

2026 ADULT CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST



Theme: "Some Positive Moments Stay with Us Forever"

April 1 - May 16, 2026, Trenton Library accepted submissions for our third annual Adult Creative Writing Contest. This year, writers explored a positive memory that they — or their character(s) — return to again and again. We received many high-quality submissions from local authors, which made it very difficult for our judges to select winners.

Please enjoy the First, Second, and Third-Place winners of this year's contest!

Although this year's contest has concluded, we celebrate local authors all year round at the library! Please join us for our monthly Adult Writers' Group (meets every second Saturday from 2:00-4:00 pm), where we share and discuss our works in progress and receive constructive, encouraging feedback.

Check our online Events Calendar to learn more!



First Place: Jennifer Sarkisian

"Some Positive Moments Stay with Us Forever: Personal Memoir"



Some days remain frozen in our minds, preserved like snapshots in time. No matter how many years pass, we can return to those days and recall them clearly. Graduation day is one of those days for me, a memory that continues to grow more meaningful as time goes on.

Graduating from college was something I had looked forward to for years. I focused so intensely on the goal itself that I never stopped to consider how deeply significant the day would become. At the time, I believed graduation was simply the reward for years of hard work and dedication. Only later did I realize that what made the day truly special was not the diploma, but the people who stood beside me as I reached that milestone. Life has a way of changing quickly and unexpectedly, and experiences like this remind us to cherish the moments we share with those we love.



When I look back at photos from my graduation, I am instantly filled with gratitude. I see a younger version of myself surrounded by people who loved and supported me. Three of my grandparents were still alive and able to celebrate with me that day. They had always lived nearby and had been a loving presence throughout my childhood. I was the first person in my family to graduate from college with a bachelor's degree, and their pride was evident. Each of them contributed to my success in different ways.

My grandpa came to this country when he was 18 years old. He didn't speak the language or have a clear plan, but he worked hard and started a life for himself here. Eventually, he went back to his home country for a short time, found a wife, and brought her back with him to America. My grandma started a catering business and with a lot of hard work, it thrived for years. I was always amazed by their courage and ability to learn the language and succeed in a brand-new country.

"Some Positive Moments Stay with Us Forever: Personal Memoir"

My other grandma, who was also present that day, taught me a different kind of strength. She showed me how to stay hopeful, even during the most difficult times. A few years before my graduation, she had lost my grandpa, the love of her life. Despite her immense grief, she always carried herself with grace and strength. I knew that this moment was also special for her as she was able to share in my joy, even while still feeling such a great loss.

Over the following ten years, I would lose all three of these grandparents, but the memory of that celebration remains etched in my mind. I still miss all of them very much, but the memory of that day is a beautiful moment that I'll never forget.

My boyfriend at the time was also there to share in that moment. We had talked about getting married, but I always insisted that I would not even consider marriage until I had finished college. He asked me to marry him on this day. Just a few months later, in August, we were married. Graduation marked the end of one chapter of my life and the beginning of another. We are still together, nearly 30 years later.

Equally important was the support of my immediate family. My mom, dad, and sister have always been incredibly close to me, and their encouragement helped guide me to this important day. Shortly after graduation, my sister became a missionary and moved to the Netherlands. She spent several years there before marrying a pastor, and since then her life has taken her to various states. Because of distance and busy lives, we do not see each other as much as I would like.

Fortunately, my parents still live nearby, and they continue to provide encouragement not only to me, but also to my daughter, who is now 18 years old and preparing to leave for Air Force boot camp in a few months.

"Some Positive Moments Stay with Us Forever: Personal Memoir"

Graduation day has come to represent far more than earning a degree. It reminds me of a time when everyone I loved came together to celebrate not only my accomplishment, but everything they did to help me achieve this goal. It captures a period of life before losses, distance, and inevitable change. Because of this, I try to live in the moment and recognize as these special moments with loved ones are happening. These are the special memories that last a lifetime.



Jennifer Sarkisian has been an Executive Assistant at EDSI for 21 years. She holds a BA in Communications from Eastern Michigan University.

She has been married to her husband for 28 years and is a proud mother to her 18-year-old daughter who is preparing to go into the Air Force.

