



2024 WETLANDS WRITING CONTEST

WINNING SUBMISSIONS

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The Big Catch

By Eva Smith

One day me and my Mom went fishing. We went to get ready and my mom picked out an outfit. My moms outfit was a brown coat with a king cake icing stain on it from when we had mardi gras from last year. Her pants were black with little specks of white paint from when we were painting my dog's house. I picked out a shirt that had the words "GOODVIBES" on it. I picked out some pants with tie-dye on it. We headed to the boat and loaded up the traps and hooks with bait. We headed out in the boat to the swamp. We found our sweet spot and stopped there. I saw something behind me and thought it was an alligator, but it was my dog! He came up on the boat with his floppy ears with his bone in his mouth. We said "how in the World did he get out here?" After that thought we just let him come with us. While Mom was throwing the hooks out and setting up the traps, I looked around me and saw a magnolia with little delicate petals, I saw a cypress tree with a brown trunk and green leaves, then I saw an Eastern Brown Pelican, It had a yellow head with big, bold, wings and had a big neck for swallowing fish. Mom said she got the traps ready, so we started to fish. We sat for a few 10 minutes then my Mom said she felt something on her hook. We waited for 5 more minutes and she said the bite came back. The quark twitched and moved side to side. Finally, it went under water. My mom reeled and pulled it as hard as she could. We were afraid that the line was going to snap, but then the hook came out of the water! On the hook was a big catfish! It was like a gray blackish color with eyes sized as a penny. It also had whiskers. There was one whisker on one side and another on the other side. Its tail was up and down like a sharks. When we got it in the net, my dog looked at it and tilted his head to the right. I could tell it looked weird to him. When we got the catfish in the ice chests, my dog started barking at something. I turned around to find that my hook was under water! I reeled and reeled so much that my mom had to help me. The hook finally came out of the water and there was a big white perch about three feet big. Its scales were shining in the sun. Its back fin was up and it looked like it had spikes coming out of it. Its tail was also up and down like the other catfish my mom caught. My dog barked and barked at it, but then he finally stopped after we got it in the ice chest with the catfish. We verily fit it with the catfish. After that my mom said we should go ahead and head back before it's dark, so we paddled down

the swamp and while we were going down I saw some alligators. They were far away, though, thankfully. When we got back to the house, my dad was already making dinner. He said we were going to have fried catfish, fried shrimp, red beans and rice, and honey cornbread. Those were all my favorite foods. When we sat down at the table, me and my mom told him all of the things we saw and caught. He said me and you should go to a wetland tomorrow and we could go fishing there. I agreed. My dad said if you want to go tomorrow you are going to have to go to bed now. After he said that, I finished up supper. Then, I went to sleep. I had sweet dreams and went to sleep for the new day to come. The next day came and me and my dad got ready. We both put fishing gear on that was camouflage. After that my dad got everything together and we set off to a wetland. When we got there I saw two egrets flying over me. They were so white and beautiful. We put out our fishing poles with worms and hoped we would catch at least one thing. We waited for about 10 minutes, then I saw something oval looking around my hook, but I saw it for only a moment. Then, It was 5 minutes later and all of the sudden my hook was gone! My line was running and made a loud sound. I started to pull and it came closer and closer. This time I didn't need my parents' help for some reason. I thought it was probably a baby fish, but then the hook came up and it was a snapping turtle! It was about a half foot long. It had a spiky shell and it had a mouth that looked like it could crush bones. My dad said we would have to let it go because my dad said it was too small for cooking and he didn't know how to cook them anyway, neither did my mom. My dad gently got the snapping turtle off. We let him in the water and he swam away calmly. On my dad's line we waited about 15 minutes for him but he didn't get any bites, so my dad just reeled his line in. When he reeled it in, we set it in the boat and started to head back to home. When we got home we told my mom all of what we saw and told her what we caught. After that, we were thinking of what our next adventure should be.

The End!

Mommy Camp
By Vail Gremillion

Today's Mommy Camp!

Chapter 1

Today was mommy camp! If you're wondering what mommy camp is I'm gonna tell you. Mommy camp is when your mom takes you to this fun place and she does not tell you! I can't wait for what she has planned today!

A Day in the Swamp

Chapter 2

I was so excited! When we got there my mom said it was an alligator tour ride! I could not wait because we got to feed the alligators marshmallows. Do you know how much I love marshmallows? Well, I do a LOT. While my mom was checking in I saw a Magnolia, a Bald Cypress, and a Brown Pelican. Turns out the Brown Pelican's name is Jimmy. One of the workers said he flies around every once in a while. I didn't know there was this much cool stuff by a swamp!

Getting on the Boat

Chapter 3

I couldn't wait to get on the boat because I wanted to see everything. When we got on we took a seat and our tour

guide introduced himself. His name was Bryon. Once we were on he said, "keep your hands and feet in the boat at all times." Then we went off. He started talking about how we're gonna come up on some alligators. Once we were by the alligators it was time.

Feeding the Alligators

Chapter 4

When we got to the alligators it was time. It was time to feed the alligators! I was so excited to feed them. Bryon handed out 2 marshmallows to everyone. He said make sure to keep your hands in the boat because they will bite your hand off! Wow, alligators are strong! Well, with no hesitation I threw one in. Then, Chomp! Right into an alligator's mouth. Chomp! Chomp! Chomp! Everybody started throwing theirs in.

Bye Bye Swamp

Chapter 5

After the alligators ate all the marshmallows we headed back to the dock. When we got to the dock we gave the tour guide a 25\$ tip because let's face it he was a good tour guide. Then, we headed to the car. Once we were in the car we headed home. Bye bye swamp. THE END

Encounters in the swamp

By Huntley Joffrion

Chapter 1

One day I was fishing in the swamp with my dad. I was a little uneasy because I had never been in the swamp before and I thought it was a little sketchy. Anyways, we were casting the rod and instead of a fish we pulled up a baby alligator and I was really nervous because I don't really don't really like alligators and I can not believe that my dad thought I was ok with it. I freaked out . My dad was mad because he said if you scream or be loud then all the fish would go away. But, I didn't understand how the fish would go away from a loud sound. Two hours passed by and I got really bored. But then, I kept hearing the sounds I heard before. It was like a hissing sound coming from the bank. I looked over to see what it was and it was a huge momma alligator. I had to cover my mouth to try not to scream. I thought, " It's going to come next to the boat I just know it." The next thing you know, that big momma alligator came to the boat and it was right next to me. I told my dad to turn around and he told me to stay calm and I tried as hard I could to stay calm but it was not easy.

Chapter 2

I finally had to squeal a little bit and the alligator went away. I was so relieved. My dad asked me if I wanted to fish and I said yes because I love fishing and that's a fact. I really did not want to reel in an alligator like my dad. So, I cast the rod. A few minutes passed by and I got a bite. I could tell it was a really big fish because it was making the boat move. My dad had to help me reel the fish in because it was so big and he thought I would get pulled overboard and that I couldn't handle it. He was right. When I was reeling the fish up I saw it, my dad told me that that meant it was close to the surface.

Finally, We pulled the fish into the boat. My dad was so excited but I didn't know why, and then he told me that it was our state fish, the White perch. Then, I remembered I learned that the

White perch is in the swamp. My dad told me that it was the first White perch I have caught in my life. This is the best fish encounter I have ever had .

Chapter 3

After the White Perch catch I was really tired and still excited. We went back to my camp and my dad told me we would start tomorrow. When we were driving the boat back, we saw a lot of small little eyes. They were everywhere. Our gas ran out right in the middle of an alligator feeding frenzy. Luckily my dad had extra gas just in case we ran out. I was relieved. Finally we made it back to my camp. The next morning I woke up. I looked out the window and it was beautiful outside. Me and my dad packed all of our stuff and left. We didn't have time to eat breakfast at my camp so we had to eat it on the boat. For breakfast we had strawberries, blueberries, and yogurt. It was delicious. My dad said we would leave after lunch this time because we don't have extra gas. It was eleven o'clock now and my dad caught a smallmouth bass. We had to go back because we didn't pack any lunch. On the way back I saw otters laying on their backs, sunning. It was a day I'll never forget.

The End

A Place to Call Home

By: Molly Gilpin

I stepped onto the shaking boat. This was going to be so stupid, I thought, a field trip on a boat! Why couldn't we just go to a museum like normal? We already had to reschedule this. And it was basically three miles away from where we live. Why can't we just go somewhere fun?

I sighed, my mom was a teacher there was no way I was getting out of this.

The cold water and tall trees emitted unwelcomeness as I stepped onto the rickety boat.

