

## FIRST PLACE—SENIOR ESSAY

Story Moller

Cedar Creek School

Age 17

### FROSTY MORNING

It was a cold morning, one of the those mornings when frost glittered on leaves and grass. The eastern horizon's faint rays cast a dazzling show on the quiet, frozen swamp. The mirror-like sheen of the ice showed itself betwixt gaps in the towering cypress trees. At the base of several trees, steam rose slowly from in between brush and bracken. This steam issued forth from four men's icy lips. They were barely visible in clothing that revealed no other colors than subdued hues of green and brown. Each of these men clutched at a shotgun whose barrels carefully stuck out of the twisted, dead vegetation. The steam and the gun barrels were the only two features distinguishable that gave a hint to the humans' presence.

Under a particularly stunted and forlorn cypress tree, a smaller path of vapor drifted towards the cloudy, pink-streaked sky. It issued forth from a bush where concealed inside stood a young boy. The water reached to his shins, and he occasionally lifted his feet to keep the ice from encroaching around the rubber soles of his boots. Anticipation flooded the boy's senses. This was his first time upon the flooded timber. The cold merely sharpened his straining eyes that searched the gloom hanging above him. His flushed, pink ears detected each distinct sound that invaded the surrounding stillness. His stiff hand grasped fore-end of the small shotgun until his knuckles turned white.

A sudden flurry of wing beats caused the concealed watchers to jump with a start. The boy looked up with sudden excitement. Two dark bodies hurtled overhead with a whistling of feathers upon the cold, hard air. The light began to steadily increase as more black shapes sped past, twisting and diving through the tree-top network. Then the relative quietness was shattered by a high-pitched squeal, followed by many answering calls. It was not light enough for the boy to make out the crisp colors of one of the flying pairs. One was a mottled brown, while her mate shone with a grace of colors that seemed only fit for the courts of kings. Blues, reds, greens and majestic maroons formed a sphere around the flying body. The two travelers dropped from their airborne venture and began drifting down to an ice-free spot in the water. The boy lifted his firearm to his shoulder and fired a single shot. The beautiful shape began to fall with an increased speed to the ground, while the other changed direction and soared upward.

The boy had done it. He had achieved his dream at last of harvesting this majestic wood duck. It was at that point in the boy's life that he knew his way of life would forever be a part of him. The hunting tradition on that day, ingrained itself into the now young man. He vowed that day to protect and honor this God-given right. He was forever changed after that day, and every chance he was given, he related his story to others so that they would be able to appreciate the time-honored tradition.