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By Alex S., kindergarten, Cherry Run Elementary



ear Readers: This week, the Fairfax Station/Clifton/Lorton Connection turns over its pages to the youth and students. We asked principals and teachers from area schools to encourage students to contribute their words, pictures and photos for our annual Children's Issue.

The response as always was enormous. While we were unable to publish every piece we received, we did our best to put together a paper with a fair sampling of the submitted stories, poems, drawings, paintings, photographs and other works of art.

We appreciate the extra effort made by school staff to gather the materials during their busy time leading up to the holidays. We'd also like to encourage both schools and parents to mark their 2015 calendars for early December, the deadline for submissions for next year's Children's Connection.

Please keep us in mind as your children continue to create spectacular works of art and inspiring pieces of writing in the coming year.

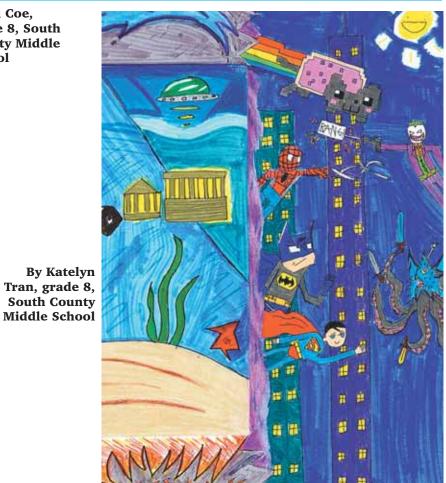
The children's issue is only a part of our year-round commitment to cover education and our local schools. As always, the Connection welcomes letters to the editor, story ideas, calendar listings and notices of local events from our readers. Photos and other submissions about special events at schools are especially welcome for our weekly school pages.

Our preferred method for material is email, which should be sent to south@connectionnewspapers.com, but you can reach us by mail at 1606 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 or call 703-778-9414 with any questions.

EDITOR KEMAL KURSPAHIC



Jamil Coe, grade 8, South **County Middle** School





By Jaime O., grade 1, Union Mill Elementary



Trading Cards, watercolor by Julia Patrick, grade 11, West Springfield **High School**

'How I Left...'

Grade 8, Irving Middle School

was in love once. In a way, I guess I still am. I've never told this story of my life before, but I hope you'll let me tell you. I know, dear reader, it's hard to believe I've ever been in love considering I've only been on this Earth for 14 years, but it happened... and its love for me is over. I think the worst part of our relationship ending was that it was completely and utterly out of my control. Now that I think about it, that's probably why I am the way I am now: the type of person that wants to be in charge of every aspect of her life and believes she can do anything and everything by herself in due time. I assume, by now, you're wondering what happened and what I'm talking about. Allow me to explain...

My mother is employed by the United States' Air Force and has been for the last 10 years of her life. Because of her occupation, I am forced to move every four to five years of my life- depending on the government's demands. That

I suppose I should tell you what I was in love with now but be aware, reader, it's odd and its abnormality is the reason this story has never been told. I'm the type of person who, although I hate to admit it, grows attached to things and people all-too-quickly. That's what happened here. I fell in love with a place, a state, the first part of the world I've ever been able to call home... You might know it as Southern California. I lived there from the ages of nine until the day after my 13th birthday, but even four years wasn't long enough.

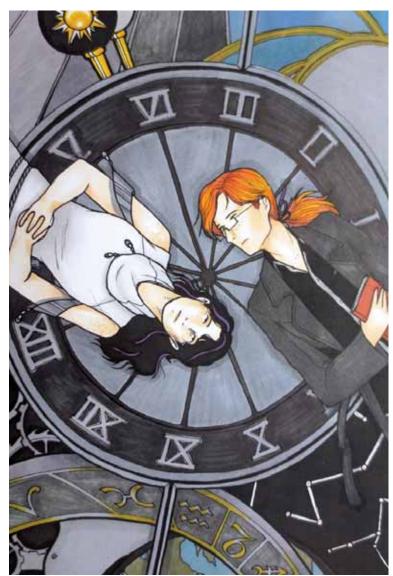
There, I truly grew up as a girl, as a Christian, and as a human being; learning things I've never would've known about the world, its people, and myself. When it was all taken away, my mind crumpled under the weight of sadness and anger.

In the morning, I was awoken by my mother in the cramped space of a hotel room. As my brain was introduced to the new day, my mind flooded with thoughts containing the events of the next 24 hours; events that I've been dreadis what controlled my life; that is ing for the past four years. I slowly

dragged each of my limbs out of the hotel's sorry excuse for a comfortable bed and saw members of my family rushing around the room, trying to get everything in order before we left the state once and for all.

