2017 Silver Pen Writing Contest
"If Only I..."

Silver Pen Essay Award partners, Salt Lake County Aging & Adult Services, Salt Lake County Library Services, and Salt Lake Community College Community Writing Center celebrate the seniors who participated in the 2017 Silver Pen Essay Contest.

A Celebration Reception was held October 17, 2017 at the Midvale Senior Center where winners were announced and all entrants were honored.

All entries were by authors over 60 years in age, are original, unpublished, and created during 2017. These winning entries are published with permission of the respective Authors and any copyright belongs to them and Salt Lake County Aging & Adult Services solely. These essays may not be republished or repurposed without the authorization of the Author.

(2017 Winners and Judges)
2017 Winning Essays

1st Place: Darylene Merrill
2nd Place: Jim Kelley
3rd Place: Maureen E. Gale

2017 Winning Poems

1st Place: Rosemary Miner Fairbourn
2nd Place: Marillyn B. Johnson
3rd Place: Leann T. Campbell
First Place – Essay

THE RAINBOW
By Darylene Merrill

If only I could have this moment back again, the moment when I saw the wonder on my Mother’s face and the joy in her voice as we viewed the most beautiful rainbow we had ever seen. My Mother and I were returning home after traveling to the cancer treatment center where she was receiving radiation treatments. I know she was not feeling well and we had to drive about three hours over mountain passes and by a glacier lake to return home to our little town. It had been raining all day and the clouds had been covering the sun, but as we came around a bend in the road by the lake, the sun peaked through the clouds and right before us was the most incredible rainbow we had ever seen. We both gasped with wonder and excitement and at the same time we both exclaimed, “Look at that rainbow.”

The rainbow started on one side of the highway and ended on the other, like we were driving under a rainbow bridge. We felt like we could reach out and touch it. The colors were so vivid and bright we were dazzled by its beauty. I pulled the car to the side of the road and stopped because we were mesmerized by the magic. I thought I was dreaming except another car pulled over too and we all jumped out to take a picture. I thought that we could walk right into the rainbow. We laughed with pure joy like a couple of small children. We seemed to be there for a very long time just basking in the spectrum of light.

A very peaceful feeling enveloped us. And we joked that we should go find the pot of gold to see if it is really true. We got back into our car and as we drove, it seemed like the rainbow stayed with us and was following us. It eventually faded away from sight, but not from my memory. My mother passed away not long after this experience, but I will never forget her face or joyful voice. I came across the picture some years later and was reminded how precious the time is we have with our loved ones. I am grateful for the reminder of my Mama whenever I see a rainbow. Now I understand what is meant by the Pot of Gold.
Second Place – Essay

HONEYMOON SALAD OR MY BIG TOE
By Jim Kelley

It was so good to be home. I braced myself against the closed door. I don't know if it was for support, in case my knees buckled, or to prevent out there from forcing it's way in behind me.

“How did you like the pedicure?” my wife teased, “Let's see what color you got your toenails painted.” When she had offered to drive me to my appointment with the foot specialist, I'd told her it's wasn't necessary. “I'll probably just get a pedicure.”

When our eyes met, she changed from teasing girlfriend to loving wife. I hadn't considered how I was going to tell her. I didn't want to just blurt it out - but I did. “It's a diabetic abscess.”

She looked confused. “Diabetic? Didn't those tests say you were just borderline?”

“Anytime I go on a binge, the levels spike. It does permanent damage. He says I have to make some lifestyle adjustments. Either I adjust what I eat and control my diabetes or I'll have to adjust to life without my big toe. He even threatened to amputate my foot.”

“He didn't threaten you? Did he?” My wife was appalled.

“It sounded like it. He said he has to amputate a diabetic foot about once a week. If only I had paid attention to the warning signs. If only I hadn't been so stupid about what I ate. If only I...”

'S-S-S-H-H-H!!” she interrupted. “We are NOT going to lose your big toe! He is NOT going to amputate YOUR foot! We’ll have to make some adjustments. You can give up lime Cokes. We’ll have to cut back chocolate and Ice cream - and potato chips. Maybe give them up. We'll do what we have to do. We've done harder things before”

I felt better just having her hold me. It was good to hear her voice, though I felt like I had just received a scolding.

“Have you had lunch?” her tone softened. “How about a salad?”
I thought I saw mischief in her eyes as she pretended to be my waitress. “I recommend the honeymoon salad, sir.” It's an old joke between us. Honeymoon Salad is 'lettuce alone'.

“The Honeymoon sounds good.” I said, playing along...

“What dressing would you like that Honeymoon, sir?”

I raised an eyebrow and playfully checked her out. “I prefer my honeymoon undressed,” I grinned

She blushed - a pretty shade of pink. “Oh, you.” she giggled as she elbowed me in the ribs.

