

Junior winner - Isabella Fleming, 9
Crosshall Junior Academy Trust
Nominated by the Rotary Club of St.
Neots St. Marys

Our World Is Beautiful

'In memory of Pauline Stewart (1923-2009) who loved this park', that's what the shiny plaque on my shabby, weathered wood says. I am an old park bench looking out over the river. I sit here quietly. I don't judge, I just watch and listen.

I watch the children playing in the shade of the trees during the summer, listening to their games and giggles. The fair comes and the same children scream with excitement and eat candy floss and toffee apples, which melt in the warming sun. As summer turns to autumn they run past me in their coats and boots kicking the leaves as they go. No matter how many autumns I see, I always marvel at the beauty and the colours of the falling leaves. The shades of brown, purple, red and orange are breathtaking against the amazing cold blue sky.

In winter, it is peaceful here. There are a few visitors, mostly dog walkers, but they rarely stop to sit on me and chat. It is too cold for them. The icy depths of the river are uninviting, sometimes even cruel but always beautiful. I could watch it racing past forever, and I would never tire of this view. I feel the soft white snow fall on my back as I gaze in awe at how pretty the whole park is. Its pure, white blanket tempts people to come and build snowmen or stroll hand in hand wrapped up in scarves and hats.

Gradually, the long dark days smell different, they become lighter and full of new hope it seems. People come to see me again and I listen to their conversations, the sad ones and the happy ones. I can't join in, but I can feel. Sometimes I feel so much that I think I may crack. Do I have a heart? I think I do. It is spring now and the flowers are beginning to grow again. The trees have new green leaves and the river, though still icy cold, is calmer now.

I'm not sure which is my favourite season, or even if I have one. They are all beautiful and unique. The wonder for me is in the people who visit this place, season after season. I have seen generations come and go, and witnessed friendships, arguments and people falling in love. I hope I am lucky enough to stay here for many more lifetimes and watch the seasons go by. I love to see the same children who played around me and jumped off me into their parents' arms, walk past years later with husbands and wives, pushing their own babies in prams.

From time to time someone will sit on me and stroke my plaque lovingly. There is one little girl who fascinates me. She is about eight and full of energy. Whenever she comes to the park she runs, skips or cartwheels towards me shouting "race you to Great Grandma's bench!" She always wins that race.

Intermediate winner - Ella Kyle, 13

Truro High School For Girls

Nominated by the Rotary Club of

Truro

Our World Is Beautiful

It had been 2 weeks since my Grandpa died and I was ready. He had left me a photo album, with a collection of photos from his life. I laid it gently on my lap. Then I brushed off the dust, placed my fingers on the same, worn patches of its leather cover, where hands had caressed it before and carefully opened it to the first page.

A beautiful baby with chubby cheeks gazed up at the camera. Innocence and curiosity were melted together in those sweet chocolate eyes. It was labelled 'me'. The next few pictures were from his childhood; everyday images from London during the Blitz. One, complete rubble with the remains of a bed here and a table there and people sifting through the wreckage. Amid this destruction, you can see two ladies, laden with cups of tea and blankets, comforting the crying and the shocked. It's just an everyday scene, but with a kind of everyday beauty, in humans helping each other.

As I delved further into the life of my Grandpa, I realised how diverse and exciting our planet Earth is. As a professional photographer he witnessed life at its best and worst and captured it through his photos. For example: the determined expression on Martin Luther King's face, as he proclaimed his poignant, yet deeply inspiring dream for equality; the immense nationalism of England supporters, head to foot in red and white, as we won the world cup; a forlorn crowd looking onto the 'Death Strip' over the Berlin Wall; starving children their bones jutting out and eyes empty of hope staring into the camera. Then there was: a splash of the vibrant colours of a Rio carnival, celebration pumping through the dancers' veins; the orange glow of the sunset over the savannah in Kenya; a newborn lamb frolicking to the dawn chorus in North Yorkshire and lots of our joyful family Christmases. On the second to last page, there was a creased photo, which had evidently been torn into two pieces, then sellotaped back together. It's a haunting picture. A limp body hangs from a tree. A crowd of people look on, horror carved onto their faces and echoing round their minds, as a police officer lifts a chair to beat the lifeless man. His eyes blaze with anger. The caption reads: 'Thailand 1973: The consequences for a student uprising. I have always regretted not trying to intervene to stop this inhumanity'. As I read these words, my tears mingled with the tears of my grandpa. Water from then and now, staining the page.