I sat down next to Marin, my best friend.

"I don't think we'll see any alligators because it's so cold." She observed. She was trying to be positive, I thought. That surprised me. She wasn't a negative person but Marin wasn't usually so bubbly.

"I guess," I mumbled.

"Cheer up, it'll be fun." She replied.

The teachers got everyone on the boat and we took off.

I'll try to be positive, I thought. The boys were in the back, getting rowdy after sitting for a whole two seconds. I tuned them out and tried to listen to Jim, our tour guide, who was sputtering out facts like a human encyclopedia.

"Aaand over here they're a lovely family of White Wood Storks," Jim stated pointing at some tall white birds, "Over in the Atchafalaya Basin we have a huge variety of birds."

I looked over at the storks, their necks gracefully bent. The mama had her two little tiny babies under her wings as she nestled down in her small brown nest. She looked so happy, I thought, so content with her two adorable children. The dad came over carrying a clump in his beak and dropped it by the mom. They took turns feeding the babies the clump and I thought of how magnificent those creatures were.

My mom, who was sitting behind me, snapped me out of my trance. "Molly," she remarked, "Look at the water, how pretty."

I turned to look at the water while the cold winter wind whipped at my face. The surface of the murky water was glistening. Its gray-blue depths filled with sheer knowing and love.

"Mom, it's beautiful," I observed, still looking at the water.

I followed my gaze up to the cyprus trees. They're tan bark projected wisdom. I felt their mossy eyes follow me with understanding and I immediately felt horrible about how I felt earlier.

We entered an area surrounded by trees and then I felt the boat stop. We looked over to Jim.

He gestured to the trees and said in a quiet voice, "This is where some of the alligators are."

We all immediately went silent as we gazed at our surroundings. I scanned the water which was still vibrating from the boat's movements. I looked all around the boat and even on land, but I could not see anything.

None of us found an alligator, but we did find a bird's nest. It was hidden between the trees, fitting perfectly into place. We weren't tall enough to see if it had eggs but we did see how a small gray bird would fly there from time to time. I was so beautiful. It would swoop down so fast like a fighter jet but it had the grace of a ballerina doing a pirouette.

As I watched the bird fly away I looked down at my white watch. What in the world, I thought. It had only been ten minutes since we got on the boat! I gazed at my beautiful surroundings, my green-gray eyes trying to absorb every detail and I looked at the beautiful nature that had been here forever. I thought about how earlier I thought this field trip would be uninspiring and an overall bust. Turns out I proved myself wrong. I shifted my gaze to Marin and I turned to look at my mother and for the first time I realized how blessed every single person on that boat, including me, was to be able to have this inspiring, magnificent, natural, and overall breathtaking place to call home.

Alligator Experience

Boom! I heard the sound of my feet hitting the hard ground of Cypremort Point. I heard the air whistling in my ear, and the sound of waves crashing against the dock. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. It was like heaven, but the cold version. The air smelled like the beach, the logs were all old and mossy but the prettiest ever. The whole thought of the house made me feel warm inside.

"Race you to the dock!" My best friend Mary Beth shouted.

"Get ready to lose!" I shouted back. I ran as fast as I could straight down to the old beat up dock.

"Girls, come get your bags," Mrs. Kattie yelled at us.

"Coming," Mary Beth and I both yelled right before we hit the dock. I walked onto the dock and saw all the boats, and the rack of life jackets, but I was staring at one bright orange fish swimming in the water. It stuck out in their school. The fish was prettier than any other fish I had ever seen, and it was just swimming long with the others. The fish was orange with white patches around the eyes, and it was the size of your pointer finger. Then all of a sudden I saw the bright eyes staring at us from the dark water. The only reason I could see it was because of the bright porch lights shining no further than the start of the dock. I looked out and all I could see were the neighbors docks, but nothing but a bright glare on them.

"ALLIGATOR" Mary Beth and I screamed, I was so scared, so I just froze. It felt like forever, suddenly MARY Beth and I both had the same instinct. We ran all the way back to the car, grabbed our bags, and ran to go get Mr. Ronald (Mary Beth's dad).

"There's an Alligator on the dock!" Mary Beth yelled at her dad. "Come on!"

"I'm coming" he shouted with fear. Me, Mary Beth, and Mr. Ronald all made it all the way back to the dock, and there was nothing there. "Where is it?"

"It was just there," Mary Beth said, almost embarrassed.

"Go get some burgers girls."

"Yes sir," Mary Beth and I said almost perfectly in sync. "I call the one with cheese," said Mary Beth."

"That's fine I don't want cheese anyway."

"Wanna go eat on the dock?" Mary Beth yelled over the chatter of the parents.

"Sure, but there better be no alligators this time," I yelled back. Mary Beth and I walked up the stairs to the top of the dock and ate our food as cautiously as a squirrel when a car passed. I looked down the rail and saw the same bright eyes sitting in the area of the water you cant see from the bottom of the dock. The eyes were glassy like marbles and huge like having two oranges for eyes.

"Mary Beth!" I yelled. "The alligator is back and he is staring right at me with his deadly eyes."

"Watch out for that alligator," the neighbor across the doc yelled.

"Thanks for the heads up," I yelled back even though we already knew and were terrified of it. The alligator slowly started to sink, I think it knew that if Mary Beth and I told Mr. Ronald he would be dead.

"Let's go to bed, this alligator is playing games with us."

"Okay, only if I get to shower first."

Mary Beth and I walked all the way back to the house, and it felt like it took years. I ran up the stairs and into the bedroom with four beds, two on the right and two on the left. The room was decorated with pictures of fish and beach-like shells. The house seemed more like an old beach house than a lake house to me.

"I call the side by the wall," Mary Beth shouted like we were about to die.

"Ok," I shouted back, matching her energy. I ran, grabbed my clothes, and sprinted straight for the shower before Mary Beth could even make it up the stairs. I was in and out of the shower in two minutes and headed straight for the bed so I could wake up early.

"Why are you already in bed?" Mary Beth asked.

"So I can wake up to see if that alligator is still there," I answered.

"Oh, can I come with you?" Mary Beth asked.

"Sure, if you want to. I'm getting up at six thirty, you can come if you are up too. Good night."

"Good night," Mary Beth responded. Mary Beth and I both went straight to sleep even though Mary Beth hadn't even taken a shower yet.

"Rise and shine," I shouted at Mary Beth in her deep sleep. By the look on her face it looked like she was having a great dream.

"Why'd you wake me up? I was in the middle of my dream."

"It's six thirty. I'm going to see if the alligator is still there."

"Alright fine, let's go," Mary Beth said in her tired voice. I jumped out of bed and sprinted to the dock.

"There it is," I said to Mary Beth. The bright glossy eyes from the night before were staring right at me.

"RUN!" We both yelled as the alligator was crawling up onto the deck.

"Let's go get some food. I'm done with this alligator." I said, I was tired and horrified. The air was yelling at me, and the waves were crashing against the dock. I was already done with the wetlands before I had even gotten to know them.

A Ride Down Into The Swamp
By Jacob Zavala

The day got to an exciting start with a phone ring from my Uncle Tim, an expert at bow fishing. I got a text early from Uncle Tim, but I was still asleep, so when I heard that phone ring, I jumped up from my bed, heart racing, and hair spiked up on my head, but when I saw it was Uncle Tim calling, I answered.

I answered the phone when Uncle Tim said, “You want to come bow fishing with me?” I said, “Of course, Uncle Tim, this will be my first time down here so show me around, will you?” I’ve never been down to Louisiana’s coastal wetlands, so I was pumped and ready to begin this new journey. My mother drove me to Uncle Tim’s house, and when I got there I rang the doorbell. With a quick instinct, I played a little joke on him. Secretly, I hid behind the side of the fence and when he opened the door, I scared him, and Uncle Tim jumped backwards out of frightness. After the joke, we hung out and prepared the boat for an hour sitting and talking about his experiences in the coastal wetlands of Louisiana. Those experiences were nothing to play around with, and Uncle Tim said, “We have to be careful with the marsh because of its disappearance in our state.” With those words and with the warning from Uncle Tim to be careful while down in the marsh, we were ready to hit the road.

On the way down to the marsh, we stopped at a gas station for drinks and ice. The ice would be for our bait in the back of the truck. We left the gas station and headed to the marshland. On the way, I saw forests and heard birds chirping in the trees. The marsh didn’t look good and had dirty brown water with grass poking out. We unhooked the boat from the trailer and set it in the water, and then we started the engine and prepared for launch. We put life jackets on, and Uncle Tim drove to a good spot for bow fishing. Uncle Tim said, “The marsh looks like

it is shrinking, and you ready for the adventure?" I was ready and excited to catch some fish, which using a bow is harder than with a fishing pole. We were in the perfect spot to catch some fish, and my Uncle Tim turned on his lights so we could see the fish swimming.