I covered myself in fuzzy boots, a shirt whose sleeves guarded my palms, and jeans whose skinniness is as though I starved their fabric. During this time, I tried to think of anything besides what was about to happen... but I couldn't. It was as though my thoughts were a river and my departure was a rock: the water crashes and clatters against the stone but it won't move. However, one day, the rock will erode away and the river will flow through in the form of tears.

When everything was finally in order, we packed our never ending amounts of luggage into our rented car and went in the direction of one of the most well known airports in America: LAX. There's something about driving past a beach, a palm tree, and an In N' Out Burger for the last time that really affects a person's emotions, but the scariest part about the ex SEE LIFE, PAGE 5



Self in Time, digital design by Jody Briggs, grade 11, West **Springfield High School**

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.And Life Goes On

perience was that I wasn't sad anymore... I was angry. At the time, I rarely ever got angry about anything, so feeling it so intensely was incredibly unexpected. I was mad that I had to leave everyone I knew and loved. I was mad because I had no power to change the outcome of my circumstances. And I was mad because I knew that I would have to start my life all over again.

By the time we arrived at the airport, the sun was perched in the sky watching planes rise and fall from the air underneath it. About two-thirds of our luggage was checked in but it still seemed as though we had three times as much as everyone around us. The farther we walked into the airport, the stronger the scent of brewed coffee beans and toasted bread filled my nostrils. I knew, by then, that a Starbucks had to be nearby and realized how hungry I actually was.

I left my family seated in the semi-comfortable leather seats that filled the numerous airport gates and moved one foot in front of the other towards the world faby a long line and a cashier alltoo-hyper for that time of morning was everything I didn't want at the moment... but got it all anyway. When I finally received my warm bagel and cool frappuccino, I greeted my family with silence, proceeding to sit down beside them. My ears were engulfed by the faint sound of the conversations around me while my tastebuds were introduced to the tart cream cheese and crispy layer of a toasted bagel.

"Okay folks. We are going to start boarding Flight 459 out of Los Angeles to Washington Dulles Airport."

Fear of the unknown washed over me as I became surrounded by the walls of the passageway. I didn't know what my world would be like in Washington D.C., but I did know that adaptation was a gift I was blessed with. Then, I hoped it would kick into play with my life's new "adventure."

With the plane in flight and the saltiness of processed peanuts on my tongue, I knew that I couldn't change what was happening and any chance I had of doing so was

mous coffee shop. Being greeted gone. If you can't change the circumstances in your life, change your attitude towards them was a saying I heard many times through my years yet excused it from applying to my life. Now, I had no choice but to turn those words into actions...

> Hello again, reader. I'd like to thank you for reading through a small excerpt of my life and, in return, give you a somewhat epilogue pertaining to what happened when I actually got there. As of now, I've been living in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area for over a year and my perspective on things have definitely altered from before. I've met amazing people here that, I hope, I'll know for the rest of my life; I've seen history by walking down a street that I never would've known existed unless my feet were planted on; and I've discovered that I have a profound interest in knowledge and learning new things beyond what I can be taught in a classroom. Nevertheless, my friend, I still love California and I miss it everyday, but life is too short to not enjoy the life you were given.



By Sydney Cordoba, acrylic painting, grade 11, West **Springfield High School**

Miracle

Light, white snow. Sparkles that show. A man in a big, red suit, climbs on roofs with big, black boots. Kids love him, and await his gifts of dolls, toys, and candies. The season of giving, for love that never ends. A time to rejoice. A time to reunite. For a miracle that lifts spirits up. The season of living, perhaps the best miracle of all.

Yurie Choe. Grade 10. WEST SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

