!"

Before I knew it, two months had passed. Granny was getting stronger, Mary Martha was learning more about her neighbors, and I was learning about life. I had made it a point to match steps with every member of the walking club, and had listened as they told me about their stories. I found that I had more in common with them than I had previously thought.

Maggie, who had been a single mom to three after her husband had been killed in a car accident. She amazed me with her stories of perseverance. "Never let anyone tell you that you can't do something, sweetheart," she admonished one day.

Barbara and her feeble husband Charlie, who walked for a lap or two with a walker with bright yellow tennis balls on the rear legs and then spent the rest of the time sitting, gazing at Barbara. "Sometimes you're the strong one," she told me as we passed by him once. "And sometimes you're not. You just have to remember that it needs to be in balance."

Jessica was the closest to my age. She was 44 and had started attending with her mother, Charlotte. Her mom loved being part of the group so much that she now came along in a wheelchair. Jessica would push her for a few laps and then pull her wheelchair up next to Charlie, where they would chat about professional football. "Honey, life is full of lemons," Charlotte told me one day. "You just need to learn how to make lemonade."

I found myself looking forward to the walking club, and not just because it meant pecan pie afterwards. I loved seeing Granny grow stronger, and it gave me some peace that maybe the horror I thought I had been facing in the hours following her stroke weren't real. I loved to listen to Mary Martha lower her voice to a whisper when she wanted to tell me something juicy but didn't want to listen to Granny quarrel about idle tongues. Mostly, I loved that it gave me a sense of community, even if the members were triple my age.

Granny eventually got the ok to drive herself, but by that time we had settled into such a routine it seemed futile to change. I picked up a job as a grocery store cashier, and gave Granny a little money along the way toward her bills, only to find twice the amount of cash stuck in an envelope under my pillow. Granny told me often, "Your Pap left me in good shape. Save your money."

I kept waiting for her to push me to go back to school, but she never did. She'd just say things like, "You sure do take good care of me. I bet you'd take to nursing," but there was never any pressure. It was almost like she knew her time was short and she was helping me soak up what we had.

One morning I came downstairs and made breakfast like normal. Granny was nothing if not punctual, so my heart felt a little funny when she wasn't in her seat at the usual time. I lumbered up the steps, complaining in my head about their steepness, and knocked on her door.

Granny had passed away sometime in the night, lying peaceful in her bed, a soft smile on her face. I could tell she had been gone a while. I called Mary Martha before I called 911 because I didn't want her to hear the news on the scanner. She was at the door before the ambulance. I collapsed in her arms.

The next few days I spent in a daze, forcing myself up to the shower and to eat a few bites. I don't

remember much about the funeral, except for familiar faces of my walking club family. I felt aimless.

One morning a knock on the door woke me out of my nightmare. I opened it to concerned faces; a familiar navy jacket zipped up to the chin; a pink velour sweatsuit; a silver-haired lady holding the hand of her hunched over husband; even the walker with tennis balls.

Sally nodded at me. "We're here to tell you it's time to start living again. The only way to greet life is one foot in front of the other, and at least in the mall you'll never get lost."

That's how the club became family.

It's still not all sunshine and happiness. My heart still aches for Granny, but I'm slowly starting to appreciate the good times we have. George keeps me laughing. Sally keeps me motivated. June comforts me.

It's took all of them to fill Granny's space, that's true, but they've sure saved my life. Maybe that was Granny's intention all along.

Youth Short Story

Category 1 (K,1,2)
Ava E., GFWC Texas
GFWC Decatur Woman's Club

Pencil and Eraser

Once upon a time there was Pencil and Eraser. Pencil always said "hey Eraser, you can't write." That hurt Eraser's feelings. Pencil also said "you are nothing and you can't do anything." Eraser said "I can do stuff. I can erase if you make a mistake." "Yeah but you can't make pretty pictures like me" said Pencil. "Yeah I guess you're right, uhhhhh man" said Eraser. Pencil made Eraser sad again. "Look, I can make a picture too," Eraser told Pencil. "No you can't, that's just eraser pebbles Eraser" said Pencil.

"Hey Eraser, tomorrow is the big math test. Are you ready to not help a bit tomorrow?" asked Pencil. "Oh I am going to help Pencil!" said Eraser. Pencil woke up and said " Oh I am so ready for this test today!" Eraser said " I am excited for this test today because I am going to help Pencil! He's just wrong. He will wait and see!"

The big math test began.

"Oops" said Pencil. "Where's Eraser? I need help. I did make a mistake. You are right." "I will help you", said Eraser. "Thanks," said Pencil. "I am sorry for being mean to you. Do you want to be friends?" asked Pencil. "Yes", said Eraser. So they lived happily ever after.

