

## Age Group: Grades 9-12

### First Place

**Author: Tara Sweeney**

“Do I have to?” I asked longingly after my mom said it was time to clean out the attic. Sunday chores were the worst but this one was especially dreadful because it was two jobs in one. Cleaning out old junk, and dusting and sweeping the floors. I trudged my feet up the narrow staircase and held the broom and rag in my hands. I had been up here many times but it seemed particularly eerie today because it was so cold and dark outside.

My tasks were as follows: empty out all the boxes, throw away anything unimportant, and don't break anything. Pretty easy in my opinion but who knows, I always mess things up.

The first box I opened was a small cardboard box taped shut with bright green duck tape. It looked pretty recent so I carefully pulled the tape off without ripping it. Inside was a whole collection of Vogue magazines from the 80's. Wow, my mom must have been some weirdo to have collected, lets see... 36 magazines! I taped the box back shut because I bet this was something pretty special to her.

Next, there were about five giant boxes but I wasn't quite ready to delve into them so I searched a little and found a wooden chest looking box with a rusted silver latch on it. Interesting I thought because all the other boxes were cardboard or plastic. What is this doing here? I picked it up and placed it on the floor in front of me. It looked so fragile and delicate I was nervous to even nudge it. Finally, I opened the latch to find a series of papers and photos. They looked fairly unimportant so I shuffled through them when my hand hit something hard. I lifted the papers up to find something entirely unexpected.

A hatchet.

The hatchet was small and very ancient looking with a wooden handle and a stone head. I was utterly confused so I looked through the papers to see if I could find anything relating to it. Soon, I came across a photo with twelve women standing next to each other holding the same hatchet in their hands. The women were dressed in fancy dresses and hats and looked in a way proud of whatever they were doing. On the back of the photo it read, *Me and the girls, 1905, Johnstown*. This was very intriguing because I knew my family had lived in Johnstown for all their lives but if one of these women were related to me then she would have to be my great grandmother! Right underneath the photo was a letter and it looked to be written in the same handwriting as the writing on the back of the photo.

“Dear Helen, I hear you have been extremely busy down there in Kentucky! Your friend there, Carrie Nation, has gotten national attention for her efforts in the temperance movement. Are you a part of it too? No matter, because I'm so proud of you for standing up for your civil rights! I have joined a little group here in Johnstown myself matter of fact. We aren't the sort to get violent but it gives us some peace at the end of the day to know we ladies are doing our part in the stop of alcohol.”

Oh my. I thought. Is this really true? Was my ancestor a part of the temperance movement? I had to keep reading.

“I can't wait to see you again Helen and talk to you about what is happening! I wished the authorities took us more seriously and heard our cries. Some many lives have been hurt by the effects that alcohol has on people. We need justice for the poor women who have been hurt or abused by their alcoholic husbands. Well enough of my ranting I want to know about you. What is it like actually making a difference in the world? Sincerely yours, Betty.”

Before I could even put the paper down I had so many thoughts racing through my head. Were there secret clubs for women supporters of the temperance movement? And who was “Betty” and why was she so against alcohol?

I reread the letter many times to make sure I fully understood it. I also wondered why this letter had never been mailed if it was for someone in Kentucky. Then it dawned on me that I had heard the name Carrie Nation before. While doing a research paper for school I remember coming across that name and being very interested.

Now it all made sense. The letter, the hatchet, the photo were all connected. Carrie Nation, the prime figure of the Temperance movement, used violence to protest against alcohol. She did this using a hatchet. The same ones that the women in the photo were carrying and the same one that was right here in front of me. I also remember that Carrie Nation was arrested so I bet if you were a supporter of her that was a very bad thing. Another thing that came together in my mind was that if she was secretive about supporting Carrie and the movement then she wouldn’t risk sending a letter full of incriminating evidence.

I looked at my watch and it said 11:46am which meant I had been up here for over an hour! Now I was in trouble, big time. But I still couldn’t stop thinking about the letter and the hatchet and the photo and how much Johnstown history was in that box. I quickly packed it all up and stored the box right back where I found it. My mom called up to me, “Time to go, Honey!” and I walked down the stairs, careful not to trip over all the scattered items.

I pulled on my coat and boots but before we got out the door I asked my mom, “What were your grandparents names?” “Well” my mom looked surprised at my question “Elizabeth and Walter but he died young because of liver disease. Why do you ask?” I smirked, “Oh, only curious”.