On the last page my grandpa had written a special message to me: 'my dear grandchild, always remember our world is beautiful because it's full of life and life is the most wondrous thing ever. From a newborn baby to an insignificant dandelion; a delicate butterfly to the most stubborn, wrinkled, old man. They are all precious and that is why we must look after our world and strive to make it better, simply to protect life and the quality of life for all living things.

Our world is beautiful

Summer: brimming with life, prosperity and merriment, it is a season bursting with hilarity and liveliness. Infants, desperate to explore the intricacies that summer brings, thrust open doors to explore the haven that is nature.

Effortlessly emerging from its chrysalis, the butterfly glides through the placid breeze and finds a minute of solitude on a stable leaf; after traipsing through the foliage, the ladybird extends its wings for the first time and embarks on its voyage into the air. Revitalized, the bee departs from the foxglove with an ample supply of pollen. Apart from the intriguing creatures that summer brings, the equatorial climate encourages fatigued businessmen, uptight mothers and restless children into the open air. The open air inspires cheerful picnics and periodic BBQs. Periodic BBQs connect families. Connected families bring jubilation and laughter.

Autumn: flushed with colour, radiance and ambition, it is a season overflowing with adventure and opportunity. Leaves, which have transformed into majestic shades of yellow and orange, begin to drift down to the speckled forest floors. Whilst the attentive animal community prepare for an arduous winter, to their relief, elderberries gallantly cruise downwards to the forest floor.

During the autumnal months, the grace and elegance of nature is truly felt. Peaceful. Tranquil. Serene. Can you imagine a calmer destination than a meadow or woodland? Although this creature is rarely appreciated, the hedgehog is a delicate organism of true beauty. Forever foraging amongst the undergrowth, the extraordinary sighting of a hedgehog is precious. Such creatures should be regarded as amiable beings, despite their distinctive appearance: their affectionate and warm-hearted personality is sporadically expressed. Sadly, this is down to the perpetual neglect that they have to suffer from humanity. Refreshing and rejuvenating, the dewy mornings bring spectacles of wonder. Spiders' webs become glistening diamonds and blades of grass transform into shimmering emeralds.

Winter: bursting with hopes, dreams and wonders, it is a season of magnificence and splendour. Whilst the snowflakes daintily flutter to the ground, a pearly blanket of icing sugar begins to form; perfectly sculpted icicles sprout from every ledge and all pools of water seem to fashion a protective surface. Though it may appear unyielding, even the slightest scrape could result in a severe affliction.

Meanwhile, babies, children, adults and grandparents are able to find refuge in the temperate interiors of their homes. Content and harboured from the extreme cold, you sit. The warmth of the frothy hot chocolate (and the flavour of the marshmallows) is a welcome treat, but such a drink is never complete without a spoonful of fresh cream. With the fire blazing and the snowflakes descending, nothing could be more special than a peaceful winter evening in the sanctuary of your own home. Elated, due to an extensive amount of overnight snowfall, children can cheerfully build snow sculptures the next morning.

Spring: the mellow light of day and crisp breeze carries you to an undisturbed world; here, you can understand the stillness that nature brings. Awaking from a winter of confinement, charming snowdrops and vivid daffodils ascend to the surface. After breaking through the almost impenetrable soil, they will release their buds and reveal a breath-taking sight.

Rabbits, such vulnerable creatures, bound merrily from field to field. Whilst tender young chicks acquaint themselves with the outside world, their mothers keep a watchful eye over their ignorant offspring.

Unquestionably, it is a stunning world that we live in, no matter what the season.