

Freshman  
winner

### A Servant's Heart

Miwanee that was my name until I came to Ft. Sumner. There I became a number to the soldiers, just another mouth to feed, another body to watch, this is my story. I lived the majority of my life in the Guadalupe Mountains, a wonderful place, filled with lush green grass, trees higher than the sky, and rivers flowing in every direction. My family was born there, my sons, daughters, nieces, and nephews. All of my family was born there, but none of us would die there, among our ancestors, in the soil we tilled. None of us would die there.

One day there was a great storm on the horizon. We thought nothing of it until the faces of many men, dressed in uniforms came into view. The soldiers came, and they brought the storm with them. A dry, hot wind blew in my face and as the lightning flashed in their eyes. I saw their intentions and my fate. I had heard the rumors of Ft. Sumner and I hoped that I wouldn't live to see the day my family was taken to that dreadful place. Now, however, I am living there myself.

The trek to Ft. Sumner was long and cold, as it was the dead of winter when we left. We traveled in a large company and many of our people died, but my family stayed strong until we reached the fort. It was the spring of 1864 when I saw my first glimpse of our new life. The grounds were already filled with Navajo and other Apache tribes. There was nowhere to go and we were put straight to work.

My sons, nephews, brothers, and husband were forced to work on the fort. Moving heavy logs and plastering thick adobe to them. My daughters, nieces, and sisters were forced to walk for miles upon miles to find firewood for the fort and split it. Then to gather up straw and water for the adobe and mix it by hand. I was placed near a plot of yucca plants. Being as old as I was, I was told to watch my families' children and weave ropes for the fort out of the yucca strands. We worked from dawn till dusk.

Even after we arrived we had no time to build a shelter. The nights were still cold, but the days were scorching, and every single one of us was plagued with fatigue. Soon I feared death would take us all in its grasp. Slowly I felt myself dwindling on the edge of death, especially as summer approached. The heat was worse than that at home. Finally, the fort was nearly built and as more Native Americans arrived we found some time to build our shelter.

My family soon needed rope, but everything I made went straight to the fort. After a few weeks, I noticed that the soldiers stopped checking in on me. They must have had their hands full with the numerous Native Americans coming to the fort, so I hatched a plan. I would fill the quota required by the army, but make more to help my family and friends with their houses for winter. I did this for weeks on end by filling a secret compartment in my basket full of my ropes. Not only did our houses become more stable, but we knew that it would keep us warm when winter came.

I knew my family would be safe and comfortable, even when the soldiers found out. It was a cool, fall evening when the soldiers confronted me at my weaving rock. I knew something was wrong when they told me to get up and come with them. I sent the children back home and walked with the soldiers. As we approached a clear area, I was told to kneel. I knew the deeds I had done could be punished with death. The sound of a gunshot echoed in my head as I fell to

the ground. I knew my family would miss me, but I did not regret my decision. I was free of this horrid place and hoped that one day my family would leave there, but until then I knew that they would be safe. I knew that the rope I weaved would hold their houses together. I served my purpose to my family and friends and I know they will help each other when times of trouble come. I served my purpose and paid my life for it, but my heart is now free.

Sophomore  
Winner

## **The Never Ending Fight, In Which We Lost**

My old home was amazing. I was perfectly content and happy there and I was blessed to have been surrounded by all of the people that I loved. I fit in with the others very well and I did not have any worries outside of my responsibilities for the family. My village was absolutely breath-taking. However, there had been rumors spreading amongst everyone that there was soon going to be spontaneous invasions like there had recently been in the other areas around us. I would have never believed that my son and I would be a part of the thousands of victims. A few hours later, I discovered that I was indeed very wrong.

I still remember like it had happened yesterday. I was laying down with my son very calmly as he was sleeping, and a few moments had passed when I heard it — a very faint scream in the distance which startled us both. I tried to comfort my son and close my eyes until it passed, when I heard even more of the shrieks growing louder and louder. I felt a huge explosion and then I realized that everybody here was in a state of panic, and I had to take a few moments to process everything that was occurring around me. It felt like a nightmare that I was sure never would have come true for us. Our home was collapsing on us and tears started to run down my cheeks as I knew that we were going to have to evacuate and leave everything that we had worked so hard for behind to be destroyed.

As I held my son tight and watched everything rapidly shatter around me, my swollen eyes were forced to notice the hundreds of soldiers marching heavily down our pathways and forcing people out of their dwellings with smirks and a look of malice written across their faces.



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Smoke started to rise up in the distance as they set fire to my tribe's homes. When my neighbors tried to fight to protect themselves and all of their labor, they were killed instantaneously. To this day, I simply cannot explain exactly which sends shivers down my spine more — hearing the screams of all the people you care about or the feeling right after the screams are abruptly taken away with the sound of a lifeless body hitting the dusty ground.

