

Street Roots was honored to take part in judging this year's Physicians for Social Responsibility Greenfield Peace Writing Contest. Five writers were recognized this month for their essays, poems and stories addressing the relationship between militarism and human needs. Winners were chosen from 57 entries from across the state who responded to this topic: "In 1953, U. S. President and World War II Supreme Allied Commander, Dwight Eisenhower said, 'Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.' How is this statement relevant today?" The top winner received a cash prize of \$1,000, and a certificate signed by Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber. The first place was awarded to Ailish Duff, a senior at West Linn High School for her poem entitled "They are Here Today."

They are Here Today

By Ailish Duff

They are here today,
the underprivileged
those who misfortune has hung on like disease,
something you cannot shake.
They are here today:
the man who pumped your gas
(you snapped at him),
the woman who stays behind
7 hours each night, at your office
to take care of your messes
because you are too good to deal with
the dirt you create.
They are here today:
the girl who sits next to you in class –
the one whose clothes you sneer at
hand-me-downs
or thrifted, if she's lucky
the boy who you think smells
because he doesn't shower enough
for your taste
They are here today,
those who hunger and are not fed:
for knowledge, opportunity, or breakfast
those who are cold and are not clothed
in Africa, in Tibet, on the other side of town
you are lucky—
you who
can read words like these
unlimited resources at your fingertips
you are lucky, and you do not see
how strong your voice is
when you consider everyone who is mute.
everyone who cannot speak.
They are here today
and while they cannot speak,
they hear
every rocket fired
they see
every gun shoved in their face
all too clearly.
they know
that they are someone's last priority
that you have no problem
stealing from them in the name of
God, of
Country and Glory
they know
but they are still here

WRITE, from page 7

D.L.: The one that really stays with me is the most brutal, from a really strong woman. She survived so much. The only thing she was in prison for was robbery, and she robbed a pharmacy to kill herself because her husband said he was going to rape her daughter.

They were getting divorced and her husband took off, and he called and said that he had raped an 11-year-old girl the night before and said he was planning to rape their daughter too and then hung up. For her, that was the final straw. She had been through so much before in her life, but hearing that about her daughter was too much to take. So she robbed a pharmacy to take the pills, and they found her in her truck and took her to the hospital and then to prison for her trouble. And she said when she woke up and saw the guy with the FBI vest on she thought, "Damn. I can't even kill myself right." And so she went to prison and the whole time she was there she was taking classes and trying to better herself.

J.T.: Was her daughter OK?

D.L.: Her daughter is OK.

J.T.: Tell me about some of the challenges that these women face coming out of prison as well as the challenges facing survivors of domestic abuse.

D.L.: A lot of it is self doubt. They feel unworthy. Even the ones that haven't been to prison, the ones that have been abused are less likely to reach out for help and less likely to stand up for themselves. To be able to give them back that feeling of control is the most important part. Another thing that they face is just the lack of confidence and lack of believing in themselves.

When someone is abused domestically or sexually, it kills the person that they would have been. It just takes that person away and replaces it with this new version of who they're going to be and a lot of them don't feel like that person is good enough to do what they wanted to do. And

it holds them back from seeking education or going for jobs and gets them into situations of worse domestic violence. It just sets them on a path of destruction. There are a lot of people who have been abused who go on to be perfectly fine, but I think that every single one of us has that self doubt and feeling less than worthy.

J.T.: How do you help people get past that, these feelings of self doubt?

D.L.: Well, the biggest thing for them to understand is that it's not their fault. No one is responsible for the abuse that was done to them, and what they need to do is understand that just because this happened it doesn't take away who you are and what you can be. I look at it for me that this is the ultimate way to thumb my nose at my abuser; the more I do this is a slap in the face for every abuser out there. It's a way for them to regain their control and let them know that they are not alone and don't have to sit there and be quiet about it. There's this culture about keeping it quiet, and it's wrong. I understand that in some cases it can destroy families. But you're an adult and you need to be able to stand up and say, "This happened to me and it's who I am and I didn't ask for it." It helps them get some confidence back.

J.T.: Does the writing you get from the people you work with have a common thread?

D.L.: You know, I think there's a commonality in all of them. One of the women was being bullied really bad. It's a confidence destroyer. Any kind of abuse just wipes away their power. That's common through all of these. Some of these women had the best parents. They come from all economic backgrounds, they're all kinds of women. But they all have that loneliness that feeling separated as a commonality. They're the ones whose families did know what was going on. They still have trouble relating to them. When you have a teenage daughter being beaten by their boyfriend, it leaves them thinking that they're alone.

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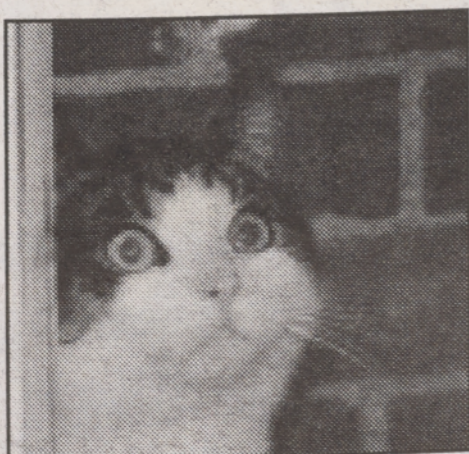
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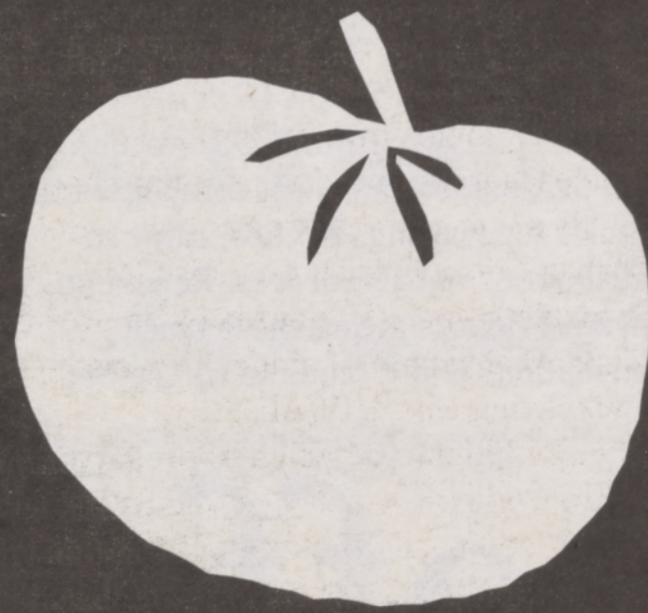
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Office Cat Rooty says thank you to volunteers Robert Britt and Eli Richey who helped paint our office. Thank you!

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