Jennifer has always had a love for books and for writing. Her very first job was at the Taylor Community Library when she was 14 years old.

She enjoys participating in multiple book clubs, camping, and being involved in her church.

Second Place: Carolyn Zorn

“Letters In the Sea”

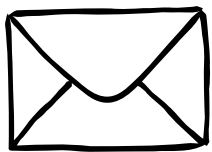
♥1995

In the setting sun he watched her walk across the grassy park toward him, his hand over his eyes to shield himself from the afternoon sun. She still had nice legs, he thought as he watched her yellow sundress swish with her steps. How many times over the years had he wondered what she looked like. He even looked for her in crowds, and now, amazingly, here she was. Smiling she reached out her arms to him as she approached. He pulled her close, wrapping his arms around her in a long-forgotten hug, feeling her grey hair tickle his cheek. The blond bob cut she wore for the years they were together, was replaced by the silver-streaked curly locks. "I would've known you anywhere," he said as they stood there, now nose to nose.

"Can you believe it," she said, "finally, we meet again. I feel kinda shy, I didn't know what to expect at our first meeting. Exchanging letters and phone calls was great but this is so, so much nicer."

"You fit in my arms just the way you always did," he leaned in and whispered in her right ear. His hands slid down to her waist as he continued to stare at her.

She took a step away and looked into his eyes. "What happened to us?" she asked. "The last memory I have is talking to you on the phone from Chicago when you were at the base in California before you shipped out. I remember it was raining," she continued, "and they had to go and find you to come to the phone. Such a silly thing to remember, that it was raining. But doesn't every love story have a scene of lovers embracing in the rain," she teased. "I will never forget that moment; crying, alone in my apartment in Marina City. You told me you were going overseas, probably to Vietnam, but no one knew for sure."



"Letters In the Sea"



"Our short conversation ended too soon," he said, "I remember I had to return to the barracks before lights out. I was stressed. I didn't know that it would be the last time I spoke with you for thirty years. We found out our destination was Vietnam after we were at sea," he resumed. "I got a letter from you onboard the ship. All the guys were jealous because at mail call the second day at sea, I was the only one to get a letter. I carried it around, afraid to open it. Then one day I pulled the wrinkled envelope from my pocket, and I just tossed it overboard."

Her eyes widened and she stepped back further and looked at him, "You never read it? Why? How could you throw it out unopened? Who does that?" She was speaking without thought, but in a kind of amusing way with her initial response losing intensity. "At least now I know why I never received an answer from you," she mumbled.

"It was a spur of the moment thing," he confessed to her. Thinking about that humid day thirty years ago, he had no other explanation to offer now. "I guess I feared what it might say." He took her hand and they walked to a nearby park bench. She wrestled with her hair as the wind blew it asunder. They sat down on the weather-beaten wooden bench, and he thought about that breezy day thirty years ago, aboard ship. How do I explain this, he wondered.

He continued his story, his memory of that day. "I carried your letter around in my pocket for the first few days at sea. When I finally took it out, I remember studying it for a long time looking for a clue in your flowery handwriting on the envelope and pondering what words from you were inside. Was it a "Dear John" letter or were you still pushing me about marriage? Maybe you had agreed to wait two years as I had asked?" He pictured now that overcast day in the Pacific aboard the USS Pickaway on his way to war when he'd faced the ocean and slowly released his grip on her letter.

"Letters In the Sea"

"I just let go and the wind took it," he explained to her as they faced each other, warmed by their closeness and the May sun in Los Angeles. "I stood at the stern port side of the ship," he told her. "Well, I guess what side of the ship doesn't matter really," he laughed, "but that's the rear of the ship on the left side. Well heck, I'm nervous and I'm sure you don't care about these details. But the memory is so clear to me. Even now I can see myself standing there staring as the envelope danced around like a loose helium balloon above the churning sea before it was kicked back up by the ship's wake. Amazingly, I watched as it returned to me and landed back on the wet deck at my feet. I wondered if there was some hidden meaning in the letter's refusal to be buried at sea," he said. "But a moment later, so I didn't overthink it, I released it again and it sailed like a paper plane into the tumultuous ocean waves."

