

Delena Steimer

Phipps Committee

Fairchild Challenge 2

15 November 2021

Austrocyllindropuntia subulata f. cristata

It was two years ago, now, that I was gifted my most monstrous looking and dearest companion. My dad and my youngest brother brought it home half smothered in a plastic shopping bag and granted it to me. The tag declared it a Crested Eve's Needle. It was structured in thick, flat panels facing upward, with sprouting segment of a density that likened them more to arms than leaves. The total effect was that of a clam reaching for the stars. I immediately pointed out that it looked like an alien lifeform, to my own delight and the delight of my family. They said that's why they thought I'd like it.

Soon enough, the thing had pride of place on its own little side table, moved to the window for proper sunlight, and a watering schedule that was more regular than my own. Soon, the thing was a dear partner and friend to me. Soon, it had a name.

My cactus's structure being so irregular to me of plantlife had me thinking of it more as an animal. He became a pet and a confidant. I settled on calling him Sawyer, after brief deliberation, and Sawyer didn't complain.

He collected things; all manner of water-worn glass, beads, and keepsakes piled up around him. A shrine to his health and good fortune grew on his tiny end table. I found myself seeing more beautiful things to collect for it. I found myself seeing more things as beautiful in my everyday search. I purchased a mysterious green plant food for him that didn't seem to do

much, but it didn't hurt any. Any candles I was gifted sat next to him. Any snowglobes or knick knacks found a home there.

I truly loved Sawyer, and that was his undoing. One evening long ago, I settled in to read for a while. I was at my desk, I lit a candle on the table, and I had been comfortably enjoying myself for sometime when I was called away. Upon my return, tragedy struck.

Fire. All the precious things gathered at the table were up in flames. Every candle was burnt to the wax, snowglobes were blackened, and in the center was Sawyer, burning in his unscathed plastic pot a beautiful final absurd display.

When the fire was put out, left only was a pot of scalded ashes. He lived only a short while, but in that time he burned brightly.