The last time I saw the foot doctor, he examined my toe - nodded and declared, “Perfect. Better than I expected. Now, watch what you eat”

Judging from the way Dr. Young looked at me I must have said it out loud. “I'll have more Honeymoon salads and keep my big toe.”
Third Place – Essay

IF I ONLY...COULD HAVE BEEN FEISTY
By Maureen E Gale

The title says it all, but you would have to see me, a woman fashioned long before female sports, diversity, and politically correct speech and thought patterns had become popular for it to really make sense.

Okay, before you ask, I’m 6’1” No, I don’t play basketball, except for fun, like everyone else. No, I’ve never modeled—unfortunately, height is not the only requirement, and have you really looked at my legs? Yes, both my parents were tall, and so are all my siblings; so in my world, I’m quite average—and you’re short. And, finally, I always resented being automatically cast as the “mother” in school productions, and I don’t want to play that role in your life either.

Those are just a few of the remarks I wish I’d had the nerve to cast back at insensitive people who assumed my only remarkable attribute as a “stately” woman was my height. But, alas, in my youth and even as an adult, I was always much less snarky in my replies because, frankly, a tall woman doesn’t get to be feisty, or “spirited,” or “spunky,” or “plucky.” Oh, no. That only works if you’re under 5’5” tall and can be considered “adorable” or “cute.”

I learned pretty quickly, once I’d reached my high-water mark, that any response such as the above pretty quickly labeled me “touchy”, “grouchy”, “puckish”, or “prickly”. Not only that, if I had any fervent opinions or ideas, I was deemed “bossy”, “aggressive”, “overbearing”, etc. You get the idea. In any given room of mixed company, when I walked in, especially in heels, there was a sudden subtle shift in demeanor. Most of the men became immediately resistant and defensive, the women self-confident and friendly. In college, I actually had a stranger sidle close, gazing up, up, up at my startled eyes and purr, “You make me feel so feminine.”

But, that was then. When being myself most mattered, but I learned not to make unnecessary waves or give anyone cause to resent or dismiss me, if possible. Now, I’m 70, have managed to make my mark and my family, retired, and don’t really much care what people think.

So, watch out world: Feisty is Fun!
First Place – Poetry

A SILVER HALO WORN SO WELL
By Rosemary Miner Fairbourn

My mind's eye travels to the early years
When as a child I watched her plait the strands
Of silver hair in triplicate, then tiers
Would form a halo 'round her head like bands
Of angel crowns. No time for curls or tint:
Eight babies, farm and garden knew her toil.
The ravages of war years forced her sprint
To high school rooms where grading burned coal oil.
Her love of travel, church and family ties
Spawned books and lectures, poems and thoughts galore.
Today, in still repose, her body lies.
But freed from mental prison, 'gain to soar;
Her spirit knows no bounds--still casts it's spell.
My angel mother's halo, worn so well!
Second Place – Poetry

AUTUMN ECLIPSE
By Marillyn B Johnson

What's past is prologue
The Tempest, Shakespeare

Take my hand, Sprite.
Guide me down your pathways. Show me each dawn with fresh eyes, the light and shadow of leaf-blaze: amber aspen, carmine maple and viridian poplar against the cloud-brushed sky.

My age absorbs starshine like the musky moon tinged ivory then henna, eclipsing into darkness. Like the two-faced moon ever-changing I am pulled by the tides of evil and goodness.

Who will illuminate the silver-simple purity within me when the eclipse is over?

Oh, Sprite, let us enjoy the phases of life in your beginning and my ending years.
Third Place – Poetry

FANFARE IS IN THE AIR
By LeAnn Campbell

Waving flags and motorcades
Adoration poured out in spades.
Interviews from men in news;
Hit the angles from all the crews.
Mother, father, brother too,
From their mouths the tales spew.
Put their son on a pedestal,
Deeds of glory since he was small,
Amidst the joy of all who's proud,
Hangs a painful, heavy cloud.
"Our son is dead. He gave his life
To defend our nation in lands of strife."
The crowds applaud a deed so fine,
They do not see the pain that's mine.
No fanfare for my son who's gone,
To others he's just a faceless "John".
He didn't use guns to do what's right;
Regardless, he was engaged in fight.
The demons he daily fought in his head,
Waged war with him from rising till bed.
He knew he was broken from choices he'd made,
But to burden others he had not caved.
For all the sons whose fanfare you sing
There are faceless ones who are also king,
For nobility in a fight we shun,
The war on drugs is a fight not done.
If only somewhere along the way,
I did something different to change this day.
Special Thanks

Event Committee
Susie Cates, Aging & Adult Services
Liesl Seborg, Library Services

Volunteer Judges
Florin Nielsen
Lee Alexander
Debbie Leasure

Facilities
Midvale Senior Center