closely the banks of the lake, a moose might be lurking in the muck eating the lush weeds and plants. A deer and fawn may also come down for a drink of the cool, refreshing water. The proud eagles swoop down among us, so graceful and acrobatic, looking for their breakfast. The fish jump at the flies that hover above the water, so we know they are there and will make for a delicious breakfast. The ambitious fisherman can enjoy freshly caught, lemon seasoned walleye for breakfast in this type of atmosphere. Even though not everyone likes fish, this appetizing opportunity can not be passed up.

Although Minnesota has almost 10,000 lakes, just the few hundred that make up the Boundary Waters Canoe Area make spending time along the lake front all worthwhile. Traveling through the endless lakes makes it an adventure in itself, especially when you do not have a map in hand. The peaceful, serene and tranquil surroundings are unbeatable by any beach strip in the Caribbean. You are so at one with nature that all concepts of time are soon forgotten.

NIGHTMARE SUMMER
D. Rachelle Turley

Exploratory
Wheeler High School, Wheeler, Indiana

I was sixteen years of age when my father decided it was time for me to spend some time with my great aunt. Reluctantly, I went along with his notion. After all, giving up one weekend of summer wasn’t going to kill me. Mom had packed my clothes for the trip. I didn’t understand until we started loading the car that it wasn’t just for the weekend, but for my entire summer vacation! “Oh no!” I cried. “My summer will be ruined! How much fun am I going to have living with an eighty-year-old woman?” This was an absolute nightmare!

My great uncle had just passed away, and my parents volunteered me to keep my great aunt company. To them, it was the perfect solution for all of us since I was dating a guy they totally disapproved of—Mike. His hair was longer than mine and just touched the top of his belt. You can imagine what my father thought of him since Dad served twenty-two years in the Navy. Mike and I were high school sweethearts. He treated
me like a queen, carrying my books for me, making sure I got to class, giving me gifts of Turquoise—my favorite jewelry to this day. I couldn’t understand why my parents didn’t like him. To me, he was absolutely perfect, the love of my life.

I cried all the way to Veedersburg, Indiana, but to no avail. Dad didn’t turn back. We just kept heading south. With every mile, my heart felt as though it were breaking. It was as though I would never see him again. Four hours later we came to a long winding driveway surrounded by trees, just next to an open field, out in the middle of no where. While driving down the long winding road, I began to notice all the different colored flowers that had been strategically placed on each side. They were all in groups of colors—first yellow—then red—then pink—and so on. The road was at least three quarters of a mile long and the flowers followed it all the way. Suddenly, I became curious about what kind of home she lived in. When we reached the end, there was a quaint looking cottage made of different shaped stones. It sat right in the middle of the forest. You couldn’t see the main road anymore.

Dad beeped the horn and out walked my great aunt. She stood tall at about five feet, five inches. Her shoulders were perfectly straight, her body was lean, and she smiled a welcoming warm smile as we got out of the car. Aunt Hazel’s eyes were the same as her name—hazel. Her hair was a beige blonde—not unlike the color of the field we’d passed on the way there. Her clothes smelled like the freshness of clean air, like she’d just taken them down from the line outside that was tied onto the two main trees by the front door.

She invited Dad in for a bite to eat before he headed back for home. When we walked in the front door, we were standing in the main room of the cottage. It had all polished, hard wood flooring that smelled like cedar. The furniture was simple, made of wood, with loose cushions that were a forest green plaid. There were all kinds of oil paintings hanging on the walls that my aunt had painted. The shelves were full of carved wooden animals my uncle had made. A small television stood on a stand about three feet away from the sofa. Directly behind it was an old fashioned wooden loom that practically took up the whole room. It sat in front of the double sliding glass door that led to a screened-in porch which overlooked a beautiful valley. You could see a stream at the bottom which kept the cows from crossing over. Immediately to the right of the front door was a medium-sized bedroom filled with antique wood furniture. On the bed was a handmade quilt of many colors and a white cotton nightgown with ruffles around the bottom of it. The kitchen was in the lower level. We followed her down a steep, creaking staircase of about twenty-five steps. When we got to the bottom of the steps, the floor was
inlaid with flat stone. The kitchen table of hand-carved wood sat right in front of a stone fireplace. The whole back wall was almost all window, allowing a harmonious view of the flowers in the hanging pots that lined the patio.

