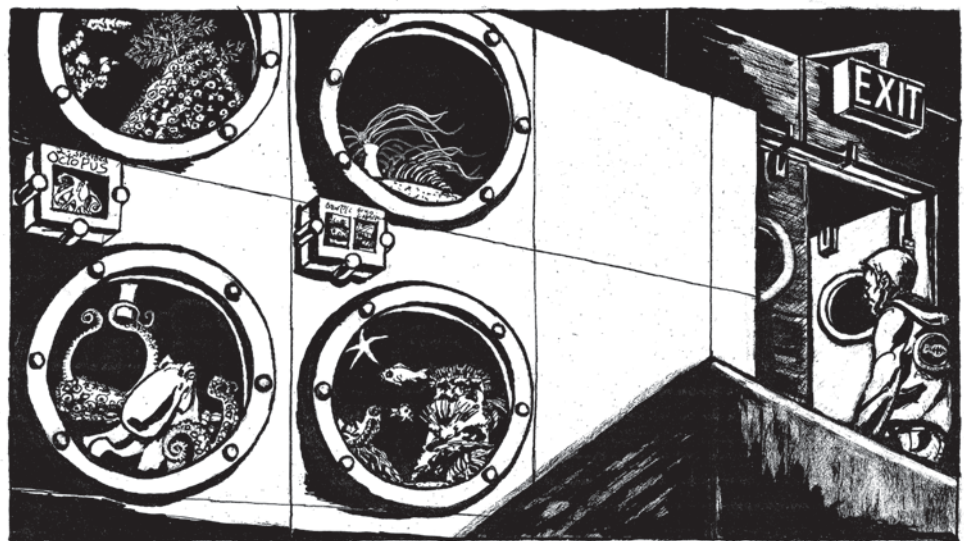


It Was a Dark and Soggy Night...



Childhood creativity flowed in our Octopus art and story contest by RANDI PARENT

When the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium's two-spotted octopus tampered with a valve in its tank last February, it created more than a flood that caused more than \$25,000 in damage.

Beyond all the media coverage, the incident also inspired schoolchildren from across the region — and from one class all the way across the country in Ormond Beach, Fla. — to devise their own theories about what

the mischievous octopus was up to that soggy night.

The "Octopus Flood Art and Story Contest," sponsored by Heal the Bay, attracted 80 stories written by students in grades 3 through 5, and 55 works of art, submitted by children in K through 2nd grade.

Prizes were awarded for first, second and third place in the story writing and artwork categories and honorable mentions in the artwork category

were also issued.

Then there is the prose of some 77 imaginative students who also entered the contest. Most tied the cephalopod's antics to a desire to bust out of the Aquarium in search of food. Some of the stories portrayed our tiny invertebrate as a much larger beast with violent tendencies, though most included redeemable traits.

Here are some samples of their amusing work:

"It was a warm school day's night and things were just about to get fishy."

"This two-spotted octopus thought life in the Aquarium was getting very dull. This octopus decided to add some confounding excitement."

"We saw a giant octopus that had Mr. Sigler's camera stuck in his teeth...I offered him some floss...he apologized for not flossing earlier."

"They gave (the octopus) a new tank and made sure he would get one scoop of ice cream every day, which kept him from running away ever again."

"He ended up finding his love and they had 19 energetic children."

"(The octopus) called a cab...when the cab driver came, the octopus ate him and drove to Red Lobster. He ate four people and left a tip."

"The octopus grabbed on to a truck for a ride to the sushi restaurant...He made his way to the water tank, and the next thing the cook knew, one of his octopi was gone. The two octopi male and female were splashing toward the beach while police investigated the flood at the Aquarium."

"He jumped on the rollercoaster and went around and around. Then he went on every other ride. After awhile, he ate ice-cream, threw up, and finally went back home to the Aquarium."

And the Winners Are ...