Everyday after that I would go up to the attic and read through all the other letters in the tiny box. I concluded, through much searching, that my great grandmother, or as she was called “Betty” , was a tried-and-true activist of the temperance movement. This was all due to the fact that my great grandfather had died from drinking alcohol every single day which caused him liver disease. She was left to raise my grandmother and her two brothers on her own and used her frustration to help get justice for all the women like her who have felt similar consequences.

My great grandmother was a fighter for her cause and I hope to have the same determination and bravery someday.

## **Age Group: Adult (18+)**

### **First Place (Tie)**

***“All Good Things”***

***Author: Kevin Vosburgh***

The timbre of the voice that boomed out of me  
Far overstated the gravity of my declaration  
In truth even I was taken aback  
When in a rarely-used baritone  
I proudly pointed to the muffler place  
And excitedly proclaimed

*When I was a boy, that used to be a Dairy Queen*

The minivan (mine) overflowed with children (mine)  
Silently frozen in pseudo-shock  
Their heretofore unshakable trust in our paternal bond momentarily strained As they sat  
in judgment  
Weighed my comment  
The scale pointer teetering back and forth between  
*Is Dad just being funny?*  
And  
*Has Dear Father gone around the bend at long last?*

Waiting out the awkward pause  
Daughter #2 took the bullet for her siblings  
As she often does  
Brave like her mother  
Unafraid to wade through unknown waters  
Or to risk offending authority  
She batted away the silence  
Cleared her throat and replied  
*Yeah, Dad? For reals?*

Her feigned interest is certainly understandable, reasonable Because  
playing the comment over in my head  
I am old and rambling  
Am an out-of-touch ancient thing  
Bursting at the seams with incomplete memories  
Useless factoids  
Historical non sequiturs  
Now I am doubting myself  
*That was once an ice cream shop, wasn't it?*  
Because what an odd thing to remember  
On the way to get the car washed and return some bottles

My father's mother took me there once  
An exceedingly rare excursion  
As we waited for our sundaes  
She gave me a licorice-flavored cough drop  
Told me it was candy  
Harshly scolded me when I spit it into a napkin in horror Her face  
pinched into an angry molten prune  
One which had baked in the sun  
Lived through the Depression

And would be damned if I wasted a perfectly good sucker

Recollections of her brought my own father into focus A  
simple cause-to-effect, splayed out for all to see An easily-  
solved puzzle once given all the variables My father who was  
stern, slow to praise

Cautious to emote, almost fearful to take joy or pride But  
when his guard was down, when he could forget Hilarious,  
kind, warm, boisterous

One of the knobs of this puzzle piece  
Doesn't fit, popping up just enough to ruin the landscape

I'm somewhere else now  
The memories spread into each other  
A blot of cream spun into morning coffee  
Which fades once the spoon swiftly stirs

Washburn's, was it? Washbaum's?  
Where they had an ice cream counter  
An offshoot of the attached assembly line that  
Churned out half gallons by the hundreds  
My grandfather used to deliver for them  
Brought home the surplus product the stores didn't need The  
memory of a freezer full of pineapple-orange ice cream Sours my  
stomach from forty years away  
My inner old man reminds me, Washburn's is gone now, too  
Restaurant and factory both  
All that remains for me are these mental afterimages  
Blackened bits of overexposed film  
Negatives  
Rough outlines with the details  
Obscured, uncertain, unreliable

Never realized I'd been collecting so many specters, these ethereal things  
Unintentionally  
Perpetually spinning a spider's web  
That lays in wait for infinite unimportant events to become ensnared Bound up  
snugly for future feasts  
A function of age or of the idle mind  
Subconsciously measuring the grains of sand that trickle Down  
Slowly  
Burying all

But all works as it should  
Each shadow is a constant  
In the dynamic differential equation of being  
This collective memory of ours  
The shared struggle  
The victories, failures and pineapple-oranges

Marking time by the passage not of months and years  
But of buildings and people  
And licorice and sprinkles  
A kiss or chuckle or fistfight  
All hourglass fodder

My daughters went to the mall for haircuts  
And we passed what used to be a radio store  
But this time I kept quiet  
Lest I have to explain antennas to the uninitiated  
To those who believe rabbit ears only belong on rabbits

***Author: Dorothy La Porta***

“Hey! You kids get off of that rail car!” hollered the rail yard worker at my friends and me as he jogged towards us.