He was quiet for a moment and couldn't look at her. "That decision, that day is sealed in my left brain's long-term memory and has, well let's face it, caused me a lot of angst these past years." He tried to look amused as he made eye contact again, trying to make light of it to her now seemed frivolous. *

"I thought I had sealed our fate that day in 1965. My excuses about why I never read it, afraid of what it might say, not wanting my life to be an emotional roller coaster while I was at war, just wanting to concentrate on staying alive, all seem lame, don't they?" He gently kissed her cheek, leaning into it so naturally, as if it was the winter of 1964, when they were 19-year-old teenagers in love. She waited for him to continue, allowing him time to get it all out.

"I didn't know if I would come home," he told her. "I was afraid and confused- seemed at the time too serious a decision for me to make at such a pivotal time in my life. I hope you can understand and forgive me. Remember, like a fool I volunteered for the Marine Corps, too." After a moment, he added, "I didn't want us--our story--to be a war movie made for television, or the lead story on the evening news: YOUNG BRIDE GIVES BIRTH AFTER HUSBAND'S BODY IS LAID TO REST IN LOCAL NATIONAL CEMETARY. I really didn't think I would come home," he repeated, and I didn't want to leave a wife and child behind.

“Letters In the Sea”

He reached out to hold her hands again as he continued, “Do you remember that you asked me to marry you before I shipped out on my mandatory tour overseas? That you didn't want to wait until I was finished with my three-year Marine Corps commitment? You threatened to move on with your life, take the job in Chicago that you had been offered that week?”

“Yes, I do,” she said, “you've got me there. Now I'm the one with regrets. I got the idea from your parents, if you recall our discussion about it. Your mother demanded that your father marry her before he shipped out and he did. I thought it would work for me; only it didn't. You said “no.” I lost. My foolish ultimatum didn't work. You went to Vietnam and I went to Chicago. I never heard from you again. I returned the ring to your mother after a few months with no response to my letter,” she said. “I was heartbroken.” She nestled closer to him.

“And here we are now,” he said, with his barbershop bass voice drowning out the birds in the trees nearby and the scampering squirls. “So, tell me, I can't wait any longer. Did you say you'd wait for me in that letter,” he questioned her? I've always wondered what it said. I speculated after I tossed the letter toward a watery grave in the trench of the Pacific that you said you'd wait for me no matter how long it took. But when I called after returning stateside in June of '66, I called your mother trying to find you. After what seemed like an hour of small talk, I finally got the courage and asked her about you. To my horror, she said you had gotten married. I was already struggling with the adjustment of being home from war and was so anxious to begin a new, peaceful life. For many days after that I didn't know what to do. I was lost. I eventually got married and I tried to go on with my life, as you were apparently doing.”



“Letters In the Sea”

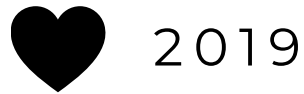
He closed his eyes for a moment, then continued, “I guess I got what I deserved, I lost you, since I cast aside your unopened letter so easily. I was an impetuous teenager leaving my girlfriend to wonder, while causing myself years of anxiety and enduring the mystery surrounding my decision at sea. I never forgot you--or us. Over these past years, I've imagined you beside me so many times, imagining what our love story would've been like. I wondered if I would ever see you again. I'm so happy you answered my phone call, remembered me, and came today. I could have changed our destiny if I had only read your letter. But now I can ask you, address the big elephant in the room, as they say, or in this case the park, what did the letter say?”

He smiled, looking at her and she noticed his long eyelashes, remembering how she always thought they were too beautiful for a guy to have. She touched the side of his cheek where a small scar from a shrapnel wound reminded her of the days he'd spent in Vietnam; days when she had waited desperately for a reply to her letter. “Well, ahh,” she now confessed, “I don't remember what the letter said-what I wrote.”

He laughed, “really? Well, maybe it's better at this point in our reunion that we don't know, but I still find it an amusing twist of fate.” She went on slowly, “when I never received a letter back, I was heartbroken. So, I must have written that I would wait for you, I guess. Otherwise, why would I have wondered all these years why you broke up with me. That's why they were the first words I said to you when you phoned, if you recall, why did you break up with me?”



