

2018 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Fiction Category

First Place:

Better Left Untouched

Christina Schafer

Oliver looked up from the deck of the boat, hope evident in his eyes. The mist clouding the ship parted, revealing a beachy shore far off in the distance. The crew stared for half a two months, before erupting into a chorus of cheers. Most hurried to the edge of the ship, peering out at what they could see of the land while one or two rushed below deck to write in their journals or prepare to dock. Oliver elbowed past the mass of crew members, which was significantly smaller in number than it had been weeks before, and clung to a spot on the rail, leaning over the edge to get a better view.

Heads turned as Captain Pinzón emerged from his quarters. Everyone scurried back to their posts as the tension slowly built. Sails were adjusted, several men prepared the anchor, the steering wheel was under precise supervision of the captain, and a crewman scouted a place to anchor the ship. Lagging behind them, to their left and right, were the Niña and the Santa Maria, the crew audibly cheering as they, too, spotted land.

As the Pinta anchored, the crew began to unwind the rowboats, dropping them into the water. Group by group, crew members took their exit, bringing nothing off the ship except for the bare necessities. Oliver gathered in a group on one rowboat, eager to explore the grounds and find a campsite; the crew had not seen or felt land for more than two months and none intended to wait more than another five minutes.

He took a shaky breath and stepped back, fully intending to find and warn his father and his tribe.

Crack. All eyes turned in his direction as he looked down at his feet with a snapped stick wedged underneath them. Several men narrowed their eyes, searching for the source and blinked several times when they saw it was a child.

There was a second of pause when Helaku made eye contact with the man who seemed to be leading, before taking off in a sprint through the forest. There was shouting and Helaku heard footsteps following him. The young boy stumbled into a clearing and frantically called for help, spinning in circles to find his father. He saw one of the men step into the clearing and turned to run, only to come face to face with the same man as before. Helaku desperately searched for an escape, but to no avail. His eyes flicked from face to face as each man stared curiously back at him. Who were these strange men? Why were they here, invading his home?

Meanwhile, the men glanced around, as well, wondering the same things. Who was this odd, timid boy? Was there more? Oliver turned to Captain Pinzón. The captain threw back his shoulders and approached the boy with his hand extended.

Helaku furrowed his brow as his world fell down around him. He could not understand these strange men or their language. What began as a simple hunting expedition had led to Helaku losing sight of everything he ever knew. Their home had been discovered. The year was 1492, and the New World had been discovered.



Winter was soon approaching, however, and the flow of bright days was quickly interrupted, however, when people began vomiting, coughing, and complaining of soreness and fatigue. It started as one, and grew to two people, then three, and, eventually, the disease took hold of more than half the camp. The tribal healers were baffled by the ailment and the chief could not console the tribe as they began to panic following the first few deaths. The white men did not seem to be affected nearly as badly, and people began to point fingers as they noticed that our numbers were dwindling while the white men suffered minimally.

Helaku and his mother soon fell prey to the illness, oftentimes coughing up blood and vomiting. There were many nights when Helaku would wake to the sounds of his mother crying, and the pure hopelessness in her sobs broke his heart. His own tears sometimes fell from his eyes as he watched his brother laugh with his friends or his father notch an arrow, knowing the likelihood of survival was slim.

It was a frosty December night that Helaku woke to screams instead of sobs. Throwing

instruments that Helaku vaguely recognized. He weakly tried to push himself up from the floor to at least give himself a fighting chance but found he could barely stand.

Before Helaku had another second to blink, a bang sounded throughout the tipi. He dropped to the floor, gagging and closed his eyes, willing the pain away. As he looked at his mother one last time, he blinked away tears, and took his last breath.

Helaku would not live to discover that his mother had been pregnant with a baby girl when she had lost her life to what was, many years later, named influenza. He would not live to see the day that his brother, Songaa, was married to the only woman left of his tribe, and he would not live to see the day that his father was released from the plantation he was taken to. Nine- year old Helaku died with the faces of the white men in his mind, and with a gunshot to his side. The year was 1492, and the New World had been discovered.

Works Cited

History2U. Web. 8 Sep 2016.