



2010

**Robert Fox Awards for
Young Writers
Award Winning Entries**

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INTRODUCTION

The Robert Fox Awards for Young Writers was established by the Ohioana Library in 2006 in honor of Robert Fox (1943-2005). Robert Fox was a writer and poet who served as the Ohio Arts Council's first poet in the schools and then became literary coordinator for the Ohio Arts Council, a position he held for more than 20 years. During that time, he coordinated the OAC's Individual Artist Fellowship program, the Summer Writing Institute for Teachers, and the compilation of the OAC Writers Directory. He also worked closely with the Arts in Education residency program and served on the Ohioana Library Board of Trustees from 1985 – 1990. He authored several books, among them *Destiny News*, a collection of short stories; *Moving Out, Finding Home: Essays on Identity Place, Community, and Class*; and *Passing*, a collection of poems.

Ohioana's 2010 Robert Fox Awards were given on May 8, 2010 during the opening of the 4th annual Ohioana Book Festival: Celebrating Ohio's Authors. The awards were presented to the students by Ohio First Lady Frances Strickland.

The writing contest was open to Ohio students in grades 9 through 12. First, second, and third place awards are given in both prose and poetry. This booklet contains the 2010 winning student entries.

We thank the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, Barnes and Noble Booksellers, and the Ohio Department of Education for their support of the Robert Fox Awards for Young Writers, and the teachers and parents who have supported and encouraged students to participate in the program.

POETRY

Be My Poem
By Cheyenne Perry

If you'll be my poem
I promise to be gentle.
I'll assuage you with euphony
And when your feelings seem unclear,
Out of shape,
I'll form you.
A villanelle, a nonnet,
A haiku, a sonnet,
Even in free verse
I'll hold you together.
I can fit you in traditional meter and time,
In lines with five iambs and couplets (which rhyme)
If you'd just like to flow.
Or I could enjamb
You so you'd never
Have to end-
Stop a good
Feeling because a comma made you
If you'd like to read slow.
If you think similes will make you too familiar
I can write you so no poem can compare.
I can transform you for all to adore
(A metaphor).
And if you just need a break, and you're sure,
Then how about a caesura?

I'll use every rhetoric device you want
If I know them
If you'd just come out of writer's block
And please be my poem.

Repeated Extinction

By Allison Gray

Out of Kaleidoscopic Chaos our Gaea egressed,
With verdant vines and towering trees overlooking
Blue-gray tides that curl like the toes of a newborn child—
A silent soundlessness wrapped the earth in a blanket and
the crib mobile spun hypnotically.
Darkness.
Tyrannical lizards tangoed through forests, and raptors
darted through wildwood,
Flickering their tongues and fanning their crowns. Yellow
eyes bid death to onlookers.
Fireballs flew—
Eruptions of Chrome—
Copper—
Brass— Left silvery snowcaps and ashen fossils.
Hulky mammoths gumshoed through snowdrifts as crystal
clones groaned;
Cave dwellers glittered homey heat from charred wood,
And from this primitivism budded all-powerful Rome:
Gory gladiators presided in status and heroes emerged:
Hercules, Achilles, Odysseus, Jason.
Dumbfounding aqueducts rose as Roman battles echoed
nonchalance.
The Germanic people germinated; Dark ages depressed the
natives but the Renaissance rebirth
Was a gleaming door, bringing stories in paintings and
paintings in stories.
Colonization of a new world crowded cramped ships,
Disease and arbitrary dishonesty banished the inhabitants,
And bloodthirsty war tore through the already divvied
continents.
Flower children of free spirit professed protest,
Though a frigid war ensued, and red was still as scary as
blood.

Spaceships and computers and calculators began the mod-
ern man;
Now lightweight laptops, fancy phones, and ipods welded
to fragile ears
Make it silent! Here.
Soundlessness wraps the earth in a blanket,
Snug and motionless,
Letting her dream reveries and nightmares,
All over again.

main artery
By Nicole Raab

May warmth
the sound of a highway draws me home
rough rhythmic winds slurring down an endless stretch of
grey pavement
reaching slowly across the earth, further and further
 until it tips over the horizon
 a thinning road vanishing as it meets the sky
this stretched length of grey rock presses down upon the
woods
 trees spilling over its edges
 dense, bulging forests bordering the concrete vein
of the land
the tumbling roar of trucks, the speeding motorbikes
breezing cars all sliding down a highway
always do I hear their symphony of mechanic echoes
swirling though the trees, shuddering the leaves of the
woods
the rumble of metal, the distant groans of engines
an industrial lullaby
it is the breath of the roads
inhaled sharply at acceleration
exhaled as the cars speed on
the vibrating tones of machines
the songs of cars humming in the still air
this noise – this song – is the melody of my home
 all day and forever, I stand still to listen to the rush
of the road
 the world speeding past me
people going going going until they're gone far past the
horizon
until they've passed my still body, with legs stationed like
stones in the earth
never faltering

keeping watch as our ears ring with the hum of the
pavement
 forever submerged in this hushed ocean of concrete
noise