I prepared the bow arrows and got ready to shoot the fish. Uncle Tim showed me how to shoot the bow and aim precisely and accurately because the fish moved fast inside the water. Uncle Tim caught a fish on his first try, and I was amazed, which proves he was an expert at bow fishing. I shot my first bow and missed nowhere near the fish I aimed for. I aimed a second time, missed again, and started getting frustrated because I wasn't used to not picking the action up fast. I aimed a third time and connected right to the fish side. I reeled the fish in and took a picture for my mom to show her I had a blast. Uncle Tim and I fished for another three hours and caught a few more fish. The experience was great, and I didn't think bow fishing was that hard, but once you find your groove, it is an easy motion. The marshland stayed with me for the rest of my life, and I later had an ambition to pursue the keeping of the marshland so young kids like me could enjoy fishing when I was a young child.

Heart of the Swamp
By Jamiya Lavergne

Originally, my intentions were to write a poem. A poem that would highlight one specific thing about Louisiana. As I began to write, I stopped in the midst of it. I soon realized that I could not limit myself to *just* a poem. I couldn't put myself in a box and focus on only one thing about Louisiana. Not when there is an abundance of things to appreciate and acknowledge in a place carrying so much heritage, flavor and a background of stories to tell for a hundred lifetimes. From the accents of the creole and cajun peoples, to the juicy red crawfish and swinging White Cypresses'. The beauty of Louisiana cannot and should be limited, especially since I have so much to be thankful for. I learned that very quickly.

Growing up, I never understood why my family took so much pride in Louisiana. I received a different side of the boot shaped state than they did. After all, I was but a little girl. I went to school in Louisiana and wore a plain, boring old uniform that was a few sizes too big, consisting of a plain burgundy button up and navy bottoms. I lived in a rather rowdy neighborhood in South Baton Rouge, and I hadn't much to admire about the landscape. Occasionally, there was a fun event that occurred. Homecoming parades, tailgating on LSU campus for the big games, strawberry fest, Mardi Gras and more. Besides those things, I didn't understand how one could uphold boring old Louisiana with so much gratification. Not until I got a tad bit older.

I remember my first time actually *seeing* Louisiana. Taking in the beauty of the Mississippi River, the small swampy spots that we would cross as we drove along the interstates to enter New Orleans, the leafless trees that had seemed to survive hundreds and hundreds of thunderstorms that threatened to destroy them with every occurrence. I soon began to admire this land. This land that my ancestors had shed so many tears on, so much of their blood and sweat on. I realized that seeing a huge body of water not only told you that you were now in the

delicious melting pot of food, music and art that we call Louisiana - but you are now stepping into *history*. Everyone has a friend, everyone has a story and everyone has a community in Louisiana.

When I think of my home, I think of the natural, unaltered beauty that is Louisiana's landscape. The bald cypress, the southern magnolia, even the pelican. I think of the happy Sunday dinners my family would gather to have, and the delectable meals we would consume while watching movies or sitting in the evening sun. I think of the art museums, the jazz museum, and the hidden treasures my family would refer to as "the country". Where we would ride four wheelers, go fishing and horse riding. I know that because of these things that bring me pure joy and so happen to come out of Louisiana, I will no longer forget where my home is. No matter how far I stray away from school, adventure or expanded once in a lifetime opportunities. I will never forget the loving memories that I have embedded in these deep waters.

The Camp

By Chloe Pregeant

Spending weekends at my uncle Matt's camps was a regular thing growing up, but one trip in particular was very eventful. It started out the same as every trip we got to the boat launch, put the boat in the water, and started the many trips bringing people, luggage, and groceries from the warfare to the camp. By the time we got in and got settled, it was late and mornings at the camp always started early so we went to bed. After waking up and eating breakfast we were ready to fish. The morning started with some crabbing off the dock. Crabbing was one of my favorite things to do at the camp. To crab we would tie a thick piece of string around the base of a chicken leg and put a stocking around it. The stocking around it caused the crabs to be stuck when they started to pick at the chicken. Although I was never good at crabbing because I would pull the string up too fast it was my favorite thing to do. After we caught about a dozen crabs we set off in the boat. My uncle Matt always seemed to know exactly where the fish were and all the secret spots. On this particular trip, we went to his favorite redfish hole. Redfish are my favorite type of fish to catch and we caught a lot on this trip. I cast my pole and within ten minutes I had a fish on the line. It was a beautiful fish. After helping me put the fish in the ice chest my cousin Clay saw his cork shoot under the water. We could tell this fish was massive just from the force of the cork being dragged under. Clay fought with this fish for what felt like 15 minutes. It was very strong. This fish was so strong the reel completely broke off of the rod. My uncle wasn't happy that the pole had broken but was now helping my cousin get this fish in the boat. Clay kept the reel while my uncle held the pole and when the fish was close enough I scooped it up with the net. After the commotion of the broken pole, we decided to reel in all the lines and go for a boat ride. Riding up and down the coast was one of my favorite things about the camp. On this ride, we saw an alligator lying in the marsh grass. We also passed a giant cypress tree which was always my favorite plant to see at the camp because it was huge and sometimes birds build their nests in the branches. A few weekends before this trip a bird was starting to build its nest in one of the branches. Now there were 3 eggs in the nest. After observing the alligator and seeing the cypress tree we headed back to the camp. When we got back the people in the camp next door were also getting back after a long day and they showed us a giant alligator gar they caught during the day. I still marvel at the size of this fish. It had to be at least 3 feet long. Spending weekends at the camp helped me connect with the coastline and truly take in the beauty of Louisiana.

Reeling in Family Bonds
By Preston Falgout

For most of my life, I wasn't much of a fan of fishing, despite growing up in Southeast Louisiana. My dad grew up fishing, mainly with his dad and brother, and would even sometimes catch fish to cook and eat. My childhood home was right next to a decently sized, man-made pond where my dad taught my sister how to fish. I, however, was never interested in it. As a matter of fact, I refused to be taught how to fish when my dad tried to show me how. But, as I grew older, mainly around the start of my teenage years, I started to want to learn how to fish and wished that I had learned when I was younger.

After we moved out of my childhood home, my dad moved to a house that had a pond in the middle of the subdivision. This is where my dad started to teach me how to fish. I quickly realized that I enjoyed the fun, exciting thrill of reeling in a fish after it snatches the bait. We continued to fish for years in this pond, catching mainly small perch and bass. I never really cared about what type of fish I reeled in or how big it was; I only ever cared about catching and reeling in anything attached to the line. I definitely value quantity over quality when it comes to fishing. I do, however, remember the biggest fish I caught from this pond, which was a bass that weighed a little over three and a half pounds.

Eventually, I wanted to go fishing with more people than just my dad, since I thought it'd be more fun. Luckily, just recently, my dad invited me to go fishing on a boat with him, his brother, his father, and my cousin in Manchac, Louisiana. I immediately accepted

the invite since I loved to both spend time with my family and fish. We woke up early on a Saturday morning and met our family at the boating dock in Manchac.

Since it wasn't quite summer yet, the temperature wasn't too hot while on the water. My dad quickly started to reel in a lot of fish, most of which were perch. After a while, me, my cousin, and my grandfather all started to reel in fish, which were mainly perch and bass, except for my uncle. He was determined to catch a big fish, using a big bait instead of a smaller one, which ended up causing him to catch no fish by the end of the day. We were out on the water for a little over three hours, and I ended up catching five fish total, while my dad caught well over ten fish. My uncle and grandfather decided to keep some of the fish and bring them home to cook them. Overall, I really enjoyed both the experience of being out in the natural Louisiana marshland, doing something I really enjoy, as well as spending quality time with my family which I rarely have a chance to do. I'm thrilled that I found a new link with my family members that allows me to hang out with them.

The Legend of the Bayou By Eliza Manganello

A long, long time ago when Louisiana was not taken over by buildings, and there was field after field lined with trees and shade, when the ground was very dry and gumbo was only just invented, there were gods who ruled the kingdom. They made the people slave away, covering their footprints with sand. Since the gods were big, the humans were afraid. So wherever the gods went when they visited land, they were always being followed by dozens of farmers, filling up their footprints with sand. One wise, kind Cajun man named Christopher, who was known for his delicious boiled crawfish, was having a party. They were talking in whispered voices, daring people to kill the gods. One man, Samuel Aurelie, said that he would try.

