

First Line Honorable Mention  
Heather M. Haynes

### Slow Down

The contents of my mother's purse spilled to the floor. My hands shook as I searched for it. I needed it- *craved* it. My legs burned and begged for oxygen. My mouth gasped for air. My chest heaved in and out, trying, and failing to breathe. Wheezing, my body screamed for relief. I was having the most severe asthma attack I had ever experienced and I was home alone. I NEEDED my inhaler- fast. My head felt weightless and my hands and feet felt numb. My vision grew fuzzy and I prepared myself for the worst. There was no one to help me. Tears rolled down my cheeks and my throat grew sore from gasping for the air I knew would not come. My shoulders were tense, my back stiff, and my body shook vigorously. Fluids rattled in my airways. I was choking- suffocating. I was drowning. I didn't want to die this way.

I gave up searching in my mom's bag and tried to slow down. I could not find my medicine. I was so scared. This had never happened before. "What do I do?" I demanded of myself, not really expecting an answer. But despite everything, despite feeling numb from a lack of oxygen, despite shaking and crying and heaving and gasping for air, despite being moments away from passing out, or worse, an answer came. Outside, a neighborhood child on his tricycle tried to catch up with his older brother on two-wheeled bike, yelling, "Hey! Slow *down*!" These words echoed in my head and I knew the little boy was right. So I sat down on the floor and completely focused on slow, deep breathing. Slow, deep breathing. Slow.

It was so hard. I needed to fill my lungs so badly, but I had to force myself to breathe slowly. I felt like I was suffocating myself. Closing my eyes, I pictured the ocean. Beige sand speckled with seaweed and pebbles. Clear blue water, breaking into gentle waves, flowing in and out, long, slow, deep waves; long, slow, deep breaths. The muscles in my back began to soften and my shoulders lowered. I stopped shaking. I was still wheezing and could not get air fast enough, but I was becoming more relaxed. Each symptom that I could control slowly left. My chest relaxed and moved as slowly as the calm ocean waves. The air flowed as slow and light as a relaxed ocean breeze. I was so relaxed; I almost forgot I was restricted from breathing.

Although my asthma symptoms remained, I was now relaxed enough to act rationally and go find my inhaler. I found it within minutes, used it, and called my parents to come home. From that day forth, I smile when my little neighbor rides by on his tryke. He will never know it, but he just may have saved my life.

*Heather is a sophomore from Kingston. She has enjoyed creative writing and art since childhood and is always looking for ways to express herself through the arts. She has high expectations for herself, which she fully expects to achieve. Heather values her family and friends more than anything in the world.*