PROSE

Isaac Steinbaum's Hanukkah

By Shannon Shaver

Isaac Steinbaum was not a happy camper. On his kitchen table sat two things: a stale cup of coffee and a recipe for potato latkes. The Metamucil in his coffee had coagulated to the point where it stuck to the roof of his mouth, making him cough up a citrusy mucus later in the day. It seemed that the life of an old person was always decorated with an abundance of mucus. Isaac Steinbaum didn't like mucus.

He reached for the recipe, a browned, dirty paper amongst a chaotic system of recipes that his wife had once understood. It was one of the few things that survived the fire; the fire that had taken his house, his belongings, and even his wife. She may have still been there physically, but she was left forever stumbling about like a lost dog. He scraped the dried bits of food off the recipe, scouring for the memories that they contained of Hanukkahs long gone.

"If only I was a Christian!" he thought to himself bitterly.

Isaac Steinbaum's complaint was legitimate. If he had been born a Christian, he would not have had to make potato latkes for Hanukkah, nor would his house have been burnt down by a lit menorah. Nothing had survived that fire, save Isaac, his wife Linda, this book of recipes, and Hirschel the cat.

Isaac Steinbaum had always hated Hanukkah. He remembered very well the earliest days of his childhood, asking his mother when Santa Claus would come to their house.

"Santa Claus no come here," Isaac's mother would tell him in her thick Russian accent. "Santa Claus come visit Christian boy and girl. Really, Santa Claus is no real man, Isaac. He is really the mama and the papa sneaking like mouse to put gift under tree. But what is point, really, Isaac? Jewish people smart people. Give gift right to you.

Cut out medium man.”

Isaac had always been enchanted by the colorful, magical light shows of Christmas, the spirited music and the delicious spiced rum drinks.

He grimaces at his menorah, in need of a good cleaning, crying the wax tears of another disappointing holiday season. It was the only dirty object in his entire home. His new condominium smelled of fresh plastic and was lacking in any character. Isaac missed his old kitchen table, his comfortable leather easy chair that had been so forgiving of his ancient, sagging buttocks. He longed for the smell of burnt bagels with schmear and the sound of the old furnace burping and coughing, singing the song of malfunction.

“Stan! Why are you in my house again?” Linda entered the kitchen. Isaac had long ago given up on correcting his wife. Since they had lost everything, she had had a mental breakdown and was now convinced she was really Dorothy Zbornak from *The Golden Girls* television show. He had learned to ignore her outrageous accusations, but still longed to hear her obnoxiously loud laughter once more, or perhaps to taste her delicious cooking. Linda stared at him accusingly for a few more minutes before retreating back to the bedroom.

As he chopped the onions, Isaac cried. He could not tell if the tears were due to the bitter smell, or perhaps because he found it completely impossible to see any kind of light in his life anymore. The phone rang.

“Hello?” Isaac answered.

“Hi, Daddy. It’s Sherry,” his daughter answered.

“Hi, honey. How are you?”

“I’m fine, daddy. Listen, I know we were supposed to come over tonight, but Dave’s got this big business dinner, and I don’t think...” she paused.

“You don’t think you can come and celebrate Hanukkah with your depressed father and lunatic mother.”

“Daddy, no! It’s not that; it’s just that this dinner is really important. I mean, Dave could start a franchise if he talks to the right people tonight. Do you understand?”

“Ah, Dave: the carpet king of Cleveland!”

“Dad, you promised me you would stop making fun of what Dave does for a living. He makes good money. He supports me and your grandchildren. What more do you want from him?”

Isaac hated the gaudy rings Dave wore on his fat fingers. He hated the strong cologne he wore and the way he got a manicure. He hated the long curly hairs that protruded from his nose and the way he called him “Pops”.

“Nothing, absolutely nothing,” Isaac replied. He hung up the phone. Life was getting too short for unnecessary goodbyes to children who weren’t grateful for anything you had given them. All of the diapers changed, boo-boo’s bandaged, and lullabies sung had long been forgotten with new lives. Isaac felt less like a father to his children and more like a burden. It seemed they always had to carry this extra weight of guilt or duty around unwillingly.

He returned to the latkes, now burning into perfectly charred, black hockey pucks.

“Feh!” he uttered as he turned off the heat and went to get ready, done with tradition.