Category 2 (3rd, 4th, 5th):
Lily T., GFWC New York GFWC Junior
Women's Club of Bellerose

Mr. Linden's Library

"And that's the story behind the creepy library in Foggy Creek, our town." I had just finished presenting a research project that we had been working on. Everyone got to pick a topic, do research on it, and write about it. I picked a topic that I had always been curious about-- Mr. Linden's Library. It was a library on 13th Avenue in my town. There were many rumors going around about that library. I decided to visit the library after school to find out what really happened there.

At lunch I asked a few of my friends to come to the library with me. Ava, Cara, and Emma said they would come. Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you, my name's Anna.

When the school day was over, Ava, Cara, Emma, and I walked over to the library. When we turned onto 13th Avenue, I got really spooked. Then we finally walked into the library. It was a really mysterious place. We were greeted by a strange man. *He must be Mr. Linden*, I thought.

"Are you looking for a book?" He said. His voice sounded shaky and he stopped in between each word.

"No, we're just looking around", I said.

"Okaaay" he said mysteriously. We walked to the first bookshelf. I heard a strange creak so I turned around and saw the man's head turning. *Was that what was making that noise? It couldn't have been*, I thought. We walked through the library. Cara found a strange book on a shelf. We decided to take the book with us. We walked up to the strange man again.

"We would like this book, please, sir," Emma said.

"Ah," the man said. "You must be very careful with this book. For if you are not careful with it, it won't be careful with you."

"Yes sir, we'll be very careful," Emma responded.

"Thank you for vis-it-ing," the man said.

We walked out. "Well that was weird," I said.

"Yeah," my friends repeated in unison.

"Do you guys want to come over to my house to do homework and find out what's inside that book?" Emma asked.

"Sure," said Ava, Cara and I at the same time.

When we got to Emma's house we walked upstairs to her bedroom. We sat on the floor by her bed. She opened the book. Pages went flying until they finally stopped and opened to a page.

"What just happened?" Ava asked.

"I don't know, let's see what the page says," Emma replied.

"Hmm. That's weird, it's a blank page." Emma ran her fingers across the page. Before I could even say a word, I heard a scream and all of a sudden Emma was gone. I yelled "Emma, where are you?!" No response. That's when I saw a picture appear on what used to be a blank page in the book. It looked like a small version of Emma.

"Guys", I said, "I think Emma got trapped in the book. Look at that page."

Ava and Cara gasped. Ava screamed, "Emma can you hear us?" Miniature Emma did not move.

"Uh guys", Cara said, "When Emma's mom gets home from work where are we gonna tell Emma went? We have to figure out a way to save Emma."

"I agree." I said.

"Me too," Ava said. Then she said, "I think we should go back to Mr. Linden's Library and ask him what to do."

"That's a good idea," Cara said. So we decided to go back to the library.

When we walked in, with the book in hand, Mr. Linden asked us what we needed. We told him what happened to Emma.

"I told you girls to be careful," Mr. Linden said.

"We know sir. We were very careful. We don't know what happened. We just opened the book and all of sudden Emma was gone. Do you know how we can get her out of there?" I asked.

"No girls, I don't. sorry."

"Okay, I guess we'll be leaving now..."

"Wait! There is one way you can get her out of there but it requires teamwork." Mr. Linden told us.

"Okay. Could you tell us what to do?" Cara asked.

"Yes. All you have to do is repeat this spell three times." He handed us a paper. "You must all say the exact words at the exact same time. You only have one day to save your friend. Once the sun rises tomorrow she will be stuck in that book forever," Mr. Linden explained to us.

"Thank you, sir, for your help," I said.

"You are very welcome. Good luck getting your friend out of there," the man replied.

We walked out of the library. "Let's go back to Emma's house and see how we can save her," I said.

We walked back to her house. I looked at the sheet. It was in a different language, I knew, because the words looked kind of weird. The page read, "Rosae rubrae sunt, violae caeruleae. Volvo enid vos veni de illic et puto te quoque." *What on earth did this mean?* Luckily, I had my phone with me so I looked up what it meant.

"What does the paper say?" Cara asked.

"I don't know but I'm going to look it up," I replied. I typed it into the search engine. "It says it means, '*Roses are red, violets are blue, I want you to come out of there, and I think you do, too.*'"

"Okay, well now we know what the words mean but we still need to figure out how to pronounce them," Ava pointed out.

"Don't worry, I've got you covered," Cara said.

She pulled up a video on how to pronounce the words, which were, by the way, in Latin. I probably should have known that since I take Latin at school. Anyway, we found the pronunciation and practiced the spell in unison. Then we sat in a circle. We put the book in the middle and held each other's hands.