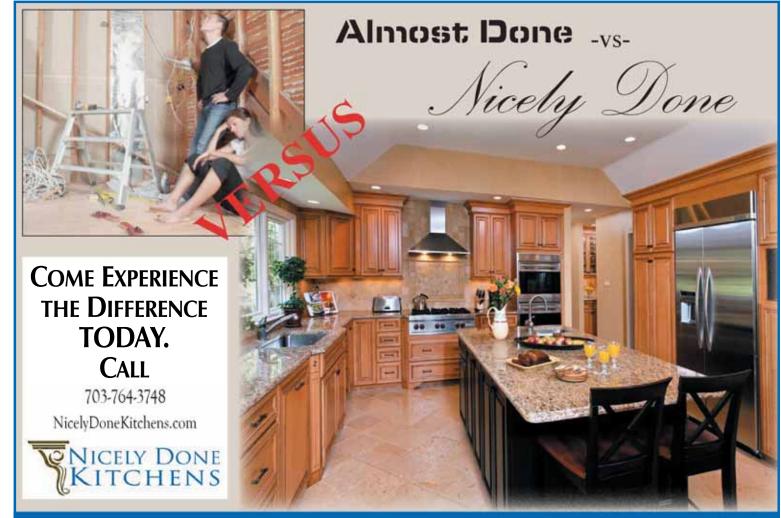
lost (adj): 1. unable to find the way. 2. not appreciated or understood. 3. no longer owned or known

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By Angie A., grade 4, Union Mill Elementary



By Cara P., kindergarten, Union Mill Elementary



By Sabrina R., Maya B., Martin R., Adam M., grade 5, Union Mill Elementary



By Luke E, grade 2, Union Mill Elementary



By Natalia M., grade 5, Union Mill Elementary



By Peter D., grade 5, Union Mill Elementary



By Aurora H., grade 2, Union Mill Elementary



By Kritika B., grade 3, Union Mill Elementary



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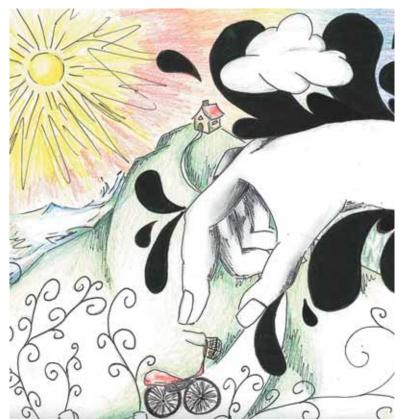
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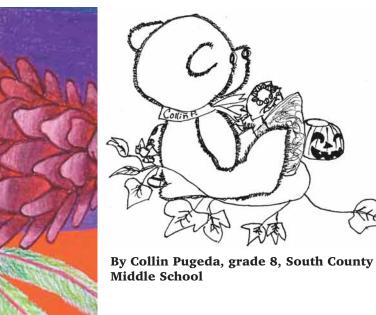
design/build | additions | kitchens | baths | basements | outdoor spaces



By Jennifer Cai, grade 7, South County Middle School



By Maryanna Valencia, grade 7, South County Middle





By Chloe Sy, grade 8, South County Middle School

By Andrea Domingo, grade 8, South County Middle School By Yasmin Abuwi, grade 8, South County Middle School



I Am Sky

By Sarah Kleppinger GRADE 8, SOUTH COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL,

I wonder what kind of world sends so many souls up to me each

I hear nothing but the wisps of the wind I see everything but I know nothing

I want to spend a day among the people, not peering down I am sky

I pretend that I can offer so much more

I feel no pain except the sorrow with no place to go

I touch no one, while anyone touches me I worry never because there is always tomorrow

I cry often, but so many are happy for it

I am sky I understand the silence of the clear days

I say nothing, but my silence is loud

I dream of a warm morning where I have a heart

I try to not dwell on each day, for I have millions of days left I am sky



By Sonja Todd, grade 7, South County Middle School









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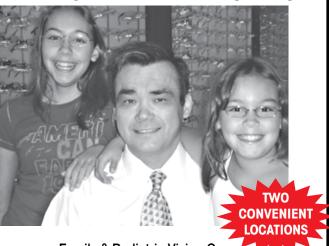
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CHILDREN'S CONNECTION



By Andrew Savino, of Fairfax Station, grade 10, Howard Gardner School.

To My Family

By Marsha Pierce Fairfax Station

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house Dexter, the dog, is sleeping and so is my spouse. The stockings are hung by the chimney with care, Waiting for my family to finally appear. The house is silent, no laughter about, Missing my two boys, the roughhouse, the shout. They are grown now and out on their own, I get an occasional visit, a talk on the phone. It is life's plan, the way it should be, We know our children will leave-don't you see. When our little birds fly North, East, South or West, They call this event the "Empty Nest." I count the minutes and wait every day, Finally they are home, but not long do they stay. Caitlin and Dan, Gretchen and Ry, It's bittersweet when you say goodbye. Remember, any time, day or night-wherever you are, My love, support and respect are never far. Love You, MOM





By Kathleen Madigan, grade 7, Washington Irving Middle School

Dreams

If you hold on to your dreams, it'll help you see the future ahead, where destiny awaits.