Isaac looked into the mirror and realized something: he had truly become ugly in the last couple of years. His face was completely consumed by his swollen nose, unsatisfied, crooked mouth, and elephant-like ears.

The doorbell rang. At the door stood Isaac’s daughter Diane, exhausted, her eight year old twins hanging from her sides. Next to her stood her husband, Henry. Henry was not Jewish, but Isaac liked him. He was quite and polite, and he still called Isaac “Mr. Steinbaum”, as he had since he had asked to marry Diane ten years ago.

He began to set out all of the unappetizing food he had

prepared: the dry brisquet, the burnt latkes, the stale matzo, when he heard that fateful knock upon the door.

Aunt Gilda sure knew how to make an entrance. She wore an outfit entirely made of polyester and sequins with a visor to match. Her face was completely painted on, including the beauty mark she penciled in on her right upper lip. She smelled of mothballs and strong perfume, the kind she had purchased at the dollar store stealthily, thinking it a rather nifty bargain.

Isaac didn't know how he was related to Gilda, only that she had been at every family gathering that he could remember in his entire existence. She had always been around. She had always been old. She had always been complaining.

"Well, were you going to wait for me, or were you just going to let me freeze outside while you stuffed your faces?" she asked Isaac in her nasally voice, punctuated with Brooklyn-style r's and phlegmy Yiddish h's.

"Gilda, I—" Isaac began.

"No! Don't speak! I know nobody cares about old Aunt Gilda. After all I've done for you, Isaac, I just thought you would have a bit more consideration."

The happy family sat down to eat. All of the Steinbaum clan was in attendance: Isaac, Linda, Diane, Henry, their two daughters Alexis and Isabelle, Carol, her boyfriend Charlie, and of course, Aunt Gilda. The room was silent, save for Aunt Gilda's loud chewing and a disgusted expression that spoke a thousand words.

"Is there something...wrong, Aunt Gilda?" Isaac asked reluctantly.

"Oh, nothing, Isaac. Well, I guess it's just the meat. It's a little dry. I just got my new dentures, and I'm a little afraid they'll become unhinged by the end of the night. And you know I have arthritis in my jaw, of course. And don't forget the way beef gives me hives! Of course there's

the acid reflux, too. Plus—"

"I think it's about time we light the candles!" Isaac interrupted. "Who wants to say the blessing?"

"I do!" little Isabelle exclaimed. She had an exuberance that Isaac so missed in his own life.

As she lit the candles, Isabelle said the blessing in the sweet, light voice of an angel.

"Barukh Atta Adonay Eloheynu Melekh Ha-olam Asher Kiddeshanu Be-mitsvotav Ve-tsivanu Lehadlik Ner Shel khanuka!"

As she lit the candles, everyone smiled, even Linda, who hadn't cracked a grin in over a year. Aunt Gilda was completely silent, and even Isaac felt some happiness emerging from his heart.

He took a bit of one of the latkes he had made, and realizes he truly enjoyed the smokey, charred flavor. He looked around him. He saw his family. Who said that Hanukkah could not become the new tradition of a happy year? Perhaps a new year would bring with it the resolutions Isaac had been needing to make in the months gone by. Well-done latkes. They would be a new tradition in Isaac Steinbaum's Hanukkah.

Via Air Mail
By Uoo Seob Kang

In the bottom drawer of my wooden desk is a stack of letters, bundled together with a thick, hospital-yellow, rubber-band. Each envelope is mostly the same: two white triangles folded over a white rectangle on the back, a jagged and torn upper edge, a smooth front side with my mother's familiar scrawl, and a stamp, across which an official "air mail" stamp certifies the distance from which these letters have come to nest in the bosom of my desk. At night or during the day, I often pick through this stack of letters, gaze at their 'air mail' logos, and think of my family as they spend their days across a vast American landscape and the large Pacific blue.

Just by looking at the cover of one of the letters, I know if it was sent by my mother or my father. My mother uses envelopes with boxed, red and blue borders and on the front, I easily recognize my miss-spelled name. Even now, my mother has not settled on the Romanization of my name and sometimes writes 'Woo' instead of 'Uoo' or 'Sub' instead of 'Seob.' Reading her letters, I hear my mother's worried voice as she reminds me to eat a lot of healthy foods, study hard, and call often. She ends each of her letters with the same promise, "From your mother who loves you most of all in the world."

My father's letters are different from my mother's. They are often more crafted and labored. He uses a computer to type out his thoughts and to tell me stories about mother, my sister, my grandparents, or the latest events in the Korean news. His stories are light-hearted and often funny, but his typos give him away. My father is not familiar with computers and I know that he has spent at least an hour typing this one page letter. For my father, however, letter-writing is serious business and he would not have his

thoughts in anything other than typeset.

