



Impr omptu



Claire Carpenter Henning – Impromptu
PYW AWARD WINNER

“It’s. Almost. Done,” Ryan, my best friend, said shortly. She poked his head out from under the metal box-thing. It was supposed to be a virtual reality machine, but to me it just looked like a large metallic closet. She had gotten the parts from a magazine order and really didn’t think it would work. Some professors from Greyton had decided to help, so they had installed some of their fancy electronics, but Ryan was still doubtful. She’s actually a bit of a pessimist, but I love her anyway. Like, as a friend of course.

The big metal closet was sitting in the Greyton science hall, which was basically a big warehouse for all the experiments and projects they had going on. They’d given us twelve square feet to keep the VR machine. Tomorrow it would be ready to test.

“So,” Ryan said, dusting off her hands and standing up. She’s tall, about 5’8”, and her long, straight, red hair just made her look even taller. “Where in time should we go tomorrow?”

“Um...” I hadn’t really thought of that.

“We won’t be able to see any people, of course, but the professors said that we could choose anywhere and they could simulate it for us.” She looked excited about this. She liked to work with the professors because she would be coming to Greyton High School next year for ninth grade, and science was one of her favorite subjects. I myself would prefer to spend more time in creative writing class than learning about rocks and minerals. Go figure.

“How about... Italy? A long time ago. Like in the time of...” I racked my brains for someone famous and cool who was from Italy. I have this weird obsession with Italy, but I never really thought about people in its past. “Leonardo Davinci!” Whoa, that was really random.

Ryan looked surprised and amused. “Ha ha! Where did that come from?”

“No idea!” We laughed as we walked arm in arm out of the warehouse and into the bright sunlight.

Ryan must have told Professor Keelsons where we wanted to go, because he knew exactly where to set it. He gave us some tips in his big, Western accent.

“All righty, girls, it’s all set. Alls you’ve gotta do is put on these here VR helmets and step into the machine. Also, just a couple of instructions before you get a’goin’. If anything goes wrong, the machine’s already set to turn off about, oh, 9:00 this evenin’. Ryan, this here’s the speaker for your ear. You’ll be able to hear us the whole time, and we’ll be a’controllin’ everything, so you don’t have to worry abouts a thing. Now, of course, you’ll both have to remember the most important thing.” He looked at us like we had done something wrong.

“What?” whispered Ryan. “What do we have to remember?”

Professor Keelson’s face broke into a wide grin. “Have fun! Ha haaa! Gotcha there, didn’t I?”

Ryan and I forced some laughter, gave each other a look, and stepped into the machine. I bucked my helmet on over my eyes. “Whoa, I can’t see anything!” It was pitch black.

I heard Ryan’s voice somewhere in the distance. “Yeah, Claire, where are you? I can’t see you, and I’m scared of the dark!”

“I’m over here, you big baby! Here, follow the sound of my voice!” I stretched out my arm and literally ran into her.

“Ow!”

“Sorry!”

“Don’t push!”

“You’re poking me!”

“GIRLS. I AM READY TO LAUNCH YOUR VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE.”

Professor Marchem sounded even more evil over a loudspeaker.

“Ow, she’s yelling right in my ear!” Ryan said, tugging out the earphone.

“Rye, what’re you doing? If you take that out, you won’t be able to hear her!”

“LAUNCHING IN... FIVE...”

“Oh, I guess you can hear her.”

“...FOUR...”

Something mechanical started to whir.

"...THREE..."

"Claire, hold me! Where are you? Oh no, I dropped the earphone!"

"...TWO..."

"Where is it?" I asked frantically.

"I think it fell down one of the vapor pipes!"

"The orange tubey thingies?"

"Yes the orange tubey thingies!!!"

"...ONE... WE HAVE LAUNCHED. WAIT... CONTACT HAS BEEN LOST... MACHINE MALFUNCTIONING... EARL, SOMETHING'S WRONG... WHAT THE?!? *Bzzzzzrp.*" The connection died.

"Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no." Ryan was hyperventilating, while all around us a noise, much like that sound at the beginning of a movie, and it's really loud. It was so loud that I couldn't hear anything but it.

Suddenly, it stopped. I felt a cool breeze around me and I could smell something... it smelled like... my mom after she eats too much garlic. Really... weird. Like... olives. I could hear Ryan next to me, whimpering over the lost earphone. The only problem was that I couldn't see anything.

"Ryan!" She had started to cry. "RYAN!!! It's of NO HELP to me if you're crying over a lost earphone. I can't see anything, and it's make me claustrophobic. I'm taking this helmet off."

"Claire, wait! If you do, you could be blinded by the lasers!"