The next morning the god of the Cajuns, Jambalaya, came and the people were eating their breakfast. So they were not filling his footprints. The god got so angry that when the farmers came out, he roared in their faces and blew them away, also knocking down a tree. Then Samuel ducked behind the log. When the god got close he jumped out and burned him. The god roared in pain and ran away crying, filling his footprints with tears and making bayous as he went. Then he drowned. Now we know his soul as the ferocious alligators that swim in these parts.

Oh, you want me to keep going, do you?

Samuel, who killed the god, was recognized for a few years before the curse fell upon him. The legendary curse of the angry gods fell upon him on May 7, 1087. The first signs started in the middle of the night. He fell asleep tired and hungry. He woke weak and shaken but when he got out of bed, his legs could not support him and he fell.

The next thing he knew he was in the old man Christopher's house being fed the broth of a soup that contained the big elephant foot shaped cypress roots. He had never developed a liking for those so he asked if he had to eat them. The man said yes. No one knew that these roots were the remedy. Samuel got ill and passed away 8 months later. It was interesting because Samuel had been getting stronger and one day he just died.

James, Samuel's best friend, had visited before he died. Samuel had gone to the bathroom and James had taken the cypress roots out of the soup because he knew Samuel did not like them. Now, we know something James didn't and the medicine was the roots and without the medicine, death took place on the ninth of January 1088.

Now of course everyone was devastated. James bought book after book and after a while he figured out he was the reason for Samuel's death. James lived in shame and grief for the

rest of his life not noticing that old man Christopher was taking all of the blame. Since he had killed the so-called hero he was set to be hanged a week later.

In a pub the day before the hanging James overheard some men talking about the hanging. James thought that's not right, it's my fault.

The next day came and James decided to explain to everyone he had accidentally killed James and insisted they kill him instead. That was the last day James ever spoke.

The End

Name: Charles Blankenship

Book 1

A Young Hero

CHAPTER 1

A tale of the Wetlands

In a Hurricane, how would you describe the weather? Whatever the answer was, multiply the severity by 10. That pretty much sums up the Wetlands for you.

This is exactly how Kile O'neil knew that this day was going to be tough. When he tried going outside, the winds blew the door to their small, humble cottage right in his face.

So he pretty much gave up and sat on the couch. He could not watch TV though, because for some reason there was a bad cable connection in the middle of the swamp, so Kile talked with his grandma because he was passing time while he waited for his dinner. With nothing else to do, he sat. And he sat the next day. And the next. This went on for 8 days until one day when Kile woke up, he couldn't hear rain anymore.

Kile jumped out of bed and called his Grandmother. No response. He called again; "Gran!" Still no answer. Kile ran to the door and barreled outside, but what he saw made the hair on the back of his neck stand up and his blood went as cold as ice.

CHAPTER 2

A Sad, Sad Day

Standing in front of him, his Grandmother's apron in its mouth, big red eyes staring at him, was Shawn, the Alligator. Shawn started coming at Kile, but he jumped away and into the cabin. He locked the door and closed the windows. Why didn't Shawn eat him? Why could he not take his Grandmother's place in the belly of the beast?

He did not know, but he did know something: He needed revenge (Best served cold). Kile also needed to protect himself, so he headed to his room and got his BB gun. It couldn't kill anything, but it was all he had. He opened the front door a little and peered out.

He aimed and... **BANG!** ...The alligator hurried off to the watery depths. Kile ran to his Grandmother's apron, but it was too late. The apron was battered and torn and had little holes in it that looked like teeth marks. As soon as he saw the apron, Kile collapsed on the ground and he was filled with grief. At that moment, Kile felt a fresh burst of fury. He vowed he would kill Shawn.

CHAPTER 3

The Hero (maybe)

After a LOT of preparing, Kile felt like he was finally able to defeat Shawn. He was going to get revenge with a knife. Yep, he was not prepared, but it was all he had. He ran outside.

Shawn was not on the land. Kile had to bait him. Luckily, he knew Shawn's favorite meal: An animal trying to take a drink. So he headed to his room and got to work. When he finished, he couldn't tell if it was real or fake. This was going to work. It had to. He set up the plastic deer at the water's edge.

Hopefully he doesn't know deer aren't in the swamp, He thought. If Kile's plan worked, Shawn would choke on the plastic and he would have his revenge on the gator for eating his Grandmother, who he cared deeply about. He sat on a nearby tree stump and waited.

"Not this again," He groaned, but just then he saw a little red eye peeking out from the murky water. He sat bolt upright and watched with glee as Shawn the alligator leaped out of the water and took his last meal into the water. After a few days had past Kile saw the broken washed up body of Shawn the alligator. Just then, though, he saw a familiar face peeking out from the tree's. "GRANDMA!?" He

rushed to her arms as she congratulated him on being able to take down an adult alligator. "Grandma!" he cried, "I thought you were dead! He had your apron!" "That's because I fed him it, silly," She said in her frail but stern voice. "I only went to collect some sweetberries."

"You were gone for 4 days!" Kile yelled, "Maybe I lost track of time," She said.

"You think!" All he knew was that he was happy to have her back. Sure, he killed an adult alligator for no reason, but he was happy.

To be continued on *The legend of the bayou*

Name: Collin Ruth Smith

My Adventures in the Swamp

Chapter 1

The beginning

Me and Papa always loved to drive around in the Airboat. Mama used to say that was the fanciest thing we owned. When I was young we didn't have much but we managed with each other. Our family was small, there was Buster, our dog, Beau, my little brother, and my name was Rosalie. We lived in a small house that was high on the hill so when those hurricanes and floods came, we would be safe.

Chapter 2

The storm

One day, when we was drivin' in the airboat, a huge storm came through and we had to get home fast. It was pretty hard to get back because the wind was blowing against us. Finally, we got back to the house an' when we got up the hill we saw mama on the bed holdin' Beau and Buster. I was wonderin' why she was and that was when I saw the Gator on the floor. "Get back!" yelled Papa. I stepped back a few steps and I tripped on a rock and fell off the hill.

Chapter 3

Lost

That was the last thing I could remember of the storm. When I woke up, I was lyin' on a piece of wood. Then suddenly, I heard this low growl and I immediately got up and opened my eyes. There it was, a huge gator, probably bigger than me, before I knew what I was doing, I broke a piece of wood off whatever I was floatin' on and stuck it in the gator's nostril. I took it out and the gator didn't bother me again that day. I had this terrible headache and I had bruises all over my legs and knees. I looked around and I realized I was floating on a piece of a wall.

Chapter 4

The Hut

My Papa always told me if I'm lost in the wild to find the nearest spring and find fresh water. I tried to find a spring, but everything looked deserted. I kept on floating and then, there was a small hut. It looked like a haunted house on the outside. But, who knew, there could be some really nice people in there. So, I grabbed a cypress knee to stop the wood boat and I walked over to the little house. I opened the door and with a loud screech, revealed an old leather couch. (It was shredded and the springs were literally coming out of the couch's top.) There was another chair, it was wooden, and on it, a little old lady reading a book. "Oh, hello. Who might you be?" asked the lady. "Well, my name is-" I stopped to think about what I was about to say, I wondered if I should tell her my name. "Well, come on dearie, we don't have all day." Said the old lady. I was so surprised, all I could cough up was "Rosalie". "That is a very nice name you got there," said the old lady. "I would love a name like that, I'm stuck with the name Rita!" "Th- th-that's a nice name too ma'am." I said. "So, this is not a normal stop for people like you is it." said Rita. "Well, I got lost in the storm."

Chapter 5

Alligator Alley

"Well, that explains why you're so dirty." said Rita "We're gonna have to get you home, I bet your parents are worried sick about you." I had forgotten about the alligator and the rest of the family. "You're right-" I thought about it and decided to run back to the wood boat and find my parents. "Oh, sweetie, if you're gonna go that way you're gonna need a proper boat and well, an adult!" Rita said. "I'm twelve years old!" I said. I thought about it. "Why do I need an adult?" I asked. "Because, you're going through Alligator Alley!" I stopped running for a second and turned around. "What's that?" "Come inside and I'll tell you." said Rita. I ran back to the hut and she explained what Alligator Alley was. "When I was little, I used to live a few miles away from where we are now." She paused for a moment and then kept on going. "I used to love to play there, but that was

until one dark and gloomy day, my Mom, Pop, and little brother were playing in the water and I was making some lemonade." She paused again. "I never got a chance to warn them."

