

Strolling down memory lane: the 2010 Air, Air Everywhere poetry contest
(by Jacob LeFleur, 1st annual contest winner)

During my childhood, the *Air, Air Everywhere* poetry contest served as an outlet for the passion that I had, and still possess, for writing. Writing for me, especially as a fifth grader, offered an escape from the day-to-day stressors and routines that often existed for myself as an adolescent. Being able to do what I love, as well as being able to learn about the environment, allowed for me to adopt a passion for past and present environmental issues. The contest itself allowed for me to realize that I can use my voice to bring forth attention and change to the issues that exist in the world and that individuals, especially those participating in this contest today, can utilize their talents, skills, and passions to bring forth that change. Winning the contest ten years ago served as a catalyst to the confidence and drive that I now possess as a twenty-two-year-old college student, all the while helping me to realize that I could be that change in the world regarding aspects that are bigger than myself (ie. environmental issues, healthcare and big pharma concerns, etc). As an aspiring pediatric neurosurgical oncologist today, this contest began my journey to the knowledge of self-competence and curiosity that I now possess. I sincerely hope that this contest can serve the same for those that are participating today. No matter the outcome, I hope that people feel inclined to participate. Who knows, it may inspire a new generation of individuals to achieve their dreams, all the while allowing for them to learn more about the world in which they live, similar to what it did for me.

I remember the countless pages in my journal that I utilized as my rough drafts for my specific poem. I was a perfectionist (I still am) by nature, so I wanted to make sure that my poem was everything that I wanted it to be and more. I also would not be able to discuss my poem or this contest without mentioning my Nana, Marilyn Marchese. My Nana had read over my never-ending drafts and offered advice or critiques whenever they were needed. I worked on these edits at her house while I was in fifth grade and remember these memories very fondly. My Nana unfortunately passed away from plasma-cell leukemia a year-and-a-half after this contest, so thinking of this contest always makes me think of her. As I am sitting here writing now, a smile comes to my face just thinking about it and about her. Seeing how proud she was of me and feeling how proud I was of myself is something that I can still feel in my heart to this day. I even still have the framed certificate and one of the solar calculators that I received as a result of winning this contest. So, my Nana served as the inspiration for the words and ideas that were employed throughout my piece, and I would not have been able to write it without her