Mark Harris with art by Kate Malley

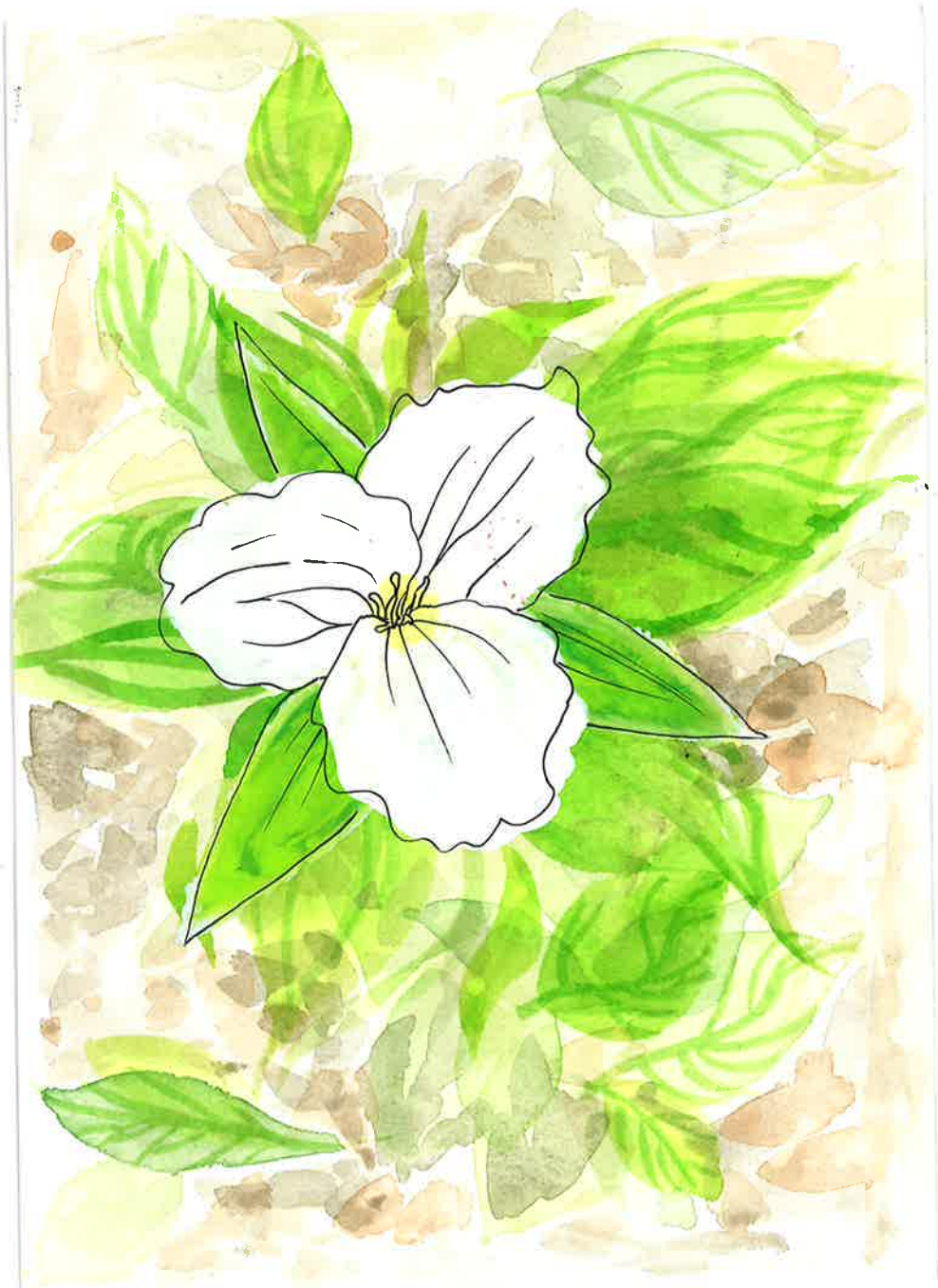
Penn-Trafford High School

The cold air sapped at my lungs, almost freezing them. In a juxtaposition of itself, I exerted hot emissions into the world from my chest that felt scarred by the harshness of the frigid temperatures. And, yet, I continued to climb further up the trail. With the unsettling rush of altering my reality, March 2020 shifted from my busy life of being somewhere, doing something to being home, doing nothing. I finally decided to take up hiking at the trails near my home. Initially, they seemed foreign, harboring paths that I could not master; their narrow ways taunted me; their tendency to seep in an impressive amount of rainwater almost always made me slide through the mud; their unreasonably exponential slope upward pushed me physically. All the while, though, the trails and their characteristics became a second home for me - and a friend. Within the trails, flowers began to grow during the spring and my daily treks permitted me to document the process.

The haven of the woods cultivated life for many plants; however, the white trillium had a particular exigence on me - a demand so great that I was not permitted to disregard it daily. The particular plant only grew along the Black Cohosh trail, which is a subtle upward trend that culminates with a steep L-shaped hill that I swiftly run up to avoid feeling the discomfort of what I have to do. White trillium grew without much of a notice at first. When I first encountered the plant, it was merely stem and leaves, airing more on a distasteful weed than its final form of grace.

As my treks became more frequent, the plant grew along with me, both physically and emotionally. With my newfound love for the trails growing, the flowers began to bud. With my loss in weight and strengthening of calves, the flowers began to bloom. White trillium was a cheerleader, pushing me to keep going. It invited my scientific inquisition to return day after day and observe its growth. In a way, this plant symbolized my growth. As my desire for knowledge expanded and my self-care grew, the plant expanded from one of insignificance to a beautiful harbinger of spring.

The promise of encountering white trillium and growing again inspires me to return whenever I get a chance to be with my friend. It could be argued that plants are unaware of what is occurring and have no emotions, but I disagree. These plants wanted to see me better myself daily, always improving as I did the same. Without their support and the beauty they provided, I would have stopped walking the first time I was taken out by a mud slide. However, I persisted because the encouraging aura of the plants wanted me to persevere. Wholeheartedly, I would not be the same today if I never went out onto the trails and was motivated by the white trillium.