The FJ&G Railroad (Fonda, Johnstown and Gloversville) was the unauthorized way for my buddies and me to travel across the city of Gloversville while growing up in the late 1960s. It was free and it was a daring, exciting adventure! Sometimes we would put a shiny copper penny on the rail, for a train to flatten and we would keep it for a souvenir of our bravery. As we rode along, we passed glove shops, tanneries and factories of our very busy industrial city. Most of our parents and aunts and uncles worked in one of them, making a good wage and being proud of their craftsmanship. On Fridays they brought home their paychecks, changed their clothes and headed downtown to buy what the family needed. Main Street was the social hub of the city back then. Woolworth’s lunch counter had a “Today’s Special” every day with things like Baked Macaroni and Cheese during Lent. Their menu always finished off with whipped topping on gelatin (was it from the Knox Gelatin Factory in Johnstown that was along the train tracks?)

As the name says, gloves were a big part of the history of Gloversville and much of that success was due to the construction of the FJ&G railroad in 1870. It connected the city to the world outside of Fulton County for shipment of supplies and finished leather goods.

When the 7 of us jumped off that veerrrrrry slow moving railcar we scattered in all directions. We were actually a pretty good bunch of kids. We were all just hitching a ride on the orange and yellow box car on the way home from church school. We wore striped cotton shirts under our plastic rain jackets, things our mothers had bought downtown at the Sears and Roebuck store. As I jumped off the metal platform that day, one of my rubber shoe covers got stuck on a jagged part of metal, but I just kept

going. Better to face mom's disappointed face that I had lost something again, then to be caught by the burly looking rail yard worker shouting at us as we escaped.

Depending on what part of the city you were from, you made your way off the railroad tracks towards your home. There was usually a stop though somewhere to get a snack. East Enders got a Lorenzo's sauce sandwich, two hot, crisp slices of bread with a ladle of sauce in the middle. West Enders headed to Farhardt's for a glass bottle of Cordone's soda and a big pickle pulled from the briny depths of a huge glass jar on the counter. We were alerted when it was time to go home by the whistle of the trains. You could almost tell time by the regularity of the sound of the train whistle coming arching over the city. It was time to pick up your copper pennies and get washed up for dinner.

At the dinner table, our dad talked about in his childhood of seeing the circus train come to town. It would unload elephants and all types of animals from the trains as the wooden ramps groaned with the weight of them walking down. He said it seemed as if the whole town turned out to watch the display.

Decline of the leather business left the route without sufficient customer base.

In the late 1990's Fulton County started taking steps to convert the rail bed into a rail trail. A paved trail rose out of the abandoned, silent tracks. The new rail trail quickly became a treasured part of the county and is enjoyed by many residents and visiting vacationers. There are bicyclists, dog walkers, joggers, inline skaters traversing the trail. The trail is wheelchair accessible. Winter time brought cross country skiing. Several old leather buildings are still visible. Some are imposing in size. You can envision the vast amount of workers with their metal lunch boxes heading into their jobs and making a life for themselves and their families.

There are some beautiful scenic areas, such as the southern part of the trail in Johnstown at the Frog Hollow section. There is a nice view of the creek/crick and a gorge. You will very likely see some wildlife. A hawk floating on a wind current, a darting bunny, a shy fox, turtles sunning themselves on a tree branch in the creek. You may see a deer with her twin fawns and there had been sightings of a young bear crossing the trail in the past. In these Foothills of the Adirondacks we have trees that glow like green jewels in the spring and summer and sparkle like amber and diamonds in the fall and long, icy winters.

Have a seat on the benches along the way to rest or take a sip of a water you brought in your picnic basket. Carry in, carry out is a good rule of thumb for any trail, in any county. Stop at the park in Johnstown called . A few blocks off the trail you can find a café serving breakfast or an ice cream shop to grab a cone of your favorite flavor to enjoy on your return trip. At the Vail Mills/Broadalbin section stop at the Visitor's Center for information of upcoming county activities. In Gloversville stop to view the boxcar that is displayed at the Trail Station park. Take the time to fully read the monument placed there. It is dedicated to "those who migrated here with their hopes and dreams". It makes you think of how different life, how things were much harder then and some things simpler and easier in the past than they are now. The sentiment on the monument is timeless for all who work hard to obtain a dream in our present 2000s with all its challenges.

Especially during this frustrating and seemingly endless pandemic, we all need to try to continue to hold on to hopes and dreams. This past year has reminded us to value life's simple pleasures. We found the need to look for activities with our friends or family that were outside, where we could social distance easily. The Rail trail offers up a great solution and it is right there in our own backyard. With the

railroad gone, our children have missed a wonderful piece of our heritage, but you can still share with them how the railway enriched the lives of our ancestors. Have a conversation away from all that screen time. Discuss what you see as you walk along the rail trail. Stories are part of who we are, they all have something to teach us about ourselves, our neighbors, our county, our nation. Our strength is in the people of Fulton county that are visionary, ambitious and forward thinking. Our rail trail is a step in the right direction to promote the growth and of our county.

