

FOR RELEASE: Immediately

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Writing talent earns recognition, cash for 10 students

Poetry contest a prelude to month-long celebration of poetry at Highline College

DES MOINES, Wash. — “Hello, Kidney Disease” earned Rebekka Paulsen first place in Highline College’s 2016 Student Poetry Contest. Paulsen was one of 60 writers who submitted 113 poems during the contest, which is a prelude to Highline’s fourth annual celebration of National Poetry Month in April.

“When writing the poem I was inspired by my father’s coming to terms with his hereditary kidney disease,” said Paulsen, who is in her second year at Highline College as a Running Start student. She noted that her father is living with 10 percent kidney function while awaiting a second transplant.

“My father is a courageous man who has worked hard to delay the progression of kidney disease. While he knew at a young age that he had anomalies in his kidney function, it did not begin to impact his life until I was in upper elementary.”

Born and raised in south King County, Paulsen will graduate from Highline in June, earning simultaneously her associate degree and high school diploma. In the fall, she will attend Anderson University in Anderson, Indiana, where she will study dance performance, English and French. Her goal is to become a dance instructor and author/poet. Winning the contest earned the 18-year-old a \$125 cash prize.

“The judges were very moved by ‘Hello, Kidney Disease;’ its knockout punch caught us off guard as the speaker addresses the illness which curtails her father’s life. The poet’s skills are most evident in the controlled voice and final epic leap,” said Susan Rich, who serves on the Poetry Month committee and is a Highline faculty member and published poet herself.

Second place, with a prize of \$100, went to Kelvin Hernandez of SeaTac for his poem “The Truth of the Bicycle.”

Third place and \$75 went to Tatyana Byrd of Burien for “Golden Beauties.”

Honorable mention, along with a cash prize of \$25, went to seven students (listed in alphabetical order):

- Shari Douglass, Auburn: “Sandra Speaks”
- Kim Huynh, Auburn: “Where I’m From”
- Braxton James: “Young Hood Struggle”
- Sam McCullough, Des Moines: “Grandpa Ed”
- Vivian Ngo, SeaTac: “When Will I Have My Own Final Draft?”
- Harper S. Villani, Federal Way: “Numb”
- Yelena Voronin, Normandy Park: “L’hiver”

The contest required students to submit poems that were no more than 20 lines and could fit onto an 8 1/2-by-11-inch piece of paper. The winning poems will be displayed as broadsides April 7–May 31 in the Highline Library Exhibits and Art Gallery.

Loosely defined as single sheets of paper printed on one side, broadsides were the most diverse form of brief, single-occasion publishing before the Civil War. Although broadsides were first introduced in England, they became a prime means of communication in the United States, often posted in the town square. Later, Harlem Renaissance, Concrete and Beat writers claimed the broadside as a below-the-radar way to get their words out onto the streets.

Highline will honor contest winners and finalists with a reception and poetry reading April 12, 1:30 p.m., in the Library Exhibits and Art Gallery. The students’ poems will be on display alongside those of published poets Rick Barot and Claudia Castro Luna, both of whom will give readings during the month-long celebration. All events are free and open to the public:

event: Poetry Exhibit
date/time: April 7–May 31
location: Highline Library Exhibits and Art Gallery

event: Poetry Open Mic
date/time: April 8, 1:30–2:30 p.m.
location: Writing Center: Building 26, room 319

event: Poetry Reading and Reception for Student Contest Winners and Finalists
date/time: April 12, 1:30–3 p.m.
location: Library Exhibits and Art Gallery: Building 25, 4th floor

event: Spoken Word Workshop and Open Mic Presented by Scribe
date/time: April 13, 11 a.m.–2 p.m.
location: Highline Student Union: Building 8, Mt. Constance room

event: Leija Farr, Seattle Youth Poet Laureate: Poetry Reading
date/time: April 14, 12:30–1:30 p.m.
location: Highline Student Union: Building 8, Intercultural Center

event: Claudia Castro Luna: Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop

date/time: April 20, 11 a.m.–1:15 p.m.
location: Highline Student Union: Building 8, Mt. Constance room

event: **Rick Barot: Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop**
date/time: April 26, 11 a.m.–1:15 p.m.
location: Highline Student Union: Building 8, Mt. Constance room

Highline's main campus is located midway between Seattle and Tacoma at South 240th Street and Pacific Highway South (Highway 99). The Library Exhibits and Art Gallery (Building 25, 4th floor) is open Monday–Friday, 7 a.m.–9 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m.; and Sunday, 2–9 p.m.

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Attachment: Photo of Rebekka Paulsen

Winning Poem:

Hello, Kidney Disease

After Brian Turner

by Rebekka Paulsen

If my father is who you want,
then here are sore muscles and swollen veins.
Here are the scars ripping
across his chest, the pains tearing
through his organs.
Here is the shelled soul downing
Lay's chips on the leather sofa. I challenge you
to end it now, while he still has his senses.
Go ahead, dare to seep
into his skin, his cells. Because here, kidney disease,
here is where he waits to be reintroduced to you.
The man you seek,
take him, if you must.

About Highline College:

Highline College was founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County. With nearly 17,000 annual students and 350,000 alumni, it is one of the state's largest institutions of higher education. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education and bachelor's degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.