

## First Place – Personal Essay

### Broken Glass

By: Elisa Stanis

Broken glass isn't beautiful. It's terrifying. Heartbreaking. Foreboding.

It isn't the jagged, teeth-like edges of the clear refraction that unsettle me. Just like it isn't the scars cut deep into skin or tears on someone's face that fill me with a guilty type of panic. Why seeing an old man through the window of a building staring into space causes me to bite my lip in grief. It's not seeing those sorts of things that twists my heart. It's the stories behind them.

When I see broken glass patched with duct tape in the midst of a run-down neighborhood on my drive to school, a boy comes into my mind. A young man filled with so much anger and alcohol that he destroys the panes of clear at a local business. Maybe his friends are with him. Maybe they do this kind of thing all the time and there's no remorse whatsoever. Who knows; maybe the company deserved the retribution. Maybe he's been shown that taking anger out on objects is better than human beings. But is any policeman going to acknowledge that sort of initiative..? I avert my eyes. Don't want to think about how I could never relate to that situation.

Sometimes I look at my arms on the days I wear short sleeved shirts, and see reminiscent scars. But I don't think of me. I imagine someone else. Perhaps a girl I don't know. Maybe from school, even. A teenage girl that, despite growing up with everything needed to be successful and adored, feels worthless. Who grows ever-tired from switching back and forth between two households that don't seem to have time for her anymore. A brunette who feels tired of dealing with her father's prissy new wife and her mother's irresponsible boyfriend. An envied girl who goes to school with the cutest shoes and well-straightened hair but hides the fact that she's sickened at lugging a bookbag heavy with two night's worth of books; because she can't leave them at either house. Maybe though we share similar marks, the scars on our hearts are so different, that I could never say I understand her pain.

And everyone cries at some point or another. To be honest when I feel hot water streaming down my cheeks, stemming from emotion that is specific to only me, I'm not thinking of other people. But after, when I'm numb and wondering how many other people in the world have better reason to cry than I, I've often imagined a heavy-set woman sitting in an office cubicle. She no longer wears the ring given to her in years past, before her husband proved to be unfaithful. And despite the consuming pain of loneliness and unanswered questions, bills need to be paid and every day she finds herself in an ever-shrinking office room, numbly typing and avoiding mirrors so the question of if her looks drove him away doesn't infest her thoughts again. When I look in the mirror, or any reflective surface, I understand that feeling. But I don't have the same causes for it. I am filled with a sense of gratefulness, and also of caution.

Finally; on the occasion I happen to pass a nursing home building on my ride home; in my mom's minivan filled with her and my two brothers, who will always be with me, won't they? I am overwhelmed with the fear of being left alone. Loneliness is my biggest worry in life, but I have hardly a reason to fear it, as I've always and always had at least one friend or family member to support my sinking structure. The notion of how many people, some of whom I have met, spend their final days in an emotionless solitude, is heartbreaking to me. It feels me with regret. How many evenings have I

used in mindless self-indulgence and entertainment when there seem to be so many presentable options available to me?

These feelings of guilt can easily turn into self-pity and that is absolutely not what will be useful to anyone. I believe the point of living, encompasses embracing emotion and empathy for others, but is absolutely useless without proper action. Though I may not have the experiences of... Growing up feeling unsafe. Feeling divided between households. Being abandoned by someone sworn to spend eternity with you. Or wasting the last days of my life alone... I believe that every person's struggle is his own. We aren't meant to truly be them. Though every person on this planet bears a cross, it is the duty of those around them to help bear it. Not to lift it entirely forever, for they themselves have albatrosses and crosses to carry throughout life, but to support.

The broken glass and scars and tears are not meant to be romanticized.

They are not meant to be removed.

The striking enticement of life can be indeed found through pain, but an even greater beauty is manifested in the image of God seen on the faces of those who respect and upkeep those in need of care. In those people whose fragile, glossy, minds and bodies are so close to becoming broken glass.