Chapter 6

Home at last

A few minutes later I spoke up, "So, are you ready to get me home?" "Sure, yeah" Rita said. I fought back the tears in my eyes. I thought about her story. "I'm going outside," said Rita. A few moments later, I heard an engine rev. "Come on outside!" yelled Rita. I walked outside and I saw a small, but beautiful, bright orange, fishing boat! "Isn't she beautiful?" asked Rita. "Well, we'd better be off!" I hopped in the boat and the last thing I saw of the house was the old creaky door. We drove for about 30 minutes and I fell asleep. I was so exhausted. After I fell asleep, we arrived at Alligator Alley. Rita woke me up with a little nudge. I looked around and realized where we were. "Now, I want you to be very quiet while we're over here." said Rita. I nodded. A little while later, a gator showed up. Minutes later, tons of gators started popping up everywhere! A gator popped up and snapped at Rita. She grabbed a stick floating in the water and stuck it in the alligator's mouth. I looked at her in surprise. For an old lady, she was definitely in shape, I thought to myself. An hour later, we saw a water moccasin crawling up the side of the boat. "Umm, Rita, you might want to get over here!" "What for?" she said. Rita looked to the direction I was looking and she wacked the snake. Once, again, I was surprised. Suddenly, to the left of the river I saw another small little house, but this time, my family was sittin' on the front porch.

Chapter 7

She knew all along

I got out of the boat and climbed up the hill, Beau came and met me halfway. The look on my Mama and Papa's faces were different though, they were very puzzled at what they saw. Rita looked up and smiled. "I don't believe it." said papa. "Believe what?" I asked. "Mom!" screamed papa. "Mom?" I asked. Mama bent down. "Did this woman help

you home?" she asked. "Yeah." I replied. "This is your Grandmother." Mama said. Me and Beau's eyes lit up with excitement. "She knew all along." Beau said. Rita got out of the boat and gave the whole family one big hug. That night, we had a big dinner. Mama made mashed potatoes and Grandma made gumbo. Me and Beau made blueberry pie. From then on, Grandma lived with us. I don't think I will ever forget my adventures in the swamp.

Our Coast, Our Home
By Labran Jeandron

It been tirty' years since I come down dis bayou. Seem kinda strange callin dis place a bayou, deres' nuthin but water for a miles each way. I 'member bein' a boy, livin' out round here. My home ain't here no more though. I live up in Baton Rouge ever since dat storm changed my coast forever. Greedy of me t'call it my coast, it's our coast. Da problems started when dem channels was cut out for tem big ol' oil boats. My papa never liked dem boats. He always used da tell me, "Mon garçon, tem boats gonna' kill our bayou, den leave us stranded." Boy, my papa was right. We used ta live in Wax Bayou, bout' 13 miles Southeast of Dulac. Wax Bayou ain't here no more, neither is Dulac. It all part of da Gulf now. Hell, Naw Orleans is just a lil' lisland, barely clinic' onta de rest of da state. I had some fond memories wit' my papa. We used ta fish, crab, and duck hunt all long da bayou. How I'd love to do da again. Dere's no more crab or shrimp, and my papa gone. I wish I could visit em'. But dat cemetery where we layed em' was reclaimed by da bayou. Still gives me chills thinkin' bout' my papa floating out der' in da' Gulf, along with them other dead folks.

I loved my lil' home. It was an oak plank shack sittin' right on da' water. I always loved fallin' sleep to da' sound of the rain's pitta' patta' on da' metal roof. Out back where we kept ta' dogs. Der' names were Rouillée, Pécan, Petit, and Lulu. They was all good dogs. But we hada' get rid of em'. When da' bayou bank round our house started breakin' down, it was too much for dem' lil' pylons to take. Soon as one of em' slipped into da' bayou, ta' whole house followed. Me and my mama was devastated, but my papa said he planed for dis. He took us, and tall' the stuff we could save, a mile down da' bayou on a pirogue. Den we saw it, first da' roof peakin' over the horizon, den' the doors and windows, den' the long pillars stickin' out the water. Dis new house my papa built was raised up twelve feet. We lived in tat house for years, den' I

would get ta' scare of my life.

It was a normal day, sun shinin' and da' breez blowin'. I was out crabbin' on my boat when I see some mean lookin' clouds headin' my way. I tink', "Heck, a lil' rain never hurt no one" and I keep crabbin'. Then, the first band came. My boat suddenly began rockin' back and forth. I could feel the wind pick up bout 30 knots and the rain was pourin' into my boat, almost sinkin' me. I try ta get the moter goin' to head back home, but it won't start. I was then when I saw a huge wave rollin' my way. Had to be twenty feet tall. We never get waved down here in Wax Bayou, so I was frozen wit fear. Da watar crashed into my boat, and trew' me from da' deck. Good thing I had my life vest on, er else I woulda' been lost to da' sea. I ended up floatin' for bout' five hours during and after da' storm. I clung onta' some big pieces a wood until I washed up ona' beach. I stood up, looked round, and saw nuthin'. No houses, no trees, not even grass or a bush. Lil' did I know at the time, but tis' was the newly made coats of Thibodaux. The wave crushed everytin' south of Thibodaux and Belle Chase. All gone. Forever.

Although this story is, obviously, made up, the horrific aftermath of the wave might not be too far into the future. Louisiana's coast is eroding away. Commercial canals, invasive species, and rising sea levels are some of the main causes. Since 1930, we've lost over 2000 square miles of land. This land wasn't just land, though. That land contained homes, businesses, and habitat for our crab, crawfish, shrimp, and other Louisiana species. Even though much of the damage has been done, us Louisianians can rally together to save our coast. We help by doing just a few simple things. Firstly, we can leave our Christmas trees on our curbs to be picked up by the Coast Guard. These trees are then used to create makeshift barrier islands. Secondly, we can donate finished oyster shells to organizations that clean them, bag them, and drop them on bayou banks, holding the soil together. Finally, we can take better care of our planet. Even though this may seem like a daunting task, we can all help a little by recycling materials, such as paper, metal, and plastic, picking up litter, preventing it from

evetring our waters, and, most simply, by telling our story. We won't
receive help if no one knows we are suffering. Together, we can unite to save this beautiful state we call
home.

Katherine Hines

Walter's Bayou Adventure

One time there was a little crawfish named Walter. He lived in a very beautiful part of the bayou. Everywhere he could look there were green trees that looked as if they could reach the sky with blankets of moss draped on top. There were beautiful white birds called egrets that would always fly around. There were also alligators, Walter was very scared of alligators. They looked like stone in the water and had humongous jaws and could snap at what seemed like everything, their eyes glowed at night like big fireflies in the water. Walter loved how beautiful and peaceful it was. Walter had one problem. He wanted to see more of the bayou, he loved his part of the bayou, but he got bored seeing the same things everyday. He could not swim through the whole bayou because he was just too small, and it would take him forever. He did not know how he would ever do it. He stood there in silence as he stared at the reflection in the dirty water, the trees draped over him creating a nice shaded tree tunnel. Bugs were buzzing around him, and the air was humid. An idea came to him.

"No," he said disappointed. He thought about it again. Maybe it could work. All he needed to do was find an alligator that was not scary and ask him if he would be kind enough to let Walter ride on his back while he swims around the entire bayou. Easy, right? *Okay* he said to himself *I am going to do this*. He went up to the closest alligator and, drumroll please, he ran as fast as his little legs could carry him into the cold wet grass to hide. *Maybe not as easy as I thought* he thought. He knew he had to do it if he wanted to see the bayou. With that in his mind he ran out of the wet grass and up to a different alligator that was smaller than the others.

"Hi," he said in a tiny voice. The alligator opened its eyes and looked at Walter.

"Hello! My name is Danny!" The alligator said. This shocked Walter, he always expected alligators to be mean and try to eat him.

“What's your name!” Danny asked. Now Walter was excited. His dream might finally come true. Walter and Danny talked for a while. It got dark and Walter said goodbye to Danny and that he would be back tomorrow. Walter was so excited, he could hardly sleep. He stared up at the sky and thought about the bayou he would be seeing tomorrow, and slowly drifted off to sleep. He woke up bright and early the next morning with the humid air all around him like a wool blanket, and catfish with shining scales that looked like tiny moons swimming around in the dirty bayou water. He saw the roots of the cypress trees as tiny mountains sticking out of the water and the sun rising in the distance half way above the horizon. Walter could not wait to see more of the bayou today! Walter could not wait a moment longer as he rushed to see Danny. He slowly crept up to Danny.