"Well, Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore."

When I took off my helmet, I saw... Italy, complete with olive groves, hills in the background, and even... a tiny village to the far right. Good gracious, we definitely weren't in Kansas anymore. Not that we ever had been, but... ah, never mind.

"Ryan, you can take off your helmet now. You won't be blinded."

Pulling off her helmet and seeing what was around us, she said, "What the? Oh my gosh. Where are we?"

"Italy, probably lie, the 1600s." I looked around.

"Ah! Young chaps!"

"What?" I said. "What did you say, Rye?"

"Nothing. He said it!" She pointed behind my shoulder, and I turned to see... Leonardo Davinci? Only he looked about twenty, not at all like the Leonardo Davinci in our books, but somehow, just as I had imagined him.

"What-" I was utterly astounded.

"Hello there! Do you speak English? Or should I try... *bonjour? Hola? Aloha?*"

"Um, no, hello is cool," I said.

"Oh goody! Well then, I should like to ask precisely what you are doing in my olive grove?"

"I'd like to know that myself," said Ryan, rubbing her eyes.

"But," he said, "this is neither the time nor the place. I-Oh my, what terrible manners. I have forgotten to introduce myself."

"Oh, you don't need to! I know who you are! You're Leonardo Davinci! You're the smartest person to ever have lived! You're a genius! You invented water shoes and... the first airplane! And, you painted the Mona Lisa and The Last Supper!"

"Did I?" He looked delighted with himself.

"Um, yeah! Or at least, you will do all of those things."

"Well, I know who you are as well."

Ryan, who had kept quiet this whole time, wiping her tears away and trying to make it look like she hadn't been crying at all, now spoke up "You do?"

"Of course. You're Ryan Nyquist and you're Claire Henning," Leonardo Davinci said impatiently. Then, turning to Ryan, he said, "Now, what was it you were going to ask me?"

"Huh?"

"The question. That you wanted to ask me..." he made a little circling motion with his hand, sort of like a *come on now, hurry it up...*

"I wasn't going to—" and then her face brightened. I could almost see the light bulb go off above her head.

"Oh! I wanted to know how you knew. Like, how you knew all about how airplanes fly, and how gravity works."

"Ah, yes, of course. You see, I used to like olives," Leonardo Davinci said sadly. "I don't anymore, but I used to and I would throw them high in the air and catch them in my mouth. I always wondered what made them come back down. So one day, I went to the library of scrolls and read as much as I could about gravity or anything like it. I studied it very hard, until I knew more about it than anyone else."

"Whoa. I never thought of that," said Ryan. "Oh yeah, and I also wanted to tell you that they have made airplanes. In the future, I mean. Like, they have them. So. Yeah. They're pretty cool."

"Are they? I always thought that they would be. Another thing. There is much poverty here, as you can see. Over there in that village, Orsina, there are hundreds of poor people."

"Nothing has changed," I said. "That's how it still is."

"Yes, but I have an idea," he said, a wild look in his eyes. "You see, I have decided that the more I help the poor now, the less there will be in the future. So do not fear, but always help the poor."

"Okay," I said, a bit choked up actually. I know that's cheesy, but I was.

"And now," he said, "you must return. Claire, only you can get both you and Ryan back to where you belong."

"Huh? How do I?"

"Open your eyes!"

"What?"

"Open your eyes!"

"They are open!"

"Wake up, you dummy!" I opened my eyes to see my older brother, Liam, shaking me awake.

"Mom says you have to get up now. The bus is coming in, like, half an hour."

"But – wait – what?" Where's Leonardo Davinci?"

"What are you talking about? You're not asleep anymore! Gosh!"

And then I realized: it was all a dream.

Rachel Hunter – Impromptu
PYW AWARD WINNER

It was a cold, blistery Monday in the small town of Fergus Falls. Students were shuffling to their classrooms to start the new school day. Waiting in one of the many classrooms was the 5th grade teacher, Ms. Molly. She was currently sitting behind her large desk, slurping down the remains of her warm coffee. As students piled into the room, done with putting their coats, hats, and mittens away, they smelled the warm steam of coffee fill their nostrils, warming them up.

Rachel was one of the first students to sit down at her desk. She was the type that enjoyed being punctual and early. Nothing made her happier than to fill her head with knowledge.

As soon as Ms. Molly saw many students come, shivering, into the classroom, she put the empty coffee cup down onto the table, straightened out her long-sleeved sweater, and stood up, facing the class.