Dad ate lunch and my Aunt Hazel acted so happy to have some company. She said, "Isn't this just lovely? We're going to have so much fun!" All I could think of was Mike. "Yes!" I replied. Then Dad thanked her for everything and off he went.

I was totally miserable. We watched the sun go down together that evening while sitting inside the screened in porch. She made us a cup of hot chocolate and asked about the family. I kept staring out the window—preoccupied with thoughts of Mike. Finally, my aunt asked me what was on my mind, so I told her. Her reply was, "If he really loves you, he will be there when you get back. Your uncle waited for me to make up my mind for eight years." Then it was late and time for bed. I slept on a cot downstairs.

At five o'clock in the morning, my aunt came down to wake me. "Time to feed the cats!" she said.

"You're too young to be that tired. Come on. Get up!" said my Aunt, so I did. "Here's the milk. Take this outside while I get the saucers." She came outside with about twenty! Since I still hadn't seen any cats, I thought maybe she was just getting senile. This was going to be a long summer.

Out of respect, I started pouring the milk for her. Suddenly, a great big tom cat came up from the hill and started drinking. Then, three more came, and pretty soon the entire patio was engulfed with stray, scruffy cats. They came up from the valley—all different kinds, colors and sizes. There must have been at least fifty. I tried to count them, but there were too many. I had never seen anything like it. They were wild cats and wouldn't let me pet them. Aunt Hazel just said, "Aren't they lovely?"

Now it was about six o'clock when my aunt decided we should eat breakfast before our walk. All I wanted to do was go back to bed. She made us one egg each with two strips of bacon and a small glass of orange juice. It was just enough to feed a bird, I thought. I didn't ask for more because it would have been impolite. "Where are we walking to?" I asked. "We're going to get the mail." Well, that was a long walk to the end of the drive, and I couldn't help but wonder whether or not she'd be able to make a mile without having to rest in between. I did the dishes, and out the door we went.
“Aunt Hazel! Wait! Please slow down! I can’t keep up!” She just kept walking like she was out to break the world record for the fastest walker!

“We’ve got to get you in better shape,” she said. “What a shame that a sixteen-year-old girl can’t keep up with me.” I stopped complaining. Finally, we got to the mailbox. I was totally out of breath and couldn’t wait to get back so I could go to bed.

“No mail,” she mumbled. To think she nearly gave me a heart attack just to find out it was for nothing. That did it, now for sure I was going back to bed.

Then down the main road she went. “Aunt Hazel! Wait! The house is this way!” I couldn’t believe it. I ran after her thinking for sure she had Alzheimer’s Disease. “Aunt Hazel! Wait up!” She just kept walking. She walked right into the empty field. I thought for sure I couldn’t leave her out there alone. Finally, I caught up. “Isn’t this just lovely? I love this old path. Your uncle and I used to walk it together every morning.” Half way around the empty field, I begged to return home since my side was killing me. She agreed to walk slower. Besides, she wanted to show me things on the way there. I think with every step we took, she stopped to name a flower, or a tree, or a bird. She even knew the different types of butterflies.

“Your uncle used to take pictures of them. There’s one at the house that was his favorite. Maybe you’d like to paint it. I’ve been meaning to, but my eyes aren’t what they used to be.”

“But, Aunt Hazel, I don’t know how to paint.”

“Don’t worry. It’ll be just lovely. We’ll go into town and get you a canvas.”