“Good Morning Danny! I have to ask you something.” yelled Walter hoping that it would wake him up.

“Oh! Good morning Walter, what do you want to ask me?” Danny said.

“I was wondering if you could take me on a tour of the whole bayou! I really want to see beautiful new parts of the bayou instead of seeing the same things everyday!” Walter said very excitedly.

“Sure! I would love to!” replied Danny. Walter climbed on to Danny's back and off they went. Walter could not contain his excitement as they passed under the shaded pathway that the trees made. Walter looked up and saw bright green leaves with a light blanket of moss on top. He looked to his sides and saw long strings of grass sticking out of the shallow water like tall buildings. He and Danny swam for the whole day and then Walter noticed that it was getting dark. He told Danny that they should probably be getting back soon. Walter was sad that it had come to an end but was happy that he could see the bayou. They got back and it was almost completely dark. Walter went to bed dreaming about the amazing bayou he had seen.

The Bayou Blaze
By Benjamin DuMontier

It was a scorching summer day in Louisiana when the fire started. I was lying on a muddy bank, soaking up the sun's warmth when suddenly, the air filled with the harsh scent of smoke.

Looking up, I saw thick pillars billowing from the horizon, turning the sky a dark, ominous gray.

Panic surged through me as I realized what was happening. The fire was creeping closer, crackling and snapping as it devoured everything in its path. I darted into the murky water, my powerful tail propelling me through the reeds. Behind me, I heard the splashing of other gators as they too tried to escape from the approaching inferno. The fire raced through the marshlands, consuming trees and brush with violent hunger. Heat bit at my scales, but I kept swimming, driven by fear and adrenaline. I reached deeper waters where the river widened and the current was stronger. Gasping for air, I dove beneath the surface, my heart pounding. The bayou was ablaze everywhere, and the flames reflected eerily on the water's surface.

Hours, they were passed before the crackling subsided. I cautiously surfaced, my eyes scanning the scorched landscape. The once beautiful bayou was now a charred wasteland, but I was alive. Against all odds, I had survived the disastrous fire. In the following days, I joined other surviving alligators on the few remaining patches of dry land. We basked in the sun, grateful for each other's company and thankful to have survived the disaster.

As the bayou slowly recovered, new life began to emerge. New plants pushed through the ash-covered ground, and the air was filled once more with the sounds of wildlife. I'll never forget that day—the fear, the heat, the devastation. The other gators and I wanted to know how the fire had started, so we searched for any clues. I eventually found something, a campsite. At the

campsite were signs of a campfire, multiple pieces of metal where the fire would have been, and a large ashy black spot. The other gators knew of a nutria hunter who hunted that area, and we concluded that the hunter was cooking himself a meal when the oil he was cooking with exploded into flames, starting the massive fire.

Furthermore, nothing within twenty feet had survived the fire, except the metal pieces, proving our theory of an explosion. How the hunter had escaped we did not know, but we were focused on other things. The gators and I eventually came up with a plan. We would wait for the hunter to go into his stand then jump out and chase him down.

A few weeks later, the plan was set into motion. We hid underwater and watched him enter his stand in an unburnt area teeming with Nutria. Suddenly, we all jumped out and made a rush for his stand. He noticed us, but he was not fast enough. I jumped at him and bit into his boot. I did the death roll, a famous move alligators use to kill prey, only to realize he had slipped out and I was eating his steel-toe boots. The hunter stood up and raised his twelve-gauge shotgun and pointed it at me. As I prepared to dodge the shot, another alligator whacked his leg with his powerful tail. The hunter screamed in agony and began to limp away from us. We decided to let him go, and he would never return to our bayou again.

Lost and Found
By Michael Hymel

In the heart of the Louisiana wetlands, where the labyrinthine waterways twist and turn like a snake, a boy named Caleb discovered himself adrift in a sea of inexperience. . . Caleb had ventured into the wetlands together with his mother and father on a hot summer's day, keen to explore the mysterious splendor of this untamed wasteland. But as he paddled ahead, drawn through the promise of the journey, he quickly found himself separated from his own family.

With each stroke of his paddle, the dense foliage closed in around and disoriented him. At first, Caleb's sense of excitement outweighed any difficulty. He navigated his small canoe with the confidence of a teenager, weaving through the slim channels conveniently. But when the sun began to go down and he still couldn't find his family, he began to worry. With each passing moment, the landscape appeared to shift and change, and he could not see the familiar landmarks he had seen earlier. Caleb's heart pounded in his chest as he found out he turned adrift into a sea of endless marshland.

Meanwhile, Caleb's mother and father paced anxiously, their fear etched deep into their faces. They attempted to call out to Caleb, their voices laced with worry and desperation, but obtained no answer except the mournful cry of a distant egret. As the sun dipped beneath the horizon, casting long shadows throughout the water, Caleb's parents made a dire choice. With lanterns in hand, they set out into the wetlands, determined to find their lost son before he was lost in the darkness. Through the tangled maze of cypress trees covered in moss they went, their hearts heavy with worry and uncertainty. Each rustle of the underbrush sent shivers down their spines, and each splash of water beneath their toes seemed to echo with the load of their anxiety.

But just as hope was beginning to be lost, a faint sound reached their ears—a voice, calling out from the darkness. With renewed dedication, Caleb's parents pressed forward, following the sound like a beacon of hope. And then, amidst the murky gloom, they noticed him—a small figure huddled inside the bow of a canoe, his face illuminated by means of the smooth glow of a lantern. Caleb's parents rushed to his aid, embracing and hugging him with tears of joy streaming down their cheeks. For Caleb, the ordeal was a terrifying lesson in the strength and unpredictability of nature. But as he clung to his mother and father within the accumulating darkness, he additionally felt a sense of gratitude—for the beauty of the wetlands, for the love of his circle of relatives, and for the simple joy of being located.

As they made their way back home, Caleb noticed the flames protruding from the smokestacks of chemical plants far away. He could only wonder what kind of effects these chemical plants had on the environment that he loved so much. Even though he was scared when he was lost in the bayou, being alone in it gave him a greater sense of appreciation for its beauty. He vowed at that moment, on the way home with his parents, that he would do anything in his power to protect that special place. Caleb went on to be a great advocate for Louisiana's wetlands when he grew up, because of that frightening, yet eye-opening experience.

A Louisiana Lifestyle

By Blake Gillio

My name is Landry Leblanc. Born and raised on the coast of Louisiana, I have walked these wetlands for forty years and love this lifestyle more than any other possible. Our culture is one of Cajun French descent, and it dates back hundreds of years. The lifestyle of my people thrives in the industries dealing with the waterways. The seafood and fishing industries are the main source of employment and money within this area. Many people often get into this industry at a young age and stay in this lifestyle their whole life, including myself. For the past twenty years, I have owned a small shack on the coast that sells shrimp. Although I am not living lavishly, money is not the reason we pursue these industries. It is the love of the water, culture, and life. Though it may not be appealing to those outside of the area, the people born here love the wetlands. There is a feeling of hospitality within this community here that I have not observed elsewhere. This life also allows for more simple living ways. No one owns expensive cars or houses and instead works hard to obtain what is necessary, the environment around them fulfilling enough. This is represented in my life of selling and catching shrimp. I work long, tiring hours on the water that involves various steps. First, I must make sure the boat is up and running and ready for the day. Second, I have to locate where the shrimp are likely to appear in large groups in order to catch enough to return a profit. Third, I must cast the net correctly in a way that successfully gets deep enough to pick up the shrimp. Lastly, once the shrimp is in the boat, I must take the long ride home to the shack and begin preparing the shrimp for selling. The shrimp I sell are used for various different things, the two main purposes being for food purposes and the other for bait. Although this lifestyle takes up a huge chunk of the day, being on the water makes all the hard work seem worthwhile. The drive back after a long day watching the water and wildlife is priceless. The combination of the warm weather and light breeze as I drive the boat through the bayou is an extremely calming sensation.

However, as I drive back from the shrimping adventures I can not help but acknowledge the eerie thought and realization persevering in the back of my head. The coast is deteriorating every single minute. Lands that used to show up on maps are no longer present. Remnants of old land remain present everywhere you look. Beaten-down shacks and stores reside in now-flooded areas that used to thrive. Certain areas of wildlife now are no longer as prevalent due to coastal erosion. This presence of coastal erosion is something that has become prevalent and does not seem like it is on the verge of slowing down. This brings great sadness to our people as our lifestyle and culture are in danger, and sadly, no one has seemed to help us in the battle. However, the people of the wetlands, including myself, will not go down without a fight. We continue to pool our funds together to try anything that could help to slow coastal erosion down. For example, we have created devices such as seawalls to help slow down coastal erosion and have made sure to not build on land close to the water as it could bring further damage to the ground. However, despite our attempts, we do not have the funding or resources to successfully prevent coastal erosion long term, and without support from other people in the country, our lifestyles and culture are in danger and the beautiful waters and wildlife are on the verge of extinction.