Rebecca Schiavone

Shaler Area High School

Fairchild Challenge 2: Plant Love Stories

From the front, my grandparents' house stood grand, white, and pristine, but from the back, you were transported to a secret garden oasis. Looking at the front, you would never know that my grandma had the most beautiful garden. But, when you rounded the corner, you could see the apple trees, pear trees, daisies, roses, peonies, and every other flower and plant stretched around her whole backyard. Many birthdays, Easters, and other occasions were spent touring the garden with her. She showed me the new plants she was growing and the ones that had been changed since I was last there. We watched the fruit grow, smelled the flowers, and played with the gnomes in the garden. Even though she had what felt like an immeasurable amount of flowers in her garden, my favorite was the small patch of snapdragons right by the back door. They were the only flowers we could interact with. She showed me how to make them talk by squeezing the center of them. We had conversations through the motions of the flowers and even pretended they were real fire breathing dragons. She taught me how if they were cared for properly, they would sprout up again the next season, a combination of the colors that already laid there. So, I watched the seasons change. The pink, red, white, and yellow snapdragons that were once there the year before now turned into ones with pink and yellow combined with red and white ones mixed behind. Each time I came back, they would appear as a different color, and every time, she would ask me if I wanted to make them talk with her.

When my grandma passed away a few years later, each grandchild was asked to bring some flowers of their choosing for her to be buried with. My cousins all picked roses, carnations, or sunflowers while I chose snapdragons. I stood at the burial with my pink and yellow colored snapdragons while we held the service, and when it was time, I set them down on her grave.

Now, I plant snapdragons with my mom in our own garden. They've since become my favorite flower and every time I see them, I make them talk and remember the best conversations we had through them.



Caty Clark
Shaler Area High School
Fairchild Challenge #2

Purple Flower

Recital Day,
4 bouquets to put in water
1 small purple flower in a yellow pot

2 weeks later,
4 vases of death; the hope sits brown
and wilting in the vase
1 small purple flower in a yellow pot; will
it grow?

6 months later,
Leaves in a small yellow pot, the petals
fell off for the winter, but I still water it,
uncertain

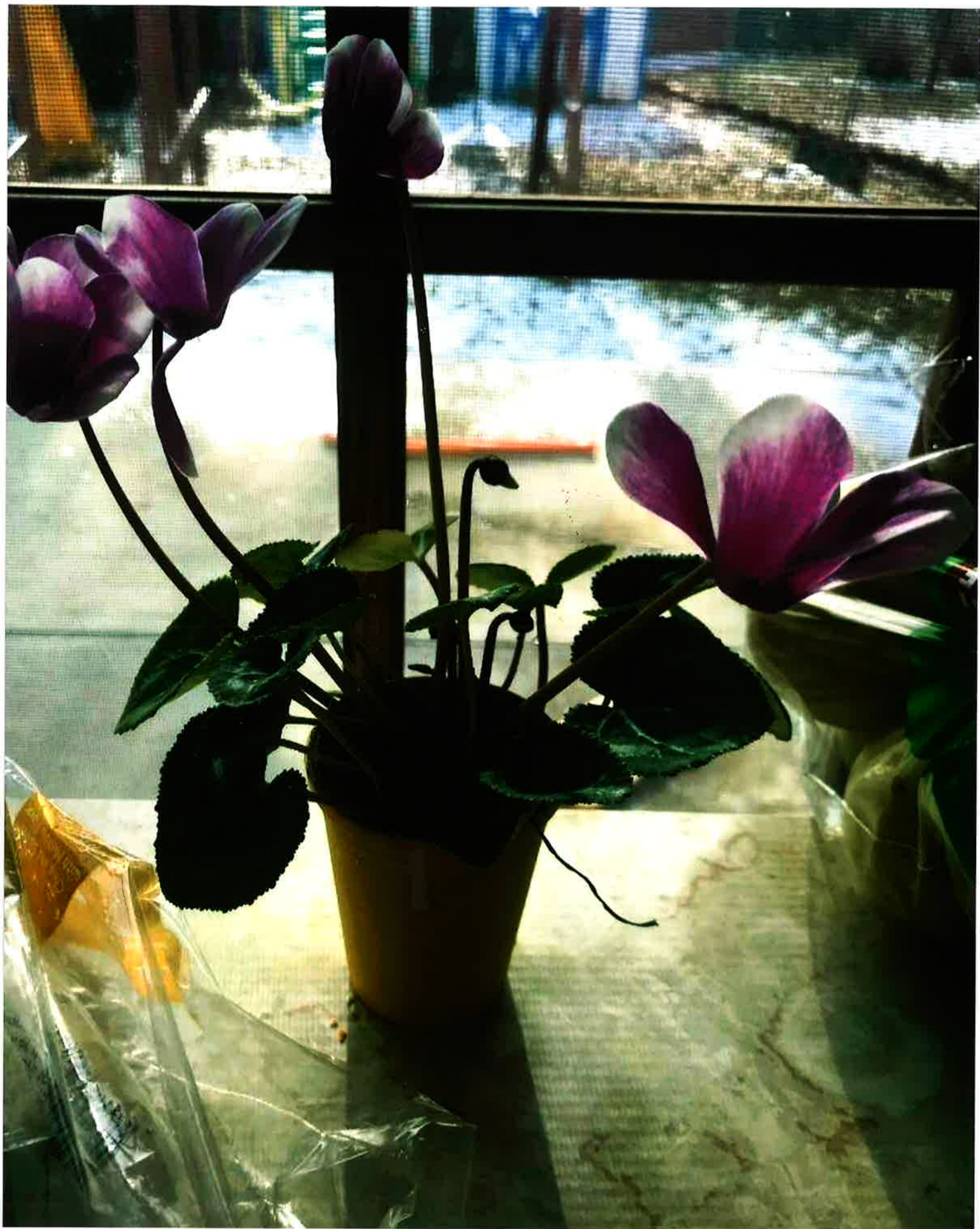
9 months later,
Leaves and one bud in a small yellow
pot, persistence brought it back, hope
lives on

