

# 2017 MCC Creative Writing Contest

## Essay Category

### **Honorable Mention: “Cold Nights” by Audra Moyle**

I put on my snow pants one leg at a time, and then the warmest winter coat I had brought with me. My boots were a little too small, and my dad was getting frustrated with how long it was taking for me to get them on. He came to where I was sitting and helped me tie them up. He had a dark red mark on his face and the stink of beer and cigarettes on his breath. “I’m sorry girl, you know I am so sorry for this.” He repeated to me for what felt like the millionth time that night.

I didn’t know exactly what time it was, but the moon was high, street lights were on, and someone had turned off the television that I had fallen asleep to. Looking back, I imagined it was around two in the morning. I could hear the wind whirling outside, or maybe it was the sirens of the police a few miles away heading toward the dingy rundown apartment we were staying in at the time with my dad’s girlfriend and her family. I was scared, and my eight-year-old mind didn’t understand at the time what was happening. We walked out the door and onto the cracked pavement covered in ice, and a part of me decided that this was going to be a long walk and a bad night.

They had gotten into another fight, I already knew that. I fell asleep to the yelling and the breaking of beer bottles the same way I had many nights before. This time she had gotten hurt in the process. We walked for what seemed like forever, in a bad neighborhood of Ann Arbor. Black cars drove by with their radio up so loud that the road vibrated from the base in the song, and there were bars on the doors of the corner store, the same corner store there we arrived at. My nose red and running from the cold, and my feet burning from the snow boots a few sizes too small. There was a man standing outside of the store, just closing, when my dad asked him if he could use the phone before he locked the door.

The man apologized saying he couldn’t go into the store. My dad picked me up and began to explain to the man that he needed to use the phone, it was an emergency. “I’m just trying to put a roof over my daughter’s head for the night. Please, it won’t take too long, I promise.” The man let my dad use his cell phone. I don’t know who he called but following that we were in the man’s car and on our way back to the apartment we had just walked from. I was just happy to be out of the freezing cold.

When we pulled in all I could see was the bright lights of the police car’s waiting for us. When we got out of the man’s vehicle one police officer took my hand while the other took both of my dad’s and locked handcuffs around them. He began to cry and asked them to let us talk. A policewoman said she had a few questions for me first. She explained that my dad and his girlfriend had gotten into a very bad fight and she asked me if I had heard

anything or if I was hurt in any way. I told her “no”; I was told to always say “no” to those kinds of questions. I overheard tell my dad that he had two options, either jail or a shelter.

She said that I was going to stay in a home for foster kids for the night. The tears rushed down my face as I screamed at the officer “No! I have a mom! Call my mom!”. The woman talked to my dad a little bit and then told me to tell him goodbye. When I went over to the car I hugged him, without receiving a hug back because of the handcuffs holding his arms together behind his back. He told me he loved me as he was crying and reassured me that everything would be okay. But, I didn’t understand what was wrong to begin with. I didn’t understand why my dad was sitting in the back of a cop car or why they couldn’t just turn off the lights because they were hurting my eyes.

That night my dad was taken somewhere, I have never found out where exactly. The policewoman asked my dad’s girlfriend if I could stay the night there and that my mom was going to pick me up in a few hours. She said yes, I don’t remember very much after that, I just remember my mom standing in the doorway when I woke up the next morning. I went home with her and I never went back to that apartment again. I was not allowed to see my dad again unsupervised, which meant that I didn’t see him at all. He passed away three years later. I have a million unanswered questions and that is something I now must live with. The last memory of my father isn’t a good one, but fortunately, I have good memories to put in place of it.

## **JUDGE’S COMMENTS:**

The first few sentences of this personal essay sound like the ordinary experience of an eight-year-old child, dressing for winter with the help of her father. Then comes a jarring note - ...”a dark red mark on his face and the stink of beer and cigarettes on his breath.” The remaining events of a traumatic evening show how scary and bewildering life can be for a child when one parent is violent and the other absent. The events of the evening are described in vivid detail. The reflection in the final paragraph shows the narrator’s resilience, while acknowledging that not all stories end happily.

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*Dr. Joel R. Brouwer is retired from teaching English and Communication for 47 years, the last 21 on the faculty at Montcalm Community College. During that time, he taught creative writing and mentored numerous aspiring authors. He also coordinated the statewide LAND Creative Writing Contest for many years. For an example of his writing, consult his travel blog, <https://hippieroadtrip.wordpress.com>*