Dreams are like life. They will show you the light. Where there is light there shall also be darkness. Where there are winners there shall also be losers. If your dream follows the light help the lost ones find their way. While we are present in this era of warring states, dreams may help you find a way.

 Azad Dosky, grade 8, Washington Irving Middle School

The Gift

They thought I was crazy, They said it could never be done. If love's what it takes, I'll prove them all wrong.

She gave me the time to learn what I need.

The knowledge she gives and the words that she speaks.

Are more important than a gift that's made out of food or came from a tree.

As long as it's made with love it's special to me. For the present I give her she'll always love me, Because she's my mother and we're family.

 T.J. Brantley, grade 8, Washington Irving Middle School



By Sam Robitaille, grade 7, Washington Irving Middle School

Life

What is life? Is it having it all, everything so perfect, or nothing at all? Is life eternal happiness? Living each day without regret? Or could it be, that life is about seeing beauty, in every living thing. Quite possibly, life is the thing, everything you worship, love, and believe.

 Aldan Callahan, grade 8, Washington Irving Middle School

EKDX5

Patiently waiting Finally, it has worked Sweet relief, And then suddenly, Black. All that I see is black. My heart skips a beat. With a flip of a switch, A snap of the fingers, And in a moments instance, Nothing. Isolation. Loneliness. I crawl under my bedsheets, Hoping to sleep the black away. I hate it when my wifi goes out.

— WILLIAM DIPERT, GRADE 8, WASHINGTON IRVING MIDDLE SCHOOL

'The House at the End of the Street'

y friends dared me to walk into an old, abandoned house at the end of the street. I took the dare and knocked on the door. No one answered, but it wasn't locked, so I decided to open the door... and it was completely dark except for a faint light at the top of the stairs. The air is cold and damp.

There was a slight whistling from the wind blowing through a small hole in the window. I naturally started walking up the stairs towards the light. The creaking of the stairs was accompanied by my heart beating harder than it ever had. As I got to the top of the stairs, there was enough light for me to finally grasp my surroundings. I was standing in the upstairs hallway and on every available wall, there were old picture frames hanging. All of the pictures were different but had the same two people in them. A

beautiful woman, about 25 years old, and a hand-some man around the same age. I walked into the room with the light and saw that it was a bedside lamp that was on. I walked over to the nightstand and saw that there were letters laying in a stack. I looked through them and noticed they were all dated from 1942-1950. I started reading them when suddenly something from under the bed grabbed my ankle and pulled my feet out from under me. I had just enough time to gasp before I was pulled completely under the bed. Something was put over my face and I felt cold, icy hands holding my arms down. As I struggled for air, I heard a quiet whisper. "Why are you here?" the voice hissed.

 Rachel Gates, grade 8, Irving Middle School



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I Am From

I am from the smell of chocolate chip cookies wafting up the stairs,

From the artsy odor of paint, splattered on the craft table

I am from the sweet, manly fragrance of Dad's cologne for date night with Mom

And the woodsy, welcoming smell of my home

I am from the big green house on RyanLynn Drive,

And the old shaky swing set in the enormous backyard.

I am from splashing through the creek in the woods behind the neighborhood,

And standing on the log, telling stories at our "Super-Secret Sitting Spot"

I am from racing across the beach with my 15 cousins as the waves crash into our legs

From games of Sharks and Minnows as we swim in the summer rain

I am from decorating the little tree with candy..... just for the kids

And skipping through the house chanting about trees and hyper pigs

I am from the memory box, labeled with my name, hidden on Shailey's closet shelf,

And the dozens of photos in the scrapbooks in "Mere- Mere's Kitchen"

I am from "Never do your homework in the kitchen!" and

"Leave your brother alone!"

I am from hiking up mountains to the top of the water falls

And eating gooey brownies, sitting on a fallen tree, legs dangling over the gurgling river

I am from rolling around on the carpet in the rumble room, braided with a thousand different colors,

From Great- Grandpa's fancy rocking chair. The one that has gleaming wood and golden threads,

The one I'm not supposed to touch I am from spending Wednesday afternoons at church,

Singing and playing and praising the Lord

From eating sloppy barbeque sandwiches in the room with the tall cross,

Suspended in the air by invisible cords I am from Italy and Ireland

From hot gnocchi's drenched in tomato sauce on Thanksgiving,

And tender corned beef, on each St. Patrick's Day

I am from tree climbing and fort building,

And playing soccer in the grass that sparkles with dew, at the early morning games

I am from siblings and parents and cousins and family

I am from the things I love And the memories that swirl in my heart

— Taegan Pratt,

grade 7, Robinson Secondary School

Where are you from?