"Rosae rubrae sunt, violae caeruleae. Volvo enid vos veni de illic et puto te quoque."

We repeated that two more times. Nothing happened. We closed our eyes and said the Latin words in unison again. Still, nothing happened. We tried one more time. It wasn't working at first so I started to get aggravated. That's when I heard Emma's front door open.

That's not good it's probably Emma's mom, I thought.

Then I felt a gust of wind and all of a sudden, Emma appeared in the middle of the circle.

"Emma!" I screamed.

"Oh my gosh, we missed you!" Cara exclaimed.

"Yeah, we didn't know what happened to you,:" Ava said.

"That was crazy! One minute I was here and the next minute I was in that wild book!" Emma said. 'I'm so glad you guys saved me," Emma said.

Her mom walked into the room then. "Oh, hi girls. Did you have a good day?" she asked.

"Oh, you can't even imagine!" I said. We all started hysterically laughing. I guess it was a pretty good day after all.

The End.

Category 3 (6th, 7th, 8th Grade)
Riley Jae J., GFWC Wisconsin
GFWC Rhinelander Woman's Club

The Duende

After my sisters and I watched the chupacabra run off, we immediately started traveling to get to Abuelita's house. Pita was still hurt and in need of a first aid kit that we were sure our grandmother would have. We had to carry Pita all the way there so we had to rest often. It was such a hot day that we were all sweating like pigs.

"When are we gonna get there?! My leg hurts so bad!" Pita was in so much pain, she was whining and just uncomfortable. I tried to make her comfortable and help her but I just couldn't. The suffering was just too much on a little girl like her.

The sun was about to go down and we still hadn't made it to Abuelita's house but we stopped at a pavilion under a tree in a field next to a noisy river. I picked some strawberries to give to my sisters.

"I'm so hungry I could eat a whole buffalo!" Velia exclaimed.

I was waiting for the Duende to pop out of the bushes that surround the field. I knew about the Duende but I don't think the rest of the girls knew or understood what was coming for us. The Duende are adept at punishing kids for disobeying their parents and the girls and I left Mama without saying goodbye so I had a feeling something bad was going to happen.

But as soon as I started to worry, I heard rustling in the woods while I was helping Pita with her leg. We both heard it at the same time and perked our heads up together.

"What was that?" Pita asked with fear.

I was so frightened I didn't respond. I couldn't respond. I stood there, staring at his eyes that fit the bush. I could tell he was short because the eyes were low in the shrub. The rustling got louder as if something was running closer and closer. It was as loud as the busy streets of London. Then suddenly, it sprung out of the shrubs.

I could finally see what he looked like after hearing legends my whole life. He looked like one of Santa's helpers. He was dwarf-like and had elf ears. In my family legends, he's as fast as lightning. He is filled with venom and could possibly kill you from just one bite.

I grabbed a shovel to stop the Duende when he was dashing into the pavilion. It knocked him down and he fell on top of a rake. I held him down with my shovel. He was fighting the shovel and had no control.

"Let me go!" the Duende screamed.

"Why are you here? What do you need?" I replied.

The Duende didn't respond and just kept fighting my shovel. My sisters started to walk slowly closer to us. He was getting stronger and crazier and soon enough he threw me out of the way and broke my shovel. Then he immediately went straight for Pita. I looked back at Pita screaming. I saw a flash then Pita and the Duende were gone. I went into panic mode to look for Pita. I was the oldest, Mama isn't here, I'm responsible for her safety.

"Where did they go?" Juanita asked.

I had no idea where they could have gone or why. Why would he want to take Pita?

"Girls, get up! We are going to go look for her." I said, staring into the field.

"Where though?" Velia exclaimed. "We don't know where they are or where to start looking."

I started packing up.

"I guess we could start looking around where Duendes live." I said in a rush.

"Where do they live? Do you even know anything about Duendes?" Delia jumped in.

That made total sense. I didn't know anything about the Duendes or where they live at least.

"We could try a cave or a grotto," I finally said, rushing out of the shelter with the shovel in my right hand and the top of Delia's dress, dragging her out with me, in my left.

Juanita and Velia followed. I just started running down the road we came from, looking for anything. I mean, what else was I supposed to do? I couldn't just sit and wait, but I didn't really know where to go either.

After running for a couple hours, we ran into an old lady. She was very nice. I wondered why she was out here in the middle of nowhere with no houses or anything. She offered us some bakery items along with some water.

"I'm Maria," The woman announced.

"I'm Odilia, this is Juanita, Delia and Velia" I said, pointing to each one of my sisters.