"Welcome Class!" Ms. Molly announced as soon as everyone was sitting in their seats. Ms. Molly was the kindest teacher in the school, and everyone enjoyed having her to teach them. She never ceased to have a warm, welcoming smile upon her face. Her shoulder-length, golden blonde hair flung joyfully across her shoulders, dancing across the many delicate features of her face. Her nose was small and pointed at the end, and she had the rosiest cheeks. Her lips were of a pale pink, and she looked like the perfect mother. Ms. Molly's joy was to teach, and she had a natural talent for this, which all of the children respected and appreciated.

"Now, where shall I begin?" Ms. Molly asked herself aloud as all of the students looked up at her expectantly with her ever-staring eyes. Rachel folded her hands neatly across the face of her desk, and leaned forward to hear every sweet word the teacher uttered. "Today we shall look back into the past, and see history at its fullest. I will be asking a couple of you questions relating to a person from history, and will ask you multiple questions from there. This will help you all to practice for upcoming assignments relating to multiple questions," Ms. Molly said, looking around the classroom with that sweet smile of hers. Her dimples were creasing pleasantly the more she smiled, which only made her look sweeter.

Everyone was sitting upright in their seats, wanting to find out about this new assignment. Rachel was one of the more excited ones. Every new thing she learned only made her feel more "grown-up," and she felt all the more appreciated.

"Now, who would like to go first?" the teacher asked, as she flung a long curl of her golden hair behind her shoulder.

Many hands shot upward into the air, but Rachel's was the quickest.

"Yes, Rachel, you may go first," Ms. Molly said, smiling.

Many of the other students groaned in disappointment, but listened cleverly.

"Okay. If you could go back to another time for one day, who would you like to meet?" Ms. Molly asked kindly, and indicated for Rachel to begin.

Rachel had not expected this kind of question, and reeled through her mind desperately for a person from the past. She knew she was taking a while to answer, and she flushed as she felt the many eyes of her peers waiting for an answer.

As Rachel thought as hard as she could, she finally found a suitable answer. "If I could go back in time for one day, I would want to meet Joan of Arc."

Many students gave a slight exclamation of surprise at this answer, for most people have never heard of such an answer. "Wonderful!" Ms. Molly cried cheerfully. "Excellent topic! Now, tell us why you would wish to meet this individual."

The classroom went dead silent, and Rachel felt the eyes fall upon her once again, but she had gained a boost of confidence within herself. She didn't take as long to think of an answer to this.

"I would like to meet Joan because she became a grand heroine! She saved all of France from English control, back in the 1400's. At the age of twelve, Joan started to hear voices telling her to save the French.

"A few years later, Joan went to the kings and told them of her visions and voices. At the age of nineteen, the kings gave Joan an army to lead by herself! Joan led her army toward victory after victory, never losing a battle.

"Even in times that seemed lost, Joan brought courage into the hearts of each individual, and therefore won many battles. Unfortunately, Joan got captured by the English, and was burned at the stake! She was only nineteen, but she had saved all of the French nation!" Rachel paused for the information to sink in, and for a touch of dramatic effect.

"Bravo!" Ms. Molly cheered as she raised her hands and clapped loudly. The class followed suit. "That was an excellent example!" the teacher exclaimed. "Wonderful! Now, if you don't mind, could you explain what you would tell Joan about life in the present, and why you would tell her this?"

So, Rachel took a deep breath and nodded. "I would tell Joan about the laws and customs of the present, because then she would know that what she did was a huge thing, and that she was punished unfairly! I would also tell her about how the French are not an independent country, so that she would know that what she did was worthwhile! Also I would explain the many techniques of war nowadays, compared to those back in her time, so that she would know how much harder life was for her in battle. When Joan fought, they had to be up close so they could use their weapons, but now you just shoot with guns from long range. There was a bigger chance of getting wounded back in the 1400's!" And with that, Rachel raised her head up proudly, feeling ultimately pleased with herself.

"A+!" Ms. Molly exclaimed, and clapped along, once again, with the rest of the class. "Yes, Joan was a savior to all of France, but died a horrible death! Nineteen is too early for one to end a life, and I wish, just as much as anybody, that her fate was not so harsh, and that it had

ended differently! Excellent job, Rachel, and I am glad you, yourself, was brave enough to stand up in front of the class to share that with us!" Ms. Molly said, and the rest of the class nodded.

"Now, who would like to go second?" the teacher asked, looking around the room for the next person. Every hand immediately went up in the air.

"My, my!" Ms. Molly exclaimed. "We sure do have a lot of volunteers! Hmm... who to choose? Ah, yes! Mike, would you like to be next?"

Mike Johanson, the shortest kid in the 5th grade, nodded his head in agreement. Many of the other children had puzzled looks about their faces. For Mike was not very social; he mostly kept to himself, and nobody knew much about him. They were all surprised when he had decided to speak in front of the class!

