

## Adult Category

### GAZA, JANUARY 2009

by Estella Lauter

*First Place (Tie)*

*In seven years, we've got a whole new body.*

- Li-Young Lee, *Breaking the Alabaster Jar*

A European doctor on emergency duty in Gaza says  
*it's like being bombed in a cage,*

and I think of how it must seem  
to those already hospitalized  
with wounds that may never heal  
to hear the wham and whistle  
smash and screech of missiles,  
the rumble of earth giving way underneath  
as they lie immobilized  
waiting for medicine.  
Even the body of a patient lying quietly,  
incarcerated, on life support,  
generates three billion cells a minute.  
In seven years, he could have a whole new body,  
not as it was, but *brimming* with life.

Where is Joseph, whose dreams saved  
both Egyptians and the brothers who betrayed him?

Water brims to the top of a tube and trembles there.

*Certain Blossoms Remind Me*

by Constance Snyder

*First Place (Tie)*

of World War II summer afternoons, the victory garden planted before Daddy was called, that garden which brought joy to a troubled house. At the edges of lettuce and corn, in cinder blocks, they planted flowers – purple pansy faces, orange nasturtiums babies breath – that sweetness from small bouquets Mother sent out with us into the neighborhood— something for us to do those long afternoons.

Door to door, little brother and me. Five cents a bunch. In that black time of air-raided curtains when we lined up with ration books for sugar and meat and newsreels caught children wailing alone at the sides of roads crowded with soldiers and refugees, our little pockets jingled with nickels. There were never enough flowers.

**Youth Category (13 through 18 years)**

***Bricks***

by Andrew David King

*First Place*

*Have you ever thought, “I’ve been here before  
in a dream?” he asks, because for him,  
that’s where he is—*

steering a tank through endless city walls,  
each one fading into the next, sand on sand.  
So many times sleep has dragged him here, like it has me.  
But it’s not enough, he realizes to merely imagine

stepping out into the fringe for the first time,  
feeling the pockmarks of bullets.  
He raises his hand, gestures toward the badlands of western Iraq,  
past the cracked-open ribcage of the weeping city—*This is how you know  
that the world is huge, and you are nothing more  
than a tiny, tiny ant.*

I begin to speak: *You start building an empire with one brick.  
That’s it, I say, just one,* hoping to bring him back to the reality  
of incoming mortar fire,  
although by now, he is gazing up  
toward where the scorching sun edges  
the rooftops of the tallest buildings,

here in this place where anything able  
to straighten its spine and stand upright  
is worthy of praise.

*Little Bowl of Peace*

by Dana Nurse

*Honorable Mention*

I bought a little bowl of peace for 69 cents.  
It came in a cracked clay pot of blue and white.  
“Be careful; it’s hot,” the woman had said.  
I paid no mind and grasped it, not thanking her.  
But it was scorching and burned me and flew from my hands  
Out of the window.

And it fell to the ground, smashing into a million little pieces of peace.  
The drops of gold began to roll.  
Into the cracks in the asphalt, covering the sidewalk, soaking the street.

And a man stepped in the peace and it got all over his good shoes.  
A bus passed through the street full of peace and it stuck to the wheels.  
And where the man and the bus went, the droplets of peace went with them.  
But that street of peace was on a hill, and the peace flowed down like waterfalls.

A busy city was at the bottom of the hill and the golden peace came rushing down.  
One woman shouted to her neighbor; “You have to come and try this peace.”  
Everyone in the city soon had their own piece of peace, and shared it with friends.

And the daughter of the woman of the neighbor had a friend who had a plane.  
Together they went up and poured buckets of peace, and dropped balloons of peace.  
The world seemed to like it and sent some into space.  
Injecting it into the fabric of the universe, infecting the stars, planets, and comets.

But one of those comets got too fat with peace and crash landed on the street.  
The street with the store with the window that my hot bowl had fallen through,  
And the woman looked at me and smiled; I smiled, too.  
“I forgot to say thank you,” I said to her.  
But she shook her head, and poured out two more bowls of peace, still smiling wide.  
Handing one to me clinking them in “cheers,”  
“It is I who should thank you. I’ve been trying to get people to try my peace for years.”

***My brother***

by Ujijji Davis

*Honorable Mention*

He wakes up sometimes  
In the middle of the night  
Panting like he's been running through all of his nightmares  
Trying to catch his dreams

He shivers as sweat beads  
Trickle down the grooves of his skin  
Like the tears of Ahmad down his little boy cheeks

So he stares into the dark  
To black out the horrors of the desert

But he can taste it, the ammunition  
Like chalk and guilt ground together in a wisp of gray fate  
He found God over there  
Somebody more merciful than the gun he held  
And the grenade on his belt.  
You see, he was a Grim Reaper by mistake  
Uncle Sam promised college and the Marines promised honor  
But they did not promise a full night's rest

So he wakes up sometimes in the middle of the night  
And stares into the dark to black out the horrors of the desert  
But the night cannot save him when he closes his eyes.

**Youth Category (12 years & under)**

***A Love Story***

by Meilynn Shi

*First Place*

When the stars are restless, so it is said,  
Mars' bright eye shines more fiercely  
Casting an evil red glow that betrays  
His anger, his quick temper  
His need for the noise of conflict

Beware, the bringer of war awakes!  
The universe rings with the clatter of his armor  
Galaxies clash and planets stray from orbit  
The stars tremble at the sight of His sword

He has freed the dogs of war  
And us mere mortals  
Can only wait for the cosmos to realign

But there is hope, a star on the horizon  
Unlike Mars' lurid glow  
This one's light is white and pure

Praise the Goddess divine!  
Venus has returned to her lover's side

Though she brings no force, no weapons  
He comes readily into Her arms  
And it is their love that calms the fires  
Quenches his thirst, soothes his rage

Love blankets Him in downy peace  
She is the final conqueror

And the fearsome Mars, now subdued  
Blushes a dusky, rosy red

Or so it is also said

***Our Purpose***

by Maia Ziaee

*Honorable Mention*

I believe the orange  
leaves should fall  
I believe that the water  
in a stream should run  
I believe fish  
should swim  
nothing should be stopped  
from its purpose

don't stop the flowers from growing  
nor the lightning from  
striking

Our purpose is not  
to fly in heavy metal contraptions  
or to flatten land for  
our own selfishness

Our purpose is simple  
but important  
Our job is not  
to kill or destroy

We are here to  
open up to the world  
and enjoy its miracles  
but even more than that,  
we are here to make peace