1 year later,
Recital day again, the small yellow pot is
filled with purple flowers. I'm reminded
of the hope from one year ago
More bouquets that die in a few weeks

18 months later,
Yellow pot with leaves again, but I know
now, keep watering it, more certain

21 months later,
Small yellow pot overflowing with
flowers, the hope spills out over the
edges, it cannot be contained
Overflowing flowers moved to a big
green pot

2 years later,
Recital day- again again
Big green pot with lots of purple flowers,
hope, and certainty



Begonias and Memories

The bright sun
The soft dirt
This is why my heart hurts
It was so fun
No more to come
Why must it end this spurt?

Since I could walk
I was in the garden
Since I could talk
I was working hard in
The only place I felt safe
Which was my grandma's garden

We could plant all night
And plant all day
No matter the weather
We were there to stay
Until all the plants
Were in their place
And I had dirt all over my face

Begonias and memories
Are what comes to mind
And when flowers are talked about
These memories are not hard to find

My grandma has a green thumb
And she tried to teach me
Under the sun
She wanted to show me to plant
Every time she had the chance
Now I only wish for
One last time to plant

My grandma made such an impact
On my love for plants
That's why it will always be Begonias that come to mind

By: Abby Guiste



My Raspberry Bush

My plant love story is about my raspberry bush I have at home. My family got it a few years ago to plant in our front yard. My grandma had one and hers kept growing and having hundreds of raspberries during the summer so we thought it would be nice to have one too. Since we planted it, it has bloomed every year and has spread across part of our front yard. Every year we get more and more raspberries from it and have even ended up with big bowls we freeze so they don't go bad. It is amazing how fast the bush grew once my dad planted it. Every spring when they bloom they start growing faster and faster. Sometimes when the weather is nice enough I will leave and go somewhere for the day and by the time I get home new ones are already ripe.

I personally think any plants that are home grown instead of store-bought taste so much better! My favorite memories of our raspberry bush are during the summer. I would wake up early and start making oatmeal. Then, while the water was boiling I would go outside and pick a big bowl of raspberries. Then, after the oats were done cooking I would mix the raspberries in and it was the best combination. The raspberries were so good I stopped putting sugar in my oatmeal because they made it taste perfect. It was also so much fun when I would play outside with my friends and I could just run up to the bush for a snack while we were playing. It is always such an exciting surprise in the spring when we start seeing the raspberries grow. They can get so ripe that they fall right off the bush so you have to pick them at the right time when they are the sweetest. This year my dad planted some more seeds so hopefully next year the bushes will spread even more. They are sweet and slightly bitter so they taste like candy.