"Nice to meet you."

"What are young girls doing out here unsupervised?" The kind woman asked.

"Um, just trying to get home for supper," I told her.

Which wasn't an absolute lie. Abuelita should have some food for us once we get there but that would be after we find Pita and make sure she's safe. Maria reached into her pocket and pulled something small and put it in her fist.

"Hold out your hand," she whispered.

I held out my hand. I felt something little and light drop into the center of my palm. Before I could look to see what was in my hand, she closed my fingers over the item.

"Just in case my *companera*," Maria said as she walked away like a robber leaving his scene.

I couldn't tell if she looked guilty or oblivious.

I looked down into my own hands and slowly, cautiously opened my fist. Maybe I was scared it was alive or something I would have dreaded seeing. I saw a penny. Really? A brown basic old penny.

"After all that all we got was a penny?! Great," Velia said with her eyes rolled all the way back into her head.

"That's not all we got! We got some bread and water. Who knows how long we would have gone without food and water if we didn't meet that woman! Stop being so ungrateful!" Jaunita yelled.

I had enough of their bickering. I just wanted to find Pita. She was in a lot of pain and I hoped she was okay.

"Stop it you two!" I started. "Pita is missing and she's probably scared out of her mind and you guys fighting is just making things worse! Please, let's just keep going until we find something."

The three of them nodded their heads and followed me. It was disappointing to think that it took forever to walk down the road with Pita's leg and now we were backtracking.

After a couple more hours I started to lose all hope. I didn't even know what I was doing. I dropped to my knees and heard my sisters stop walking. I could feel them staring at me while I had my head down between my knees. My eyes started to water.

"Where is she?" I said to myself with tears running down my rosy cheeks.

In the corner of my eye I could see Delia and Velia wandering off around the corner of a tree eating the rest of the bread that I told them to save for Pita. Jaunita was digging in her bag and pulled out a tissue. She handed it to me so I could wipe my tears. Soon enough Juanita and I heard one of the twins yelling for us.

"YOU GUYS BETTER COME AND LOOK AT THIS!" Delia screamed.

Juanita and I looked at each other confused but then both decided to get up just through our expressions. Jaunita started to run at the sound of Delia's voice echoing through the woods. I was trailing behind, not picking up my feet while I walked and my head all droopy. As soon as I turned the sharp corner I saw a small brick tank with writing on it.

"In loving memory, Maria De Leon Gonzalez," Juanita read in a questioning voice.

"Hey! Isn't that the name of the woman we met earlier today?" Velia asked the rest of us.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out my one-cent, copper-colored coin. I looked into bricks. Water.

"A wishing well," I softly said to myself.

"What?" Juanita asked.

"It all makes sense. Why else would Maria give me a coin? She has a wishing well with her name on it. What if I throw the penny in the well and ask for Pita? You think it would work? I mean Maria is obviously not alive anymore, I'm assuming that she was a ghost. Ghosts can be magical. Maybe this is how to bring Pita back!" I said basically throwing myself at my sisters telling them to have hope for a shot in the dark.

I mean I don't really know what I'm talking about or if this could even be somewhat true. "Do it," Juanita ordered me. "Make a wish, what's the worst that could happen?"

That was true. Could I really make this situation any worse than it already is? I didn't think so. After all, it was just a silly old well. I was only throwing a penny in a wishing well like a little kid. It was worth a shot.

So I shook my penny in my fist like a pair of dice and tossed it into the water.

"I wish for Pita to return to us safely," I told the inside of the well.

The water lit up like a starry night. The water started to bubble very quickly. Then all of a sudden, it stopped. All of it stopped. We looked at each other wondering what was going to happen next. I stood up straighter, expecting Pita at that exact moment but nothing happened.

We stood there for at least 5 minutes, waiting. Finally, I saw her. I saw Pita! She was behind a couple of trees. She ran to me as fast as a speeding train. She wasn't limping at all.

"Pita! OH MY GOODNESS! I have been so worried!" I exclaimed.

She was so excited to see me, she couldn't get a word out. I asked her where she was.

"Um, I don't remember," she answered.

"What do you mean you don't remember?" Juanita jumped in. "You forgot everything that happened?"

Pita just stood there. I wouldn't know what to say either if I was her. She doesn't even know that anything happened. I really wanted to know how she got her leg all wrapped and taken care of.

After a half hour of unanswered questions, we heard loud footsteps coming around the corner. I immediately grabbed Pita's hand so she wouldn't go missing again. The steps sounded heavy, not small and light like a Duende would sound. It finally made its way around the corner and my jaw was on the floor when I realized who it was. Abuelita came around the corner with her welcoming and warm hugs, as always. We used all of our strength to give her the biggest bear hugs we had, just like we did when we were little.