Ms. Molly smiled even broader, and gave him an encouraging nod. "Alright, Mike, if you could go back to another time for one day, who would you like to meet and why?"

Mike answered almost right away, which also surprised many of the students. "I would like to meet Martin Luther King, Jr." Mike started in a squeaky voice. Many of the girls who sat in front of Mike started giggling at the sound of him, but one look from the teacher and they quieted back down.

"I would choose to meet Martin because he did a great thing, not only for himself but for the whole black community. He shared his beliefs and dreams of a free country, and showed a great deal of courage for standing up to those who threw him down!"

Some of the students gaped at his outwardness and belief in the subject, but Ms. Molly just smiled all the more.

"Good point, Mike! You are right on target," Ms. Molly said. This seemed to make Mike even less afraid, and he had a defiant look in his eyes.

"Now, could you explain what you would tell him about life in the present, and tell us why, please?"

Mike nodded, and began. "I would tell him how much black people are making a difference to our government, and that some have some of the more important jobs. I would tell him this because then he could know how much he made a difference. I would also say that without him, there would be slaves still today, and that most of the people now are not racist. I would tell him this, so yet again, he could know that he made a great impact. He made a difference, not only to our country, but to the whole of the world!" There Mike stopped, with a grin across his own face. He seemed to feel as if he made a great point to all of his peers, and everyone immediately burst out into a loud cheer of applause.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" Ms. Molly cheered to Mike, and to the rest of the class. "I am very much proud of you all, and am so happy that we have found those of you who like to share with others what you know, and can be brave, and courageous all on your own. I appreciate each and everyone one of you for standing up for what you think today, and for sharing this with all of us!" As Ms. Molly said this, she glanced hurriedly at her watch.

"Good gracious! It's half past ten o'clock! You lot had better get your lunches and head down to the cafeteria. When you get back, I shall have a treat for all of you!"

So, the children gathered up their lunches and skipped merrily off toward the cafeteria. They all felt the appreciation soar through them, flooding their very hearts, until that was all they could feel. Each and every one of them felt as if they actually lived in the time of the people from the past, and saw what Rachel and Mike had explained. It had ultimately been a good class period, and each of them had thoroughly enjoyed it.

Emily Klump – Impromptu
PYW AWARD WINNER

It is astounding how often one thinks with obvious partiality to the concept of a time machine. And generally, when one probes deeper into their way of thinking, it is found to be for superficial reasons. Whether it be for a mistake that was made, this is a blemish on the mind, or even for things such as a test that one didn't study for, the first thing that surfaces is as follows: what could I have done differently? In my opinion, the majority of the population holds that characteristic. And it is quite unremarkable that such a thing would hold true. My whole life, I've been one of those people. I understood very little except perfection. But now I realize, given the choice of turning back time, that superficiality holds little sway over my decisions. I believe that if I ever had the option, I would not go back to a day when I didn't ace a test, or even a time when a certain, highly influential people still lived, such as Princess Diana. The truth is that however great the intention, I would gain very little in ways of knowledge, because these people, and times, simply didn't pertain to me. Perfection is a short-lived thing. It is near impossible to fully achieve, and even upon gaining it, the work involved to hold such a position swamps even the most devoted. Such as it is, given the choice, I would go back to meet my great grandfather.

His name was Earl Lutz. He enjoyed fruits (watermelon especially) and the race of a good baseball game. That right there is about the extent of my knowledge about his life. The rest of my judgment about his character was based chiefly on others' opinions. I knew that my grandmother adored him, and that he helped to form her to the amazing, strong-willed person I know today. My mom always enjoyed visiting him, and he consistently kept mini Dove bars waiting in his freezer for the next time we would visit. He loved chocolate as well, which in itself gained him some merit with me. And I know that he loved my brother, very, very much. So much that it felt like he didn't love me.

Every year on my brother's birthday he would arrive with my grandparents in town and a great big watermelon under his arm. My brother, being the fruit lover that he is, delighted in his gifts. And my great grandpa sure knew how to pick them. But it always hurt when he didn't know what to get me. I can't even recall anymore if I even got a present. All I knew was that the pain I felt was meant to be a silent one. Whenever I brought up the topic with my parents, they assured me that I was as dear to his heart as any of his great-grandchildren. They attempted to console me by telling me that he never was quite as good with girls. According to them, he just didn't know how to express his love with me. I felt differently, though. How hard could it be for one to bestow a hug upon their granddaughter, a few words of kindness? Resolved that my case was right, I resorted to an odd state whenever my great grandpa was around. I would smile and say all the right words. But if one looked really closely, you would see the smile never quite reached my eyes.