I really love my raspberry bush so I thought it would be the perfect plant for a love story. If you like raspberries I would highly suggest getting a bush of your own. I have so many great memories of my raspberry bush and if you got one you would probably too. They are an amazing plant and I am so grateful that I have one.



- Analise L ♡

Ace of Heart
By Frankie Stamerra

West Mifflin Area High School

Gazing at this enormous creation;

Fearful to climb this formation

The pink buds I wanted to reach;

Dad patient to teach

When I was six

As the time went by, I conjured the branches;

Confident in climbing I took those chances

Touching those little buds so high

When I was nine

The tree began to be my comfort;

I would go there when I was in discomfort

How green ruffles would grow on the bark;

How when you picked the buds it would never leave a mark

When I was twelve

The places where my hands and feet used to find;

Are no longer defined

I still feel comfort because through all these years;

That Ace of Hearts Red Bud has kept me in endear

Now I am fifteen

Ace of Heart
By Frankie Stamerra

West Mifflin Area High School



John Dickinson
November Fairchild Challenge -

We have a plant; it is large in size
If size was a competition, it would have first prize

Ficus elastica a scientist may call it
That's a bit too formal I must admit

My family just calls it a rubber tree
It is quite a bit older than me

My Grandfather had it 30 years ago
It has had that long to grow

30 years may sound crazy but it's true
He got it as a gift, when it was brand-new

It's in its 5th pot
In 30 years that's not a lot

We drag it outside when the weather is hot
Then drag it back in when the weather is not

After being brought in this winter season
We noticed ants everywhere and found the reason

The ants had hitched a ride
When we brought the plant inside

When the ants were first found
Mom had a doughnut, it was round

The pastry had a bit of a crunch
Looking inside there wasn't just one but a whole bunch

Tiny ants were crawling
This set my mom squalling

She ran right to the store
Those Ants had started a war

The groundwork had been laid
She purchased 20 cans of Raid

She was about to elevate the tension
But hadn't heard of the Geneva Convention

John Dickinson



William Palko

11/16/21

Biology 1 Pds. 7-8

November Fairchild Challenge

Ignorance is Bliss

The simple things are what make the experience bolder,
The season was now unfortunately colder.
Summer's last ditch effort to show signs of prosperity,
These attempts only prove mother nature's charity.
Her true beauty shines a brightness on a journeying soul,
Only to be known as an earthly jewel.
The warm eery shouts of better days to come,
Which will inevitably go.
This mysterious flower fills me with a certain zest,
It establishes a newfound quest.
The thirst for more experiences and nature,
Unlocks a new taste and flavor.
Everyone around me skips my newfound love,
It flies in my head like a beautiful white dove.
The playful perfume sparks a flash in the dark.
It ques back to distant memories,
At times it's so long gone it feels like centuries.
The blue creates an unknown,
This flower's true essence is truly shown.
It lures me into an extra moment away from my walk,
So it seems to talk.
I shall not ponder on this,
Knowing only that ignorance is bliss.



Greg Zagrocki

Challenge 2: Art and Writing

The DogWood

The dogwood tree,
Oh how its shaped my life for me,
Bringing smiles and good times
Its presence over the yard was so divine,
The center of childhood games,
Running around the yard on summer days,
Using its shade to block the light,
As those summer days were oh so bright,

The dogwood also cared for many birds,
As they came and went, their chirps could be heard,
Under its cover their offspring would thrive,
Where they could be nurtured and come alive,

Its leaves could be used as food for all,
As its branches went so high and were so tall,
Far away the tree may seem bare,
But as one grows closer the insects start to stare,
As young caterpillars begin to roam,
Soon all types of butterflies will call it home,

The dogwood tree can nurture all kinds,
Whether it is humans or animals the tree does not mind.