"Letters In the Sea"

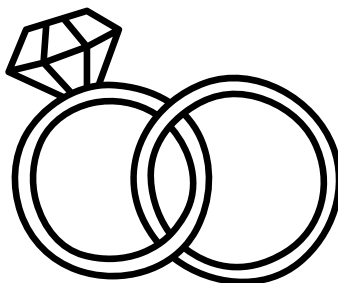


She settled her skirt around her legs nervously, "I never knew you called my mother until told me recently. It is so shocking to think about it because I wasn't married when to my mom. I don't know why she said that. I got married two weeks later, in July, in Las Vegas. I don't know if I would have proceeded with the wedding if you had reached me. Seems silly now, but I felt like an old maid and thought I should say yes to the first guy, since you, who wanted to marry me."

Looking at him now, there was no doubt that this was the same sweet young man she had fallen in love with at nineteen, when she blatantly challenged him under the mistletoe at a Christmas party and kissed his surprised lips. Two strangers caught up in the holiday spirit who kindled a forever kind of love with their first kiss. She now believed the war scared him off from making a commitment, not marriage to her. She pondered the time they had lost.

He pushed her hair behind her ear on one side, and leaning closely kissing her neck he whispered "I have always loved you. I never stopped loving you. I will never stop loving you."

"We've lost thirty years because of a letter that I can't remember, and you didn't read," she said. Tears spilled down her cheeks, as the new emotions engulfed her; she felt a tightening in her chest. Staring into his blue eyes, noticing the new look of his graying mustache, she still saw the geeky guy, who always stood with one leg kicked out, and wore Buddy Holly glasses.



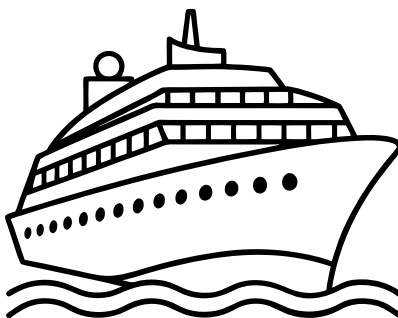
"Letters In the Sea"

"Please don't cry," he begged, "this is a happy day-one of the happiest in because I have found you again, you are back in my life, and I won't let you go." He moved down to the grass, kneeled and asked her, "Please marry me." And smiling he said, "And I mean it this time!" The kiss that followed, as he stood up and embraced her, was the kiss she remembered. She thought they fit so well together except they weren't thin anymore, so their hip bones didn't crash together. Two skinny kids, now mature adults starting over again at age fifty.

A year later, driving away from her hometown church in Phoenix, with their children and grandchildren waving, bystanders couldn't help but wonder why the "JUST Married" poster on the back of their car had been crossed out to read, "FINALLY Married."



After he died, she went on another South Pacific cruise, this time without him but bringing her tears that were still her constant companion in her recent widowhood. They had cruised through the South Pacific waters so many times before; the last time shortly before he died. Now another one of her letters was being thrown into the sea, but this time she was the one throwing it. She had carefully rolled a copy of their wedding invitation and an accompanying note to her beloved together and tied them with a yellow ribbon. She slipped them into a bottle. On this, her last cruise, when no one was looking, she let the sealed bottle drop into the sea from the ship's tender she was on as it neared his favorite destination, Fanning Island. On flowering pink stationery, the wedding invitation read:

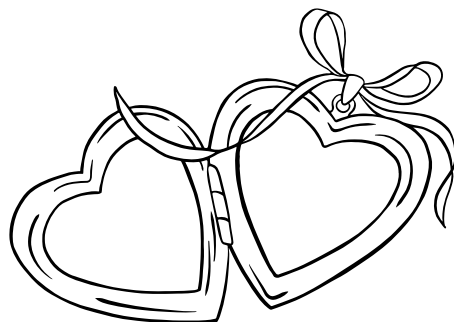


“Letters In the Sea”