I did not try to put myself in the middle of the battles nor run away, my goal was to hide and wait for this nightmare to end. Of course all that I had seen so far was already branded into my memories, but I wanted this to stop. If there was one thing that I knew for sure; if I was terrified beyond belief, what was running through my seven-year-old son's mind? He was holding my hand as we quietly stepped through the remnants of our house and crops. I found a good temporary hiding place under a piece of metal which used to help enclose what cattle we had once had. My son and I crouched underneath the metal and I took a deep breath as the scorching sun was finally hidden by a source of shade. Although, before I could exhale, I was interrupted by someone that I was not aware was sitting behind us, clearing their throat.

Startled, I grabbed a large stick as a weapon and turned around and saw someone who I would not expect to see. It was a soldier, dressed in the same wool clothing as the others who were destroying our livelihood. However, he did not threaten us and just gave us the sign to be quiet. He told us that he was going to help us. We followed him to a small shack behind the soldiers barracks used only for a storage, and we stayed there for many days and nights and no one ever noticed us. That is, until the only thing I had left to care about, my son, who started to

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

become gravely ill. Over the course of these many weeks, my instinct told me that he was dying.

Not only that, but the fact that the soldier had not come to feed us in a few days was also making it worse.

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Come to find out, the man who helped us was carrying a disease and he had died days ago. If I wanted us to survive, I would have to reveal our cover and tell that it was a soldier, who should have been against us, that had motivated us to go this far. I felt such a pity when I realized that I did not even know his name. I mourned the loss and frantically scrambled through my mind figuring out a plan on what I was supposed to do now, and my son fell asleep right in my arms. Only this time, I knew that he was going to be asleep forever.

Junior  
winner

### False Hope

Everyone said it was because of the change and the move. Everyone said it was because of the work. Some even said it was because of the child. But I know the real reason.

Our family survived the long trek from our home to this desolate land. My husband, our three daughters, and their families walked the harsh miles to our new home. My oldest daughter was expecting her first child when we arrived. They placed her on a tiring, insignificant, ongoing job: washing and repairing the soldiers clothing. This didn't settle well with her husband. One of the most laborious jobs given to an expecting woman. A couple of lashes to his back made him think twice about speaking up for his people. Nevertheless, my daughter was ecstatic about the child. She spent long hours into the night weaving the unborn child blankets and clothing from the burlap sacks. She was the closet of the three daughters to us, her parents; the other girls were always concerned with their own children or finding husbands. She loved her father dearly; they laughed and talked deep into the night and she received the blessing from her father those many years ago.

Winters and summers came and left on the reservation and life seemed to become drearier day by day. Food became scarce, cramped spaces were inevitable, and the stench of unwashed hides and people hung over the land. My daughter returned to our makeshift home every day; hands raw and red from hours upon hours of washing and stitching. We all kept faith and hoped that soon we would be allowed freedom, and that my new grandson would be able to travel home with us.

During a particular winter, my eldest became unable to work because we were expecting her child any day now. Harsh cold winds blew through the holes of our teepee during late nights and the snow and ice was nearly unbearable. One day, it became too much for my husband to

bear, as he always gave his blanket to my daughter for her and the unborn baby to stay warm. On a freezing, cloudy morning, my husband died. We buried him without my daughter knowing, and returned to the teepee to tell her the dreaded news. She cried and screamed for her dead father and everything that was wrong with this new world we were living in. Late that night, accompanied with a fever and coughing, she gave birth to her baby boy. Oh, how he looked like his grandfather. We all cried tears of joy for this new hope in our dark situation.

The next morning, however, we woke to her unconscious and breathing raggedly. Her fever had returned and when she woke, she was delirious and moaning for her father. Her forehead glistened with sweat and her coughing sounded worse as the blizzard raged on outside. We knew then that she could not be healed by any remedy or herb from our culture. So I approached the blue-coated white men asking only for medicine for my sick daughter. I explained her situation and our rising concern over her life. The medicine man in charge looked at me with pity filled eyes and handed me a small covered bowl of red liquid. I returned to the teepee, hopes high for this strange, advanced medicine.

As the child grew over the next few months, his mother became sicker and sicker. I returned to the fort to retrieve more red medicine from the white men. She drank it twice every day, the sickness only becoming worse. Her son grew a shock of black hair and started to crawl around the teepee while his mother laid coughing, sneezing, and groaning in bed. His father would return from a long day of hunting and pick the boy up and swing him around, making both of them laugh. He'd then sit by her bed from when he returned to when he left in the early hours of daylight. We tried to save as much food and water for her as we could, but there was only so much to sustain us all. I prayed to my god to bring the sickness upon me instead of my daughter. But all we could do was feed her the red medicine and hope for her healing.