A few years later, I learned the harsh truth. He was dying; the great-grandfather I never quite knew had only a few months left in this world. It was a hard thing to deal with, to be sure. My bitterness seemed a horrible overreaction now, and I committed myself to being a doting companion. Yet the feeling never quite left, and even upon his deathbed, he seemed to show favoritism for my brother. Andrew left with a special jug and the feeling of being loved. I, on the other hand, took leave of the hospital with a heavy heart, filled with grief and regret.

He died that night. Earl Lutz, the grandfather I never knew, was no taken away from me forever. I cried for the passing of a life, but I could not say that I cried from sorrow.

My parents were overwhelmingly grateful for the chance to say goodbye. I was too, but I knew that in a certain dark corner of my heart that I was angry. It seemed that I never really knew whom I was saying goodbye to.

When I think back upon my great grandfather, it is with sadness. It is a heartless being that would not regret the passing of a life. However, it is also with shame. I find myself wishing that I could sob for him, but I cannot. I loved my great-grandfather, Earl Lutz, but I mostly loved that picture that was drawn out for me. That is why, given the chance to meet with a person from the past, I would meet with him. I would tell him how my grandmother is doing, how strong she took his death, so that he might feel proud of the woman he has raised. I would depict how the thought of Dove bars reminded me of him, so that he would know that he is not forgotten. But most of all, I would voice the grief I have been holding in my heart. I would attempt to build

bridges where there were once only gaps. I would ask him if he loved me, and tell him honestly that I do. My utter remorse for his death is held by only one thing, forgiveness. I need to know that he had loved me, and I need to tell him that I feel the same.

It is my greatest belief that tears are the best cure. They wash away sorrow, and they leave a person knowing that there is a clean slate, a place to begin again. I have always loved my great-grandfather, but I need to be able to cry to truly believe.

Veronica Rosand – Impromptu
PYW AWARD WINNER

Courage. A small word, but filled with meaning. Sometimes, I find myself lacking in courage. Courage to stand up for someone, courage to stand against the crowd. Courage to be different, even though it's not the easiest thing. Sometimes, it's the hardest. St. Veronica had that courage. If I could travel back to another time and meet whomever I please, St. Veronica would be on the top of my list.

St. Veronica was just an ordinary girl, with extraordinary audacity. When Christ was taken to be crucified, the soldiers replaced Christ's crown of heaven with a crown of thorns. Because of that, blood was pouring into his face. The crowd had no pity. They saw what was happening and spit upon him and mocked him. St. Veronica looked upon him with different eyes. She knew what was happening was wrong. She took a leap of faith and stepped out of the crowd. She wiped Christ's face. Such a little act of mercy resulted in a tremendous act of love. She dared to do what no other did. She had the courage.

I would want to meet St. Veronica for quite a number of reasons. She could really teach me a lesson on stepping outside of the box. Not just thinking, but actually stepping. Doing what's right, even if it means something bad for you. St. Veronica had more than courage, though. She had humility. I mean, how many people do you know who would be willing to wipe the blood and sweat off of somebody's face? Not many. With that humbleness and courage, she also had love and faith. She didn't know what was going to happen to her. What if the soldiers took her to prison? She didn't know. Instead of guessing, she put her faith in God, and simply did a great act of kindness. Wow, what a girl!

I would tell St. Veronica a lot. I would tell her about myself. I would tell her about my family, my hobbies... but I would tell her more than that. I would tell her how sometimes, the world is like that crowd of mockers watching Christ being crucified. Some of us don't even know what's going on, but fear overcomes us and we just do what the person beside us is doing. Some of us know what the right thing to do is, but are too scared to do it. Sometimes pressure is put on us from others that we give into. Normally, it's what we believe in that gets the short straw. I would tell her that the reason we don't step out of the crowd is fear. The fear of not being liked. The fear of being different. The fear of being alone. A world like ours needs more of what St. Veronica had in her heart.

I would tell her this because it needs to be heard. I know we hear at school all the time that one person can make a difference. That's so true. It's just really hard to be that one person. I'm sure St. Veronica already knows all of this and is looking at us from above. I'm positive she prays for our courage every day.

There are also people that do display acts of courage every day, big or small. Each one makes a difference and inspires us to follow that example. You know that saying, "Go with the flow"? Well, I'm sure St. Veronica would be the first to tell us not to! Dare to be different, stand up for others! Have courage! Step out of the crowd! Make the world a better place just because you exist.

Courage. A small word, but filled with a lot of meaning.