Once upon a time, there was a handsome Marine who fell in love with a beautiful, blond girl after only one kiss. They became engaged. But he was sent overseas to fight an ugly war and not wanting her to suffer greatly in his absence, he asked her to wait for him and they would his return. She naturally wanted to marry right away. Alas, what were they to do? marry upon The Marine shipped out and the young girl eventually moved to another state to take a job. At long last she wrote a poignant letter to her Marine expressing her desires and affection. On board ship, the young Marine carried the letter around for several days, afraid of what it might say - not wanting to know. He never answered the letter because he never read it. He threw it into the sea. She never wrote again. He continued to carry her picture around with him through the war and occasionally he would look at it. When he returned home, he inquired about her. He was told she was married. So, they went their separate ways. They each had children. Then one day, almost thirty years later, they began to correspond and were eventually reunited. They fell in love all over again, gray hair and all! It was magic! They decided to spend the rest of their lives together. They knew they would live happily ever after.

On Sunday, December 31, 1995, at 11:00 AM they plan to finally become husband and wife at Faith Lutheran Church, Phoenix, Arizona

Their desire is for everyone who loves them to be present for this happy event. Please come and stay to toast to their future happiness at a champagne brunch at the Holiday Inn immediately following the ceremony.



“Letters In the Sea”

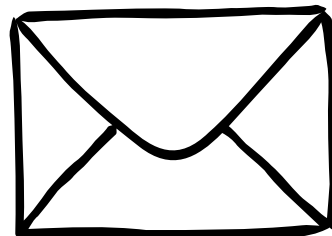
And a note to her sweetheart was added which said:

Darling,

It has been two years now and losing you has been almost unbearable. You never knew what I said in that letter you tossed in the Pacific on your way to Vietnam and you probably will never know what is in this letter either. Like the movie, I'm putting it in a bottle, hoping someday it will be found, snuggled in warm sand on a distant beach and that the person who finds it will hug their spouse with renewed passion after reading our love story. It was signed: Your Sweetheart forever.



She was an old woman now, with her memories and a love story that a war interrupted but fate reclaimed. Settled in her recliner she sipped tea and nibbled a sugar cookie. The phone rang. Her wrinkled, blue veined hand picked up her cell wondering at the incoming "caller unknown" designation and the foreign area code. "Hello," she said. "This is awkward," the caller said, "but are you the one who left a letter in a bottle? My husband and I were on a beach in the Solomon Islands and found a bottle which had apparently drifted to shore on a wave. We opened it and read the letter enclosed. I wanted you to know that your message changed our lives." A tear slipped silently down the woman's wrinkled cheek.





After raising her children in Novi Carolyn moved to Trenton to be closer to her daughter. She attended University of Detroit Mercy where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology. She had a long career as a sales engineer in the automotive industry. She loves to read and always wanted to write, so after retiring she worked as a freelance writer for several newspapers and online sites. She published a book about childbirth, helped her husband with his book about Vietnam and his life in broadcasting. After becoming a widow, she went back to school and earned a master's degree in Creative Writing. She currently works on her podcast and a book about her grandmother.

Third Place: Shahida Alvarado

The Kind of Love That Chooses You

An unfamiliar sound
lingered softly in my new space
as I opened the door with care.

A tail curled past my foot,
Punim, the baby cat,
settled gently on my unmade bed.

Her eyes, wide with wonder,
followed my every movement—
as if asking,
Who are you, and will you stay?

I couldn't leave her there.
My heart needed to carry her.

That is what her presence does—
she brings a kind of love
you didn't know existed
until it quietly chooses you.

Down the stairs we wandered,
searching for Lentl,
curled like a black circle of calm
beneath the windowpane,
choosing the sun as her companion.

Two different cats,
moving in their own quiet rhythms,
each with their own way
of being near,
of offering comfort
without asking for anything.

And there I was,
somewhere between them,
grateful to be let in—
not just into the house,
but into their quiet world,
and allowed to be their friend.





Shahida Alvarado is a local Michigan author, educator, and yoga teacher. She is the author of the poetry collection *When I Meet Myself* and the children's book *The Gecko Who Learned Yoga*. Inspired by her travels and lived experiences, her writing explores themes of belonging, resilience, love, compassion, and the beauty found in everyday life.