Maybe, as you walk the trail, if you are very lucky, you might just find a flattened copper penny on the side of the trail sparkling in the sunshine as your souvenir.

## First Runner-Up

**Author: Dayna Peck**

Never had Beatrice Susan Walters regret marrying her husband as much as she did on the night he got lost in his drink and chased her about their farm with a wooden hatchet in his hands.

“Aw, Bea! Come on! Do not behave this way!” Prescott’s words slurred out of his mouth, as he ran in a vaguely serpentine formation, a few yards behind her.

“I’ll stop running when you put down the hatchet!” She shot back, looking over her shoulder at him. She regretted this action immediately, as it had slowed her enough for him to be able to lunge at her. The both of them tumbled to the ground, Prescott landing on top. Beatrice closed her eyes and prayed for a miracle. That some way, somehow, someone would come and rescue her.

Prescott dug his knees into her shoulder blades, driving her into the cold October mud. She could feel it cake to her skirts and hair, it’s dampness seeping in and saturating everything she wore. She opened her eyes and stared up at him, hoping that there would be someone else around to take care of their daughter. After all, the man pinning her to the ground and looming a hatchet over her head was certainly not whom she wanted to do the job.

*Argh!*

The sound felt as though it had come from somewhere outside of her body. Beatrice reeled momentarily, as a searing pain appeared suddenly over her left eye. Her vision in the struck eye went blurry. With her good eye, she tried to make out the shape of her husband; who had finally decided to toss the hatchet to the side, and opted to beat her instead.

The image of a younger Lilian appeared before Beatrice, her mane of red waves bouncing in every direction. This startled Beatrice for a number of reasons. Primarily because her daughter had just turned sixteen none too long ago, and this vision of her could not have been more than ten. The young Lilian made direct eye contact with her mother, a look of utter disappointment written across her features.

“You are a Peter’s woman.” The spectre spoke, but the voice that came from her daughter’s mouth was not that of her daughter, but of Beatrice’s own mother. “And Peter’s women are not *weak*.”

Beatrice’s gaze snapped back up to Prescott, who appeared to be winding up for another hit. At the last moment, she rose her hands up over her face, his punch striking them instead of his intended target. She sucked her teeth in pain, certain that he had just broken one or more of her fingers. She dug her heels into the ground and shoved her pelvis up towards the sky, unrooting her husband from his place. She let out a battle cry as she shoved him over her head and punched him between his legs as he was hurtled into the mud.

"To the devil with you, woman!" He cursed, an ominous look in his eye as he began to frantically search the ground around him. "Leave! Go! I don't want you here anymore!"

"Not without!"

"Lilian's *my* daughter! Lilian *Walters!*" He spat. "And you will *never* see her again!" Beatrice froze. As it dawned on her that there was nothing she could do to prevent his threat. "Prescott." Beatrice pleaded, searching his eyes for any kind of sympathy. "You'll feel differently in the morning when you're!"

"No, I won't!" He demanded, a look of offense washing over his crimson complexion.

"Just promise me that you will not treat her this way." The words fell from her mouth before she could prevent them. Her heart began to race as it settled upon her what it was that she was agreeing to. "Because you're right. She *is* your daughter."

He froze, staring at her with his jaw slack, his expression becoming paler by the moment. "You're bluffing." Beatrice stared down at Prescott, her eyes blazing with the fires of a protective love that only a mother could know of. That was when it dawned on her exactly what it was that she was going to do.

"Good luck to you." She said in a casual tone. She couldn't help but relish the dumbstruck expression this elicited from her husband. She hoped to remember it for a very long time, because it was oh so satisfying to see. She then pivoted on her back foot and walked off, out of the gates of their farm, and down the country path.

It was quite dark, but Beatrice had memorized it, as she took this path many times a week. At this point, the eye that Prescott had punched was beginning to swell slightly and throb. Regardless, she knew she could not stop now, and opted to look up to the moon for the strength to finish her journey.

Relief washed over her when she spotted the lantern that hung from the door of the log cabin that she had been searching for. It was lit, just as it always was. Her pace picked up to a sprint, as she bolted across the lawn to the porch. She pounded on the door as hard as she could, hoping that the person who was put on door duty hadn't fallen asleep accidentally. As she waited, she stared into the face of the decorative carving of medusa that her friend May had created shortly after inheriting the cabin from her father. Beatrice's fears were instantly put at rest, as the front door flung open.