All I kept thinking was I’m not walking to town. Finally, we got back to the house. Aunt Hazel said, “We’ll take the car.” Oh no! I thought—she can’t see to paint. How is she going to see to drive? We’re going to crash—I just know it! She told me to get her glasses.

“Can I call Mom first?” I asked. After all, I figured it might be the last time she’ll get to hear from me. “Mom? Aunt Hazel’s taking me to town to get a canvas, so I can paint a butterfly.” My plan was to let Mom tell her I couldn’t go.
“That’s nice, Dear. Tell your aunt I said, hello, and I love her.”

“But, Mom, you don’t understand. She’s driving”

“Isn’t that wonderful? I hope I’m still driving when I reach her age.” With that, she hung up the phone. All I kept thinking was—I’m doomed. Slowly, I got into the car. I had hoped she didn’t drive as fast as she walked. The car was an old Ford, but it was in mint condition—spotless. To my surprise, she drove totally opposite to the way she walked. We snailied down the road so that I thought we would never get there! She enjoyed the scenery along the way. We did get to town, but I’m not sure where it began and where it ended—it was so small.

On the way to the store, she decided to stop and see some old friends of hers. Great! Just what I needed—to be with a group of senior citizens. We pulled up to a little white house. Aunt Hazel told me to wait in the car while she went to see if her friends were home. I thought—where else would they be? “They must be in the studio,” my aunt said. “We can stop there on the way back from the art store.”

At the studio, much to my surprise, was an array of beautiful pottery. It was all handmade with little designs painted on every piece. “This is stoneware. They must be at the potter’s wheel. I’ll let them know we’re here.”

Then she called for them, and the couple came out. They were both in wheelchair, incapable of doing what I had complained about all morning—walking. I tried not to stare.

“It’s okay honey! We won’t bite! Polio got me and my wife during the war. It didn’t get our hands though—thank God,” the elderly gentleman said. All the way home I couldn’t stop thinking about those poor people. And yet, they were so happy.

Throughout the summer, my aunt and I came to know one another very well. She was a no-nonsense kind of girl! At least that was the way she put it to me. I taught her how to wear makeup and she taught me about the important things in life—things we usually take for granted like love, family, nature, and our elderly. My aunt was a very proud, independent lady. She and my uncle had built this house themselves after the war. Every stone that was laid, they placed it together—all by hand. They lived there until they died. Whenever I think of what kind of relationship I would like to have in my marriage—I think of them. They were the best of friends—sharing every moment as if it were their last. I
never heard either of them say anything negative about anything. They were always too busy enjoying the good things in life. Maybe to some it would sound as if it were a dream world. Well, my aunt always said, "We are the creators of our worlds."

Mike and I didn’t see one another until the following summer, but I had changed. It just wasn’t the same. I had discovered I had so much more to learn before I wanted to settle down. I think now it was just as well since he became a preacher.

My aunt passed away several years ago, but she will always live in my heart forever. All the things she taught me about—you couldn’t buy for any amount of money. There is something to be said for having peace in your life—real peace. Maybe, it’s just, "taking a moment to make a memory with a loved one." We finished that painting together. It still hangs on my parents’ living room wall. Every time I look at it, I remember the summer of 1976.

Aunt Hazel will always be a special part of my growing up. Right before she passed away, I was able to tell her how much that summer meant to me and how much she was loved by me. We stood in her bedroom holding hands and I watched a tear fall from her cheek. I was thirty-two years of age by then. It never occurred to me at the time that it would be the last time I would see her—at least, in this life time. My nightmare summer turned out to be one of my most treasured memories. It was—"just lovely."

MY MOM, SO PRECIOUS
Linda Matera
Social Work
Gage Park High School, Chicago, Illinois

I have been blessed to have my mother in my life for thirty-six years. She has been the focal point of love, and her support has been endless. Her greatest achievement in life has been fulfilling the role of both mother and father. It will be difficult to express in words the love and admiration I feel for her. My mother has truly been a gift. so very precious.