Suddenly, I noticed a first aid kit.

"Abuelita? Did you take care of Pita's leg?" I asked.

"Of course I did. I saw that my *nieta* was hurting so I helped. Just like any grandmother would do,"

Abuelita replied.

Abuelita pulled out a blanket to lay on the grass. Then she unpacked some Tortilla Espanola. She knew that was our favorite. It was like she knew we would be seeing each other today and she came prepared. While we were eating, Abuelita shared her story about finding Pita. "I never saw the Duende. but I did see Pita in the cave unconscious so I grabbed her and brought her to my car to take care of her."

Abuelita has always been the best but I never asked her how she knew we were in trouble or how she knew where we were?

Category 4 (9,10,11,12)
Caitlin C., GFWC Virginia
GFWC Lexington Woman's Club

Specchio

Cecilia held her breath, her eyes closed and her face pressed against the kitchen door as she listened to her mother and father speak. It had become her nightly routine to stay up late into the night and let herself listen to the arguments surrounding things she shouldn't understand at the age of twelve. She squeezed her eyes shut tighter each time one of the voices grew louder, whether it be the low growl of her father or the hushed screeches of her mother. She always kept her ear close to the door and had learned when to run back to bed or when to bite her cheek to keep herself from bursting into the room and yelling at the both of them.

She had not heard how the current argument had started, but she could now hear her father's voice growing louder. She listened as he struggled to contain his anger, beginning to sound less like a man and more like the monsters from movies Cecilia shouldn't be allowed to watch.

Yes, that would make more sense; her father was a monster. A cruel one with sharp teeth and a sharper tongue. A monster who stays with women only to beat them and scream when he doesn't get his way. David Williams was a monster that could not love, but would stay with what was supposed to be his family anyways.

Cecilia flinched as she heard the contact of hand to face, feeling as if her own face was stinging. Her mother was not there, not when it mattered, yet Cecilia could feel her. Understand her pain. She now bit her lip, keeping her anger contained (unlike her father) as she heard another slap. Her mother was the absent kind, out partying when Cecilia was still struggling to cook dinner for herself. But she was also a woman of many burdens, one of which was being with David Williams.

Cecilia couldn't stand her mother sometimes. Thinking of her for too long would make her small fists shake and her eyes water out of pure anger for the way she has treated her daughter, her only child, all these years. But another, smaller part of Cecilia was desperate to carry all of her mother's pain on her shoulders. She was desperate for her mother to grow small so she could hold her delicately in her arms and promise that it would be okay.

She wondered (or more, hoped) that her mother felt the same about her. She was begging for her mother to feel the same sweeping, somehow contained yet uncontrollable anger each time she was hit. She did not relate to her father, not one bit. But with her mother she strived for connection. She wanted to be able to look her mother in the eyes and say, "You're like me, or more: I'm like you. I'm also a broken girl who cannot cry but will try her damndest to. I'm also scared of dad. I'm also above him."

But that connection could possibly never be, as any time Cecilia was slapped, screamed at, or completely ignored her mother didn't say a word. She didn't move to give Cecilia the hug she has desperately needed since she was born. To once again feel the warmth of who was supposed to be her rock. Her savior.

Cecilia moved her head away from the door, creeping back to her bedroom that she has had since she was a baby and she's worried she'll never get to leave. She curled up into the blankets and allowed only a tiny crack in the door that her father won't notice, but perhaps someday her mother will. She shoved her head into her pillow and tried to piece together the argument she had heard, not fully understanding the gibberish her father had been spewing.

She had almost managed to drift off into a tired sleep when she heard the creak of the door, making her eyes wide and instinctually sit up in her bed, gripping the sheets tightly in her fist. She didn't relax when she saw who it was. Her mother.

"Cecilia."

Cecilia got out of bed, stepping closer to her mother, carefully watching every movement she made. Her mother turned on one of the lamps, tugging on the switch too tight, she closed the hallway door leaving only a bit of light pouring through the bottom crack, and lastly, she turned to look down at Cecilia, her right cheek a flushed red compared to her tan skin and her eyes framed with tired lines. She cocked her head slightly, as if confused as to whether the girl standing in front of her was really her daughter. Cecilia almost half expected her to ask, "Where's Cecilia? Where's that girl not even over five? The girl who never causes a fuss, doesn't even cry."

But instead, her lips pursed and she gave a glance up and down, observing Cecilia's too big pajamas and her unruly blonde hair that they both surely associated with her father. Her hand brushed her red cheek slightly, but pulled away in an instant. She spoke no words, only still looking down at Cecilia.