"Beatrice?! Oh my Lord, are you okay?" May's voice sounded like absolute heaven after what Beatrice had been through this evening. The concern in her friend's tone brought tears to Beatrice's eyes. May's proclamation had set off a raucous from within; as the other women climbed over one another to pry the door open wider.. Upon taking in Beatrice's appearance, the women exploded into a range of reactions. Some began dotting upon her, ushering her into the house and offering to get her something frozen to put over her eye.

Some began cursing Prescott's name, listing off the things they wished they could do to him in return. Some were quiet, simply staring at her with a knowing expression in their eyes.

Beatrice counted the women in the room. Including herself & May, there were eleven women present tonight. The highest number that they had in a few months.

Once they had finally gotten Beatrice seated, and her eye chilling, she told them about his drinking, their fight when she had caught him, the hatchet, the punch, all of it. When she had finally finished her tale, May reached over and placed a hand over Beatrice's, and asked her a difficult question.

"Where is Lilian?"

Tears welled up in Beatrice's eyes as she fought for the proper words to explain what she had done. "She is still at the house with him."

"How could you leave her with him?" May shouted, clutching her chest in panic. "He has a hatchet, Beatrice!"

"No, he doesn't." Beatrice shot back, reaching under her skirts and producing the very hatchet Prescott had threatened her with not an hour prior. "I snagged it as soon as I was free of him, and hid it. It was out of self preservation at the time, but it certainly worked in Lilian's favor."

"So what, then? You're going to just *leave your daughter* with him?" May shouted, her face quickly shading red.

"Of course I'm not leaving her with him! Who do you think I am?" Beatrice shot back, jumping up and putting her fists on her hips. "We're going back for her."

All of the ladies in the room looked at one another with some uncertainty. However, as Beatrice began to explain her plan to them, their hesitation shifted into determination.

The following morning, at the break of dawn, Prescott Walters was roused from his sleep by the sound of metal striking wood. Quite agitated by this, he flew from his bed. *This had something to do with Bea*, he just knew it. Oh, the beating he was going to give her for her little stunt in the pasture last night.

*What was she thinking? Abandoning them...*

Prescott paused mid step when he saw the head of his hatchet buried in his nice maple banister. "Beatrice!" He snarled, looking down the stairs to the lobby where Beatrice stood still in her dress, rumpled and stained from the previous night. Behind her stood ten other women, fire in their eyes, and a hatchet in each set of hands. The expressions on their faces dared him to threaten them.

"Ladies..." He began, trying to figure out where they had all gotten hatchet's from. "I'm sure there is some agreement that we can come to. There's no need to resort to..." His sentence trailed off as his eyes met May's.

His heart began to jackhammer in his chest. *Was this how he was going to die? At the hands of a group of hysterical women?*

At that moment, May was positive that she was about to murder Prescott.

Then, there was a knock at the door. Everyone in the room looked at one another, quite startled by the interruption and unsure how to proceed. Beatrice took one last glance at Prescott before she opened the door. The first thing Beatrice encountered was a giant black box, covered with a black velvet cloth.

"Hello! I am Harvey Smith. You arranged to have a family portrait about a year ago. You've finally made it off of the waiting list!" The young mustachioed man speiled, not once pausing to take in the atmosphere he'd entered into.

Beatrice burst out laughing, catching both he, and everyone else, completely off guard. While distracted by her bout of laughter, Prescott took this opportunity to make it out of the house alive. He shoved both Beatrice and Harvey on his way out, and he did not stop sprinting until long after he was out of sight.

"Mr. Smith." May began, looking to her peers for advice for how they were to explain the situation he had just walked in on.

"Please ladies, call me Harvey." He said, staring from Beatrice's eye, to the hatchets in their hands, a stern look upon his face. "And there is no need to explain anything to me. I can see just fine the situation I walked into." "Mama? What's going on?" A young voice chimed over the noise. Everyone turned to find Lilian standing at the top of the stairs, where her father had stood a moment prior.

"We're taking a group photo!" Harvey said in a chipper tone. "Care to join?" Lilian looked down at her nightgown and touched her unbrushed hair, and shook her head. "Just throw on a shawl and a bonnet." May directed her, a smile upon her face. Lilian didn't look entirely convinced, but did as she was told anyways.

“We can do this some other time if you’d like.” Harvey said, looking at Beatrice’s eye. At this point the swelling had subsided, but there was a light purple ring around it. She shook her head, a look of pride washing over her as she realized what she had just accomplished.

“That’s what makeup is for.” Beatrice said, a genuine smile crossing her face for the first time in a very long while. “I want to commemorate this day.” She looked about the room at all of the women who were there to support her. Some of them were not but her acquaintances before last night. “On this day, we overcame. Because that is what the women of the Adirondacks do.”