Days on the Water

By Hayleigh McKean

It was a peaceful sunny day over the wetlands. Aella leaned back against the seat of her boat and watched the sun glitter over the peaceful waters. She stayed in the shade though as she waited for a fish to bite.

The young woman pushed a stray strand of black hair behind her ear as she thought about all of the resources her home provided for everyone. The wetlands were spacious and seemed to go on forever when you were in the middle of it. The cypress trees were large but provided good shade from the hot sun in the summer, especially during the middle of the day.

It was one of her rare days to herself and fishing was always a good way to get away from the business of the world as the waters were calm most days. It allowed her mind to wander freely every time without fail. She didn't expect to catch anything at all today but it was relaxing in a way.

Aella only stayed out a few hours that day before it got too hot to continue and she was forced back home. As expected she didn't catch anything but it had provided her with the opportunity to think and reflect on how she felt about everything.

She loved her home and it had made her who she was. She felt drawn to the waters in a way and was always calmer surrounded by the gentle waves.

Aella docked her boat on the shore as she went to get her truck to tow it back home.



The drive home wasn't eventful besides the traffic, but she was greeted by the pleasant smell of food as she entered through the garage door after unloading everything. The black-haired woman walked into the kitchen to see her boyfriend at the stove stirring something.

"Hey," she said.

Caleb looked back at her and smiled. It was an amazing and wide smile that showed all his teeth but it never failed to make Aella smile. Along with his smile his dark blue eyes glimmered happily.

"Hey," he replied. "How was it?"

"Good. I was thinking while I was out there though. Louisiana's amazing and you wanna know my favorite part about it?" she asked.

"What?"

"The wetlands. They are so amazing. They provide so much for us and are home to such a diverse amount of creatures."

“They aren’t they? What do they have to offer?” She knew Caleb was only trying to keep her talking because he always told her he loved the way her green eyes lit up whenever she talked about her favorite things. She smiled at him as she talked.

“They offer us so much. It provides habitats to waterfowl as well as bunches of different types of fish. Each one is unique. We also provide about sixteen percent of the nation’s fish harvest including but not limited to: shrimp, crabs, crawfish, and oysters. It’s amazing and they are so beautiful when the sun is shining on it. The cypress trees give it an almost mystical affect that’s alluring in so many ways. I could explore for hours and still not see everything it offers.” Aella stopped to take a breath before continuing “Not to mention that a lot of our economy relies on the wetlands. You should come with me tomorrow and we can just explore.” Her eyes lit up at the prospect of spending the day with her best friend and boyfriend.

The smile had never left Caleb’s face as he listened to her and worked on dinner at the same time. His blond hair had fallen into his face at some point and was an alluring mess.

He looked back at her over his shoulder and said, “I would love too. Also dinner’s ready.”

“What’d you make?” Aella asked. “It smells delicious.”

“Gumbo.” Caleb placed a bowl in front of her and she gives him a quick kiss before digging in.

“Delicious.”



The next morning found the sun shining through the curtains of their tiny living room as Caleb and Aella packed up for the day ahead of them. As Aella worked on putting snacks in a bag for the day, Caleb was trying to finish getting ready. She loved him but somehow he always managed to be just about running late or actually running late.

“Almost ready?” Aella called out.

“Yeah. Almost,” Caleb yelled back.

The black haired woman smiled as she pulled her ponytail through her hat and grabbed the snack bag to load it up. “Alright. I’m going put stuff in the car.”

Caleb joined her five minutes later, just as she tightened the hitch for the boat trailer.

“Ready?” he asked from behind her.

“Just about.” She nodded. “All that’s left is getting there without any problems.”

“We can do that.” He laughed slightly as he said the words..

“Ready for a day of adventure?”

“With you? Always.”

The drive only took twenty minutes but Aella was eager to get back out onto the water so it felt like it took much longer.

Caleb parked the truck after the boat had been unloaded and the snacks placed on the floor of the boat. He walked back not even five minutes later after finding a close parking spot. He stepped into the boat and took a second to adjust to the gentle tilting due to the waves.

Aella does a poor imitation of a pirate and says, “Where’s ya sea legs, laddy?”

The blond looked at her with a playful glare hidden behind his eyes. Aella laughed at him, it’s a carefree laugh and Caleb laughed with her.

The two spent most of the day in the expansive waters. The air around them is filled with laughter and jokes. Once Caleb scared himself and for about an hour was convinced that a log was an alligator.

They started to head back as the sun set behind the trees however they didn’t exit the waters just yet instead they kept the docks just within their line of sight as they watched the sun set over the water casting hues of pinks and oranges along the surface. The sun also silhouetted the trees just so creating a picture perfect setting. Aella tried to get a picture on her phone but it came out wrong without encompassing half of the beauty the sunset offered.

“Let’s get going,” Caleb said before the last rays had disappeared from the sky. “The bugs are eating me up.”

Aella hummed in agreement. “I’ll go get the truck, you can stay with the boat and get used to being on land again.”

“Alright.”

The truck hadn’t been but at most a two minute walk out and the raven found it quickly. She picked up Caleb and loaded the boat quickly. The two made it home and both were content.

A day on the water together was exactly what they needed to relax before going back to work on Monday. It had helped to strengthen their relationship by allowing them to be themselves. The wetlands were amazing and Aella was proud to call them home.

**In The Bayou Where The Cypress Trees Grow
By David Herrington**

In the bayou where the cypress trees grow

Where creeks and rivers flow

Where Grasses and tree trunks lie below

In the bayou where the cypress trees grow

In the bayou where the cypress trees grow.

Where snakes and gators burrow.

Where moonlight and fireflies glow.

In the bayou where the cypress trees grow.

The Bald Cypress
By Samuel Riggs

Wetlands

I'm making a sonnet
About trees and leaves
It takes place in Louisiana
Not a poem, a story to me

Under the marsh trees
With roots so deep
All tangled together
Their memories weep

Called bald cypresses
With branches so green
Something so lovely and
Something so clean

The birds that rest on the swampy branches
The alligators that burrow in the cypress knees
The turtles that graze on our cypress roots
The snakes that skim the tops of the greens

So much depending on these cypress trees
So much depending on the sunset light
So much depending on water so deep
So much depending on the
wetlands

Murky Waters By Cora Gray

Below the murky waters
alligators bite.
Below the murky waters
creatures hide.

Beside the murky waters
snakes hiss.
Beside the murky waters
animals wish.

Above the murky waters
Cypress trees bloom.
Above the murky waters
squirrels loom.

This is the bayou,
Where the murky waters flow.
This is the bayou,
Where Louisiana's heart lies below.

Our Coast

By Benjamin G'sell

In Louisiana's coastal wetlands, beauty thrives,
Where nature's brushstrokes paint the skies.
Marshes whisper secrets to the breeze,
Communities resilient, bonded with ease.

Feelings stirred, like the tide's gentle sway,
In these lands where pelicans play.
A sense of awe, a reverence deep,
For the harmony these wetlands keep.

Beneath the canopy of cypress and oak,
Lies a spirit resilient, steadfast, bespoke.
From Cajun shores to Creole heartlands,
Unity thrives, where each heart stands.

With each ripple upon the bayou's face,
Echoes resilience, an unyielding grace.
In these marshlands, life's rich tapestry,
Threads of hope woven eternally.

Yet, shadows linger, whispers of threat,
As waters rise, a haunting duet.
But amidst the challenge, courage stands tall,
In the face of adversity, answering the call.

For the people here, kin to the land,
Their bond unbreakable, their hearts expand.
Through hurricanes and trials untold,
Their strength, a beacon, resilient and bold.

So, when thoughts drift to Louisiana's embrace,
Emotions swirl, finding their place.
Love, admiration, and pride arise,
For the beauty and strength beneath Louisiana's skies.

The Price of That Black Gold
By William James

The moss flows.

Herons glide across the water.

Everyone is welcomed by the wild.

Not in the city.

Big knees poke up from the water.

Alligators stalk their prey, their eyes ascend as they slink through the marsh.

Yet even the gators pay their respects.

Outside of the swamps is a loud disorganized world, and the fact is society is more wild than

Under the willow trees.