GRADES 3 – 5, Story Writing Category

1ST PLACE: Emmie Martirossian, Gardner Street School, "Bob Leaves to Marina"

2ND PLACE: Mena Smorynski, Gardner Street School, "The Night Party"

3RD PLACE: McKenna Colton, Edison Elementary, "Misty the Octopus"

GRADES K – 2ND, Artwork Category

1ST PLACE: Jessica Garff, individual entry

2ND PLACE: Evan Toji, individual entry

3RD PLACE: Leif Jones, Seven Arrows Elementary

ARTWORK HONORABLE MENTION

Angelica, Chandler School

Harry Gers, Seven Arrows Elementary

Rory Baker, St. Timothy School

The Aquarium also thanks the following businesses of the Santa Monica Pier for providing prizes for the winners:

Pacific Park; Bubba Gump Shrimp Company; Rusty's Surf Ranch

HOMETOWN HERO

Meet Angelino Raegan Payne, aka *The Good Muse* (thegoodmuse.com). Raegan has embarked on an exemplary volunteer mission—to complete 50 different volunteer activities before 2010. A lofty goal, yes? What's the best part? You get to experience the trials and tribulations, and of course the gratification vicariously through Reagan's online volunteer journal. Reproduced below is Reagan's entry detailing her adventure with Heal the Bay's Stream Team.

When you hear the phrases Stream Team and Creek Restoration, you might assume you will be participating in a volunteer activity involving water – not so my dear ones – prepare instead for a day of gardening.

I arrived at Malibu Creek State Park at 9:00 am on a Sunday. No friends joined me today as they all mysteriously lost their cell phones after I mentioned early morning Sunday volunteering. However the surroundings were lusciously green and the air was fresh (in LA a rare commodity) so the wake up was worth it.

I located my Heal the Bay group and squeezed into the crowd surrounding a Stream Team guide who was explaining our mission today. The guide reminded me of my


beloved Natural Resource Major roommates in college. I found my mind wandering back to their tales of licking rocks in class to determine what kind of rock they had in their hand. I don't know if their professors were anticipating them becoming blind from this work or if it is just easier to distinguish a rock by taste. As I stared at our guide's hand-knitted skull cap, I could not help wondering how many rocks she had licked in school. Then my somewhat erroneous thoughts were silenced when she took off her sweater and revealed arms that would make Madonna swoon. "What the...!" I thought while scanning the ground for rocks to pick up and lick.

Today our mission was to rip up all the invasive non-native vegetation and replace it with native purple needle grass. To make it clear the Stream Team pointed out the native plants – if it looked like a dead twig it was native and stayed. All the other plants and grasses had crept into the landscape, care of hay bales many years ago. Odd as it sounded, due to the fact that the native plants looked like kindling, the invader plants help fuel California's huge fires when they shrivel in the dry season. The non-natives also have shallow root systems that do not prevent runoff but do choke out the native species. This garden-

ing is necessary for stream restoration because it protects valuable topsoil from running into the creek and the native plants provide food for local animal and insect species, which keep the ecosystem healthy.

We set about tearing up the naughty invasive plants. I quickly wormed my way into the Hermanas Unidas group, which was doing some of their community service hours. They were laughing and having so much fun talking about jobs, hopes for future travel, and classes that I wanted to join. We found many creepy crawlers in the grass and I pointed out an adorable tiny gray frog.

After the grass was torn up we started planting the purple needle grass, which is apparently very persnickety about how it lays in its hole. If the roots break it's dead, if it's buried too deep it suffocates, or if it's not deep enough, it dries out. Thank goodness one of the girls was the daughter of a professional gardener or we might have killed off all the grass.

I'm definitely interested to see how our grass is doing in a few weeks. Hopefully by the summer it will have grown into a big poof of vegetation (poof being a highly scientific term here – only the most precise language will do). Next week I have been invited to do water sampling with Heal the Bay. I'll try not to fall in. 

Class Act

This year, our Earth Month's reach spread all the way to central Florida, where it inspired Shaina Belsky to take her 3rd grade class at Tomoka Elementary School in Ormond Beach to the beach for a lesson in what it's meant to look like every day — clean. Congratulations to Mrs. Belsky for securing funding and time for the field trip held on Earth Day on the beach considered to be the "Birthplace of Speed" due to early car racing on the sand in the early 1900s. The class found mostly plastic items and cigarette butts, much like we do at our beach cleanups here.