Teacher Adrienne Forte's creative writing class at Robinson Secondary School wrote poems about family: where they came from, their roots, what makes them and completes them. These poems will warm up your heart.

I am from the forests and grass fields of Clifton.

I am from the vast extended family that comes with the Eyob name,

A bloodline that stretches from the Eritrean nobility to Amharan Generals,

Born to a doctor and a businessman I am from the enticing scents of a hardy Ethiopian breakfast,

From the powerful smell of fresh pasta for lunch,

I am from the gooey gold and wonderful fragrance of lasagna for dinner

I am from the electronic mice and the slick black keyboards,

I am from the computer games of the 21st century,

Steam games, DotA2, League of Legends galore!

Surfing the internet, not the cold blue ocean waves

I am from a brave grandfather, who walked 564.3 miles for a small glimmer of hope,

Uncertain of his destiny, he worked and worked and worked,

A peasant farmer to a general and I couldn't be any prouder

I am from a brave grandmother, who thwarted off sexism and racism,

A young black African banker working in America,

Oh what a stir she caused,

I am from her determination; I am from her thick skin

I am from the hard work of my bloodline,

I am from the ideas of the 21st century, I am from the games of the internet, I am from both everything and nothing

— YAPHET EYOB, GRADE 8, ROBINSON SECONDARY SCHOOL

I am from a red shuttered house and pink vibrant bushes

From the colorful, rusty playground and refreshing lemonade stands

I'm from the house with grass growing as tall as a tree

The paighborhood kids playing till it.

The neighborhood kids playing till it gets dark

From the early morning church services
To matching Jamaican dresses with my

I am from the loud weird cousins and funny grandparents

From the home where music is always playing

I am from "wakey, wakeys" in the morning

And "night nights," just as the sun goes

I am from the Disney sippy cups And scents of fresh warm chicken From the long bike rides in the spring And hot chocolate in the winter



By Eunsoo Gang, grade 4, Mosby Woods Elementary

The fashion shows every Friday
To the family stories every Sunday
I am from the "yellos"
To the "shut your clappers"
From the strawberry syrup
And the Barbie doll skits
I am from my Webkins collection
A Winnie the Pooh themed room
From Mrs. Dianna's daycare

I am from the exotic paintings on the wall

The wooden piano downstairs

I am from the dad who never is without a camera

Snapping pictures of anything insight I am from, "love your neighbor as yourself"

From the mom who is always smiling

The sister who loves books
To apple juice
And bologna sandwiches
Underneath my bed
And in the cabinet above the sink
Are piles on piles of past days

Each one with a specific memory

Spilling out pictures from "the olden

— Zahra Edwards, grade 8, Robinson Secondary School

I am from the pine trees that sway day and night

From a short, curly haired, Peruvian lady

To the tall El Salvadorian man I am from the fresh, bright green grass, with heavy dew

From the window with barking all day long

I am from the balcony where BBQ has been a tradition

From the houses in Trujillo and Lima, Peru.

To the little white house in Burke I am from the rusty, old purple bicycle

in the garage

From the Beyoncé playing in my brother's room to the pitter patter of three legs.

From the squawking of a green bird To the Cardinal singing its song. I am from the boiling pot on the stove

to the cake baking in the oven.

I am from the "Go clean your room!"

I am from "Angyounghaseyo" to "Como estas?" to "I love you"

I am from branches that can't be broken,

An important family tree.

— Annie Jimenez, grade 7. Robinson Secondary School

I come from pine trees and firewood, From the West Coast to the East.

I come from the California orange tree in my grandmother's yard,

To the beautiful wildflowers of Tennessee.

"Never throw the first punch, but always throw the last",

And "Stand up for yourself and others"-says my mother every day,

She survived breast cancer; pink ribbons surround her,

As do purple flames of independence. From my father, I am an artist. Creativity runs through my veins, From pencils to paints, From music to words.

I come from "YOLO!" And "Never be afraid!" To always have courage,

To always be brave.

I grew up with "You Are My Sunshine",

And "My Darling Clementine", Then on to "Hey There Delilah", All music, that's what I come from, Music, Art, and Love.