For my first year in America, I never wrote my parents back. I often called or tried to get my parents to video-chat with me over the internet. But my parents' letters kept coming. To my surprise, letter writing began to grow on me. Unlike a phone call or video-chat, letter writing becomes a routine of expectation. Every afternoon when I checked the mail, I hoped to see a white envelope with the familiar 'air-mail' stamp. Receiving a letter often resulted in more expectations. If I could not go to my room and read a letter right away, I would think about the little square packet in my bag or back pocket throughout the day. In my room, I enjoyed tearing open the envelope, unfolding the letter, and even smelling the paper for a scent of familiarity. After reading a letter, I always fold the letters as they were originally folded and added them to my growing bundle of envelopes in my desk.

Looking at the bundle of letters in my desk, I am reminded of how far I have traveled to pursue my dreams to study in America and of how much I have had to leave behind. They remind me of lost time with family, but they are also physical evidence of the love, support, and sacrifice my parents have made to send me away to study. My parents' bundle of letters are important to me because they have been a comforting physical link to my past and to my parents and a reminder of the independence and educational experiences I wanted to achieve when I first decided to come and study in the United State. Because they embody what is most important to me in my life, those letters remain my most valuable possessions.

Consumed

By Kathleen Naymon

How do I *feel*?

I feel like the carbonation in a soda bottle. I'm waiting and waiting, pressure pulling me down, but with the right trigger, will burst and fizzle and pop.

I feel like running around aimlessly, screaming at the top of my lungs, only stopping to breathe for a few seconds to regain my strength and then returning to a high pitched shriek.

Sometimes I feel like just sitting in my bed and thinking.

Even when I'm lying down I'm not relaxed. My sleep is light and weightless; a momentary cover over my thoughts just so I'm sane. My whole body aches. My legs tense with restlessness and my hands are clammy as I play with my fingers, just looking for something to do.

I think and think and think. And when those thoughts seem too optimistic, I rethink them until they're negative. It's more realistic that way. I don't want to feel like this anymore. I want to relax and think and not rethink my thoughts.

But I can't. My thoughts are unrealistically good. It's not possible, I reason with myself. Why would it be? What evidence do I have? I can't accept anything. The most obvious answer isn't always the right answer. Maybe I'm reading everything wrong. But maybe I shouldn't second guess the situation. Maybe I should.

In the pit of my stomach, I feel empty. It's like my organs are doing flips under my skin. Nausea sets in. My face turns red. My cuticles are swollen from my biting. I'm fatigued. But honestly, I would take all of this any day. It's not as bad as my mental state.

I'm not my own worst enemy. If something is perfect, I'm reading it wrong. If ten other people say I'm overana-

lyzing, they're just trying to make me feel better. I think and process until I'm sick. Every detail and every moment has been fully documented and scrutinized in my mind. It's my own scientific method complete with hypotheses and data and research. In chemistry class it's a bit different though, I'm not being objective. I'm being ridiculous.

See, that's the worst part. I know I'm over thinking all of this. Deep down in my churning stomach and jumpy organs, I know it's fine and I know what's real and what's not. I don't know why I do this to myself. Why do I make myself sick over this? Why can't I be normal and relax? Why can't I listen to what people have to say in the most basic terms? Why is there always subliminal messaging or ulterior motives?

I'm realistic, though. And now, I'm second guessing myself – again. It's fine. It's fine. It's fine.

Maybe if I keep repeating that it will come true. Perhaps if I try to ignore my thoughts, I'd be better off. Live and let live. No, that's stupid.

I'm not being self-indulgent. I mean, I kind of am, but not really. Yes, no, maybe so. It's like a standardized test problem. One or more answers may be right, but choose the one that fits the best.

What if none of them fit best? Everything is a shade of gray here. Black and white is for kindergarten finger painting. Adolescence is charcoal. Or maybe a dirty off-white, or a muted heather gray. One of those.

I just want a piece of chocolate. Make that ten.

I guess I could pray even though I'm not very religious. I already make wishes at 11:11, so hopefully that's helping. I also make sure every eyelash that falls off goes toward a wish. Maybe I should use my Ouija board tonight.

No, I won't. I will not stoop to supernatural board games for answers. I wish people weren't so complicated. I should just pull a flower and start picking petals for an-

swers. Loves me, loves me not. Little girls do that and it always seems to work out for them.

I'm absolutely obsessed. Infatuated. Fanatical. It's quite possible I'm going to vomit. I should take up yoga or get an expensive psychologist. Maybe I should start a blog.

Breathe in, breathe out. Roll shoulders back, roll them in. Crack knuckles. Wipe sweat off face. Blink. Blink. Blink. Breathe!

That's it. I'm going to tell him I like him.