"He hurt you, momma." Cecilia fills the silence. She is not used to being alone with her mother. She is not used to how her mom looks in the dim lamp light with eyes looking down at her begging to leave this house.

She waited for a response. A confirmation. But instead, she was met with her mother's bottom lip quivering. She brushed her styled hair out of her face, a stark contrast to Cecilia's unbrushed hair. She pulled up the bust of her dress like she was a highschooler trying to avoid the dress code. Cecilia once again bit the inside of her cheek, now fully aware that her mother had been out partying.

"Cecilia." She repeated, as if it were a stranger's name and not her own daughter's. "Your name is Cecilia."

Cecilia moved her gaze to her feet, "Yes momma."

Her mom's hand moved to the door, and for an instant Cecilia almost grabbed onto her, begging her to stay. Instead, her mom clicked the door lock. Cecilia's breathing relaxed, watching her mother move to the bed, sitting down and once again pulling at her dress.

"I named you that, you know?"

Cecilia quickly shuffled to her side, sitting down but scootching further away, not sure how much room to give her, "No. I thought dad named me." her voice was soft and quiet, as if speaking too loud would make her leave.

"There was a man I loved...before your father. He was Italian. He promised we'd run away together some day. So I named you Cecilia. It's Italian." She held her hand up to her mouth, almost as if smoking, but Cecilia saw no cigarette being held.

She lifted her head up, looking right at her mother's face. She examined the tired lines around her mouth, which Cecilia now realizes were smile lines. Her mother had been happy before.

"What happened?" "He left me."

Cecilia didn't respond, her mouth stretching out into a thin line. Her mother had once been happy, but she was not now.

"Momma." Her mom turned her head hesitantly, slightly surprised at the name, even though Cecilia had been calling her that this whole time.

"Yes?"

"You're beautiful." Cecilia said, folding her hands together in her lap and ducking her head low, as if she weren't allowed to look at her mother. As if her mother was above her.

At first, the room was still silent, filled with the buzzing of the barely working air conditioner. Cecilia regretted what she said.

"I'm sorry."

She looked up, now seeing the small line of tears streaming down her mother's cheek. She felt her eyebrows crease as she watched the tears go down to her chin, delicately gliding over the surface of her face. It shined in the dim light of the room, almost sparkling like an angel's halo. Cecilia dropped her head into her hands, trying to block out all the light. She did not cry. She could not cry. But her mother still had that privilege.

"I'm so sorry Cecilia." her mother's voice was now shaking, "I wish I never married your father. I wish.." She trailed off, not knowing what else to say. Not having anything else to add.

Cecilia flinched when she felt two arms wrap around her. She let out a small cry as the hug tightened. Her mother had never held her. It was clear she wasn't a natural.

"I want to love you." Cecilia crumbled at the words. The admittance that love was not yet there. "I'm sorry." Cecilia listened to the repeated words, resisting the urge to lash out. Twelve years.

Twelve years of neglect. She loved her mother with the same passion that she used to hate her.

She curled into a ball in her mother's embrace. She took pride in the fact that she was nothing like her father. She could resist the boiling anger inside of her and she could keep her emotions in control. But she was like her mother.

She wondered if she would have smile lines when she was older. She wondered if she would be married to a man she despises with a child she doesn't want. She wondered if she would ever have the strength that her mother has.

Cecilia kept her eyes shut when she felt her mother pull out of the embrace. Of course, it was right as she was getting used to her mother's warmth. She only opened her eyes when she felt something on her head, realizing that it was a comb.

Her mother turned her around on the bed, grabbing her hair with the light force that every mother has and began to comb. Cecilia stayed silent, not crying out when she hit a tangle or her ears.

She turned her head when she felt the brushing stop, now seeing her mother staring back at her, the tears on her face now dry. "I was once in love with your father." she said, setting the comb back down on the side table, "He was beautiful when I first met him."

Cecilia's eyes moved to the other side of the room, aware of the comparison.

"You're even more beautiful, Cecilia."

And then, Cecilia felt herself grow small, and she felt her mother hold her tightly. And for a moment, she felt whole.