I will address the problem, I will not sit around and cry like a child while doing nothing to help the Situation. I am not a politician.

The city is dark and dangerous.

Soon it will tear itself apart.

Under the murky depths of the water lay a calm and peaceful world.

People point to the predators hunting as a showing of "savagery" hence why they are better.

Everything is as it should be; natural and pure unlike the concrete jungle that is the city.

Righteousness is in the swamp and all around it.

"Is it true?" asks society? "Are we just as much of an animal as the alligators and fish?"

Over and over you ask and again and again I answer. Yes.

Right down to the bone you are wild like the animals, you are alive like the animals and you make mistakes.

So

When you make mistakes,

own them.

“The Place I Call Home”

By Emily Eckert

The crash of waves
Gives me peace more than anything
It's a feeling that everyone craves
And a feeling nothing else can bring

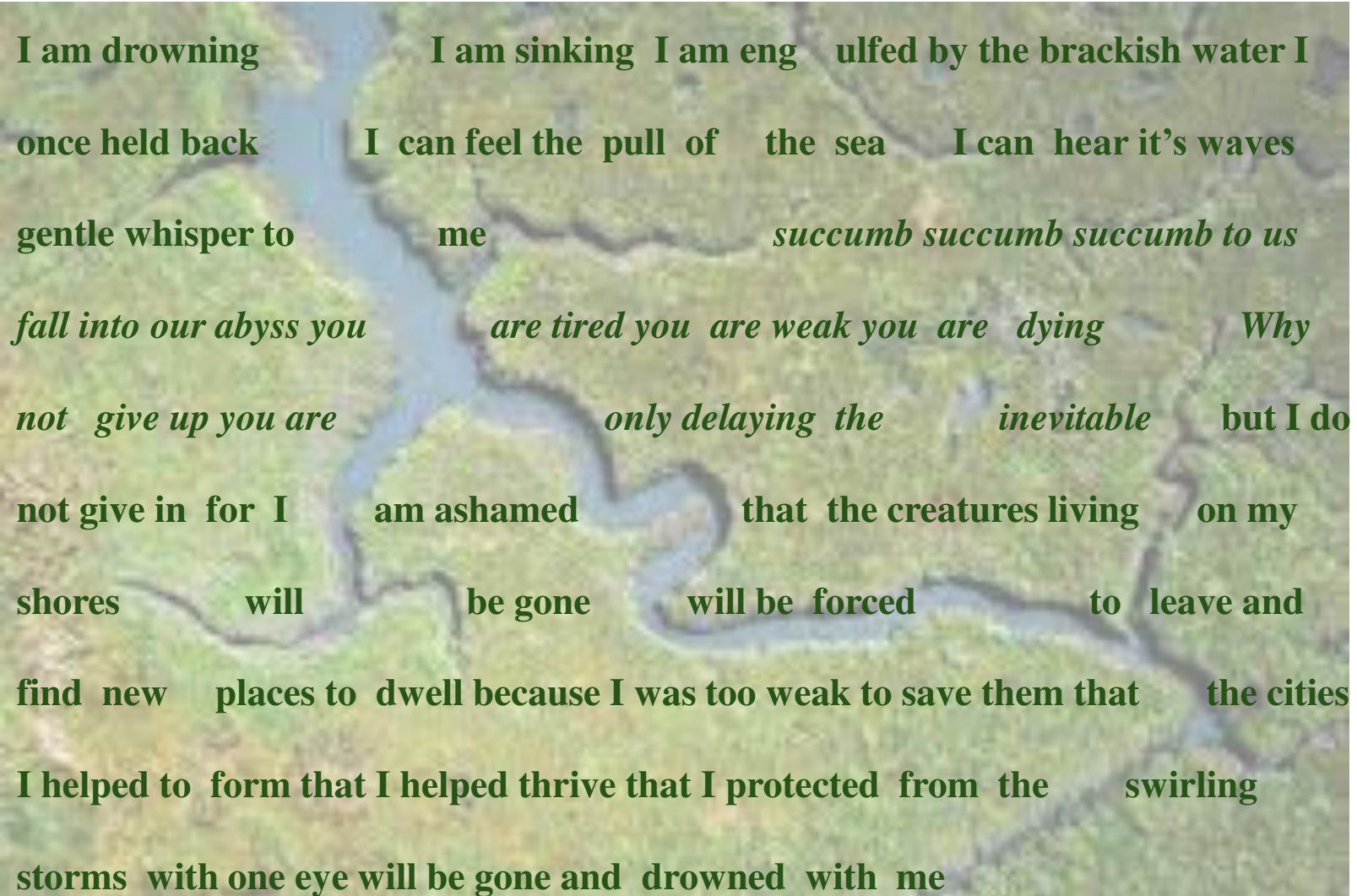
The wind moves the cypress trees
As I stand basking in the beauty
Of a coast that beats all seas
Being here feels like my duty

Fish jump in the water gracefully
And their scales reflect the sunlight
They chase each other playfully
This feels so right

My boat grazes the long grass
As I watch the sunrise
Wishing that forever this could last
I can't believe this is in front of my eyes

Because nowhere else will you find
A place as beautiful
As the home, I will never leave behind
Because it's the only place I find suitable

I grew up here and I never want to leave
The dark waters and crawfish
It all feels like an award I can never achieve
But staying here is my only wish
Because this is the place I call home

An aerial photograph of a river delta with a complex network of channels and islands. The text is overlaid in a dark green, serif font, following the winding paths of the water. The text is arranged in several lines, with some words in italics.

I am drowning I am sinking I am engulfed by the brackish water I
once held back I can feel the pull of the sea I can hear its waves
gentle whisper to me *succumb succumb succumb to us*
fall into our abyss you are tired you are weak you are dying Why
not give up you are only delaying the inevitable but I do
not give in for I am ashamed that the creatures living on my
shores will be gone will be forced to leave and
find new places to dwell because I was too weak to save them that the cities
I helped to form that I helped thrive that I protected from the swirling
storms with one eye will be gone and drowned with me

Statements from an Eroding Coast By Isabel Magnotta

Silt

By Gabriel Swindle

We are all made of the Earth, and in being so are part of it.
Silt, basest, unknowing, and pure, builds up-- the land so
that.

Earth may experience herself,
beautiful, changing, and growing.
It builds us up, knowing,
knowing more so that, we may infringe upon the Earth--
Machines beyond her wildest fancy,
Mocking creations that distort her,
and in doing so misplace her gifts,
so that she may no longer experience herself:
beautiful, changing, and growing.

Bayou Lament
By Sam Dinshaw

Each year, I find myself back in this unique place, but
each year, I find it much more different than before.
Human greed and neglect, it can only take so much more.
Oh, to save these precious lands, what a race.

In better days, these waters brimmed with life,
with bountiful harvests each season.
But humans will find any reason,
to deny the shrimp float dead, a sight filled with strife.

Not long ago, the pelicans still looked white,
their feathers shimmered like Orion.

But now after Deepwater Horizon,
they find themselves drenched, covered like night.

There was a time when you see for miles,
a never-ending view of greens and blues.
Today, instead, I see only gray hues,

waiting for the day the smog clears from the isles.

This place has seen much better days

and now finds itself a victim of over-ambition and corporate greed.

But until these evils recede,

we will continue to see this desolate phase.



Thank you for supporting the
4th Annual CWPPRA Wetlands Writing Contest
 hosted by the **Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act**
in memory of Jennifer Ritter Guidry.

CASH PRIZES

WRITE

POETRY
 PERSONAL NARRATIVE
 SHORT STORY

WETLANDS WRITING CONTEST
 K-4TH | 5TH-8TH | 9TH-12TH

In Memory of
JENNIFER RITTER GUIDRY

The CWPPRA Wetlands Writing Contest was established in November 2020 in memory of Jennifer Ritter Guidry, CWPPRA’s Public Outreach Coordinator from 2019-2020. Inspired by Jennifer’s passion for Louisiana’s coastal culture and communities, the CWPPRA Wetlands Writing Contest provides young writers the opportunity to unleash their creativity through sharing their own knowledge and experience of Louisiana’s coastal wetlands. This contest combines a few of Jennifer’s passions: Louisiana culture, education, and the community spirit of coastal Louisiana. Jennifer never missed an opportunity to communicate with the public, adventure out into Louisiana’s coastal wetlands, or inspire young minds. She was a true Louisiana advocate and spread her knowledge and experiences whenever she could. It is in her honor and name that CWPPRA is continuing the Wetland Writing Contest.