One spring morning, my daughter weakly called for her husband who happened to be home for the day. He rushed in and held her hand and smoothed her hair back as they exchanged quiet words. Afterwards, he shuffled out of the teepee, face wet, and his hand covering his mouth.



She called for me. As I looked into those blue sparrow eyes, I knew she was about to pass into another world. I promised to be strong for her and raise her child as she would. I didn't weep, for death was not a consequence she deserved. She asked for the baby boy. As she lay there, taking her last breaths, she held my wrinkled hand and the baby boy's tender, tiny hand. She gazed into her son's eyes that resembled his father's and the nose that looked like hers, and left this world as a cool, spring breeze drifted in.

They did this to her. We held our hope and faith in false things, such as the white men's medicine. The more they gave her, the sicker she became. They killed my beautiful daughter, a faithful wife, a loving mother. They took her from me. My culture was raised to always have hope, but there is no hope on this reservation.

Senior  
Winner

### Frozen in Time

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As the biting wind cuts straight through my thick wool coat, I can only imagine how the Natives must feel being scarcely clothed in this unforgiving weather. My fingers are numb as I snap yet another picture. This one of a shivering mother crying at the loss of her infant child lying in the dust in front of her, frozen, because she had nothing with which to keep it warm. Another victim of Mother Nature. Guilt nauseates me. I was spoiled in my small hometown in Sweden, compared to these poor people. I will never again take for granted my soft and pampered life.

The only way for me to capture their true pain and misery is to look straight into their eyes; I have not yet found the courage to do so though. Instead, I turn away from the broken-hearted mother, towards the sound of a strangled cry and the cold crack of a whip as it tears through flesh. I force my numbed fingers to hold steady as I snap another picture; freezing the moment in time right before the whip connects with a young Native boy's bony, already bleeding back. His hands are tied to a post, tears wetting the dust beneath him as he glances back towards the unrelenting soldier. It startles me when I realize that the soldier, as stern as his face may seem, has a single tear running down his face. Whether it is from remorse or the bitter cold is anyone's guess.

I've been here less than a week, and even I can tell that this brings no one any sense of satisfaction. I turn away from the boy at the whipping post, lying there taking ragged breaths, his bones now more prominent than before. I begin making my way around the makeshift shelters towards the outskirts of the "village". I watch as a young girl plays with a small leather doll in the dust just outside of her shelter that is her new home. She has not yet noticed me, so I quietly stand there, watching, observing, listening. As I listen, I begin to notice a soft sound drifting

towards me; it's coming from the child. At first, I think she is humming and it baffles me. I slowly raise my camera, hoping to capture this single, untarnished moment of happiness.

She must sense me, for as soon as I begin to press my finger down to take the picture, she turns and looks directly into the camera. I realize, then, that she was not humming, but instead quietly crying to herself. I let the camera slowly fall from my face and release my frozen grip from around it as it rests on the strap from around my neck. She keeps staring at me with tears slipping down her face, all the while still crying to herself. It's almost as if she's staring straight through me. The haunted look chills me to my core. I can't take it anymore. Before I know what I'm doing, I, too, begin to cry, as I reach for the small girl and wrap her in my arms. I bury my face into her soft, cold, fragile hair, trying to calm her and quiet her tears. Eventually, we both calm down and we sit in a peaceful silence. It is the most joyful and at peace that I have been since arriving. I carefully move my camera into position and take a picture of us sitting in the dust. Neither of us are smiling, but we are not crying either.

Dusk is beginning to fall. As the sun dips lower on the horizon, the temperature begins to plummet. I gently move the child off of my lap and take her to the entrance of her shelter. Before I leave her, I unzip my wool coat and drape it over her. She huddles down into it and wraps it firmly around her tiny body. I bend down and give her a brief hug before heading back to the barracks. I walk past many families huddling around small fires, their breath puffing out in front of them. The only things left for them to burn are hardened animal droppings. I quickly take a picture before hurrying on. I notice a vacant look in many of their eyes.

Suddenly, the sharp report of a gunshot shatters the silent serenity of the evening. I begin sprinting towards the sound of the gunshot, the cold air burning my lungs. As I round the corner of the barracks, I come to a skidding halt. I hurriedly snap a picture of the dead man lying in the

light spilling from an open doorway and the soldier still holding the gun, before running to kneel beside the body. Just beyond the man's outstretched fingers lies a small loaf of bread. I turn to the soldier:

"Must you have done that?"

"He was stealing," the soldier replied coldly.

"They have less to eat than you!" I accused.

"It is not my problem," he replied indifferently, before turning and marching back through the open doorway and shutting the door against the cold.