Clubwomen Photography Contest Winners

**Living the Volunteer Spirit
First Place**

**Mickey Coonfare
GFWC Iowa
GFWC Iowa Five Season's Women's Association**

Rockin' the Hairnet





**Living the Volunteer Spirit
Second Place**

**Linda Leatherman
GFWC Kansas
GFWC of Mulvane**

Clean the Statue

**Living the Volunteer Spirit
Third Place**

**Louise Tucker
GFWC Washington
GFWC Battle Ground
Woman's Club**

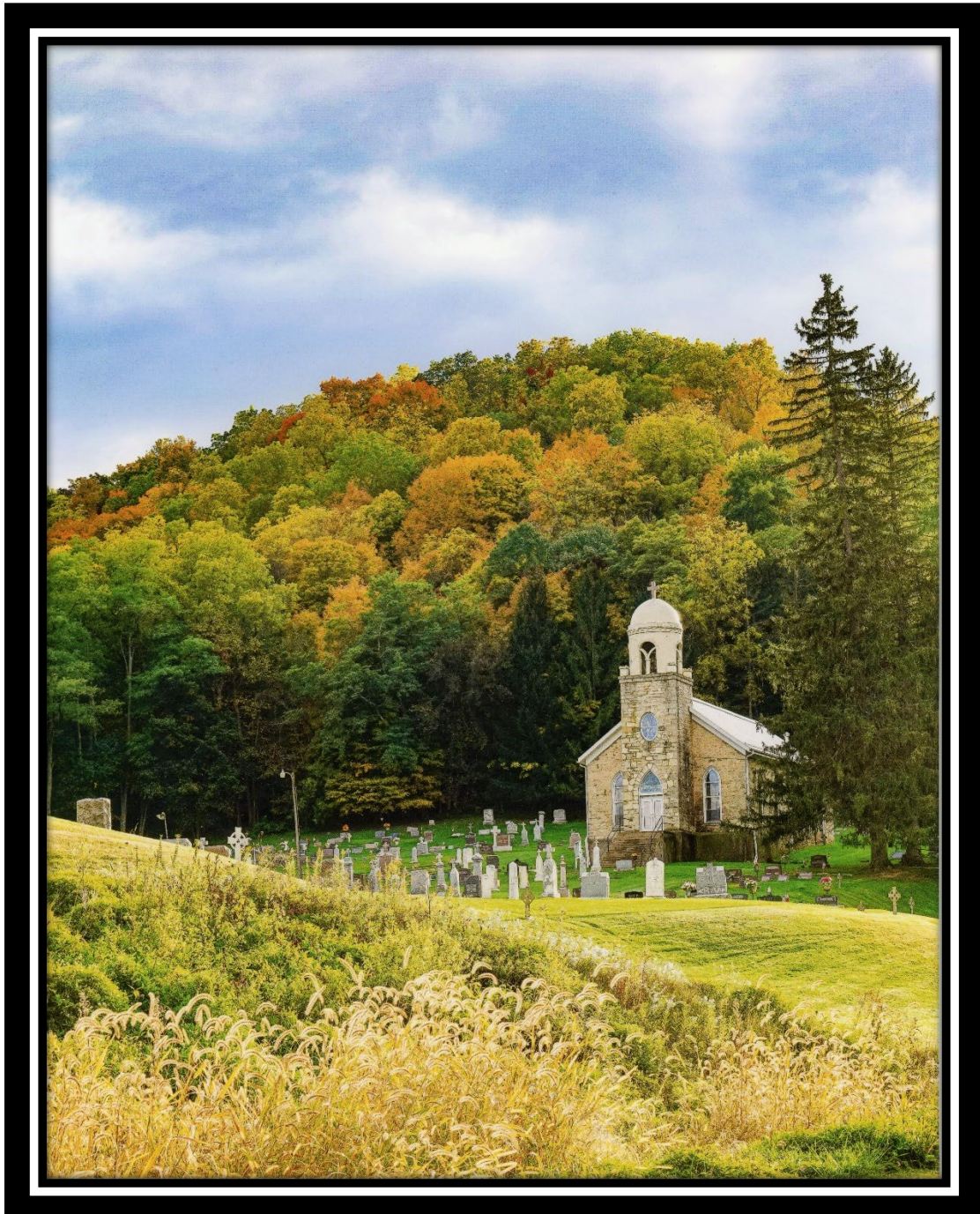
Pinwheels for Prevention



**Natural Wonders
First Place**

**Kathleen Hoard, GFWC Iowa
GFWC Granger Iowa**

Immaculate Conception Church





**Natural Wonders
Second Place**

**Ann Marie Atchison
GFWC Florida
GFWC Temple Terrace Junior
Woman's Club**

Driftwood Beach

**Natural Wonders
Third Place**

**Elayne Cannarozzi
GFWC Delaware
GFWC Village
Improvement
Association**

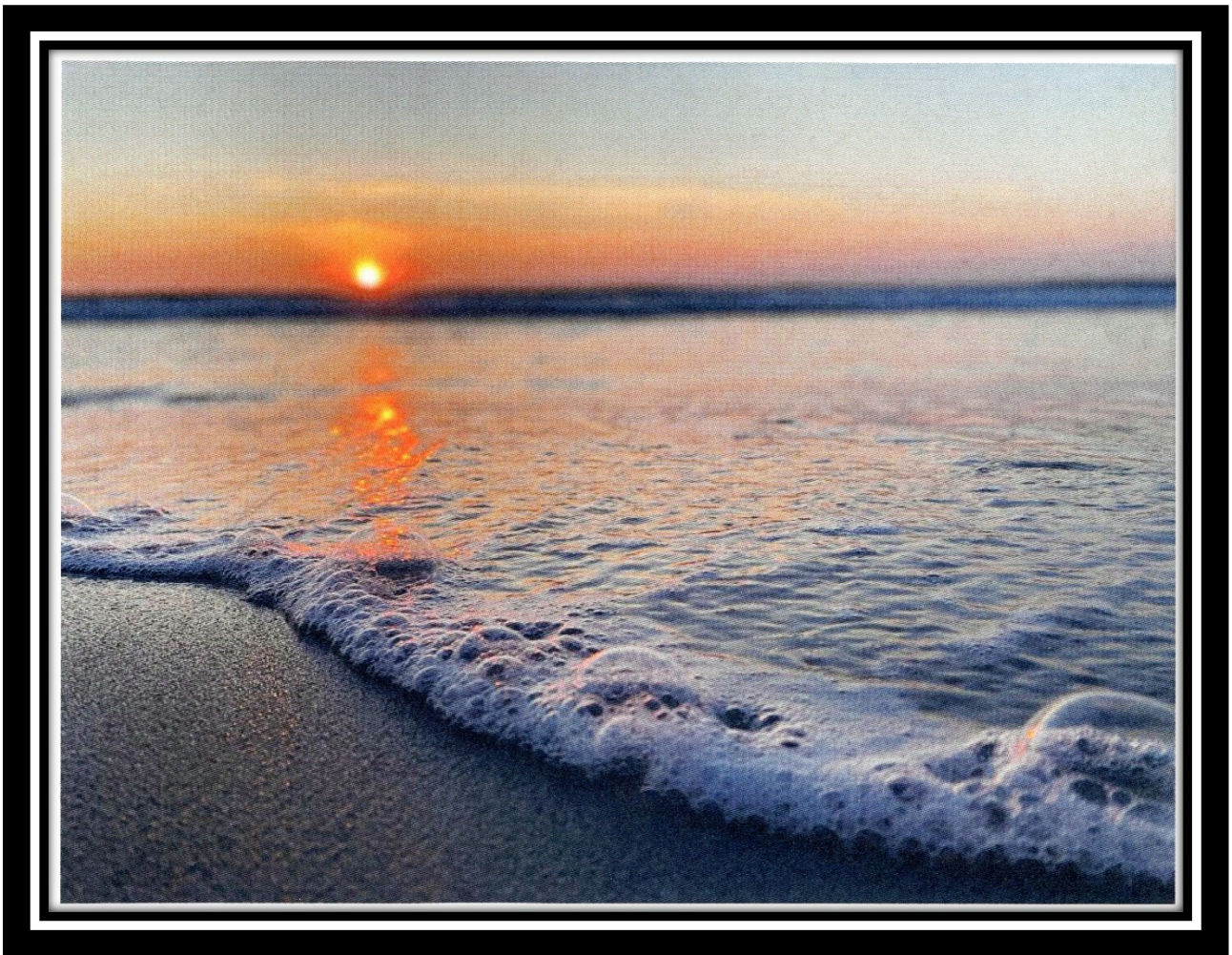
In the Clouds



**Reflections
First Place**

**Terri Belch, GFWC California
GFWC Lakewood Women's Club**

Beautiful Sunrise Over the Water





**Reflections
Second Place (Tie)**

**DeAnna Fritsche
GFWC Missouri
GWC Woman's Club of
Lexington**

Mother Earth Protects Me

**Reflections
Second Place (Tie)**

**Adriana Fajet
GFWC Florida
GFWC Miami Springs
Woman's Club**

Reflecting With Friends





Reflections Second Place

Jennifer Phillips
GFWC Ohio
GFWC Ohio Warren
Junior Women's Club

Remembered

**World Up Close
First Place**

**Keiko Torgersen, GFWC Alaska
GFWC Anchorage Woman's Club**

Koi Pond





**World Up Close
Second Place**

**Diane Grossman
GFWC California
GFWC Ojai Valley Woman's Club**

Gold Dust Day Gecko on Coconut

**World Up Close
Third Place**

**Linda Guraedy
GFWC Mississippi
GFWC Decatur Woman's
Progressive Club**

Alien Saguaro

