

# Classroom Snapshot

GARY EARL ROSS

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, Just Buffalo and the CEPA Gallery have joined forces to form Writing with Light, which provides disposable cameras to students and encourages them to shoot pictures which they'll later use as inspiration for their creative writing. The piece below was written in an afterschool program for high school students. CEPA photographer Nikki Gorman had provided the students with cameras, basic photography instruction, and darkroom time before I joined them to structure a writing activity. The group was small, eight or nine students. Having enjoyed their photography field trips and darkroom experience, they were all