— ABBY DEATON, GRADE 7. ROBINSON SECONDARY SCHOOL

Reflections

2015

In the upcoming year, I will wait for baseball season, summer, and the SOLs. Since I love baseball, I will be looking forward to Little League as well as the Major League baseball season. Of course, I would love to watch Major League games. In summer, I will go to the beach, spend time in the pool, go to a baseball game or two, and play with friends. I know that the SOLs will be hard, so I should study, study, and take practice tests. In conclusion, I have a fun year ahead of me!

> PHILIP MARGULIES, GRADE 3, Mosby Woods Elementary

The Best Gift

The best gift I've ever received is my family. They are the nicest people I've ever met! I love them so much. I say I love them every day! They are nice, loving, caring, kind, and good friends. They are worth more than money. They feed me. They take care of me. They tuck me in at night. In my religion we believe that our God gives us everything. Our families are gifts from our God. My family has five people in it. My mom, dad, sister, brother, and me. I love my family. I hope you love yours, too!

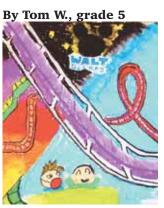
- Zoe Ethington, GRADE 3, Mosby Woods Elementary

My Favorite Toy

My favorite toy is a bear. I got him for Christmas from my dad. My dog sometimes bites my bear. My bear is humongous. My bear is white. I love my teddy bear because my dad and mom gave me it. My bear's name is Beary. My big sisters have a bear too. I sleep with him every night.

My bear wears a shirt. I made his shirt. My bear never wears another shirt. My bear's favorite food is pretzels. I got my bear when I was 4 years old. My bear does not have teeth.

> BECKY STUART. GRADE 2, Hunt Valley Elementary







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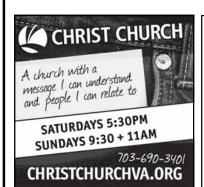
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- Ralph Waldo

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21 Announcements 21 Announcements

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21 Announcements 21 Announcements



Dr.Donald Anthony Fleger, age 85, passed into eternal rest at Atlantic General Hospital on Sunday, December 14, 2014. Born November 21, 1929, in Cleveland, Ohio, he was the son of the late Anthony A. and Mary Nemec Fleger. He is survived by his beloved wife of 59 years Mary

K. Fleger and children, Kathleen Mary Tracy and her husband Patrick of Pittsburgh, PA, Dwayne Edward Fleger and his wife Marti of Reston, VA and Stephen Anthony Fleger and his wife Melanie of Herndon, VA. There are nine grandchildren, Patrick Tracy, Christopher Tracy, Timothy Tracy, Cassie Jackson, Kirstie Fleger, Kalla Fleger, Katherine Fleger, Andrew Fleger, Jordan Fleger, and four great-grandchildren, Madison Fleger, Lilliane Fleger, Andrew

Fleger, Jr., and Evelyn Fleger

His family moved to Washington, DC in 1940 when his father was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. During that tenure, Don attended Capital Page School where he served two years as a Page in the US House. He attended University of VA and was a 1955 graduate of the Georgetown University School of Dentistry. He then served as a dentist in the US Army for two years as a Captain while stationed at Fort Meade, MD. Following his discharge, he moved his family to Virginia and opened a dental practice After 30 years he retired to Ocean Pines in 1988. There he served as an active member of the Environmental Control

Donald was an affectionate husband and caring father who adored his grandchildren and great grandchildren. In his spare time he enjoyed boating, wood working, model building and watching the Washington Redskins. Above all, he will be remembered for his love of family, optimistic outlook and tenacious drive to never give up

Committee for approximately 20 years

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held on Friday, December 19, 2014 at 11:00 AM at St. John Neumann Catholic Church Friends may call on Wednesday, December 17, from 3:00 until 6:00 PM at the Burbage Funeral Home in Berlin. Prayers will be said beginning 4:00 PM by Rev. William Porter. A

donation in his memory may be made to: St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital 262 Danny Thomas Place, Memphis TN, 38105. Letters of condolence may be sent via www.burbagefuneralhome.com

CHILDREN'S CONNECTION



By Dave, grade 3

Desire

BY EMILY S., grade 7

The aching desires of the few, include the necessities for me and you, but the vast majority want the new, they want the luxury and they lust, because they must,

they need the future in the past, they need products that must last, for as long as they want them to. What happened to this world, what must release the greed, make a creed,

and find the greatness in giving and not wanting,

loving not taunting,

and fulfill the deserved desires of peace, nourishment, and fair treatment for others, for the fathers, children, brothers, sisters, and mothers.



By Luke, grade 7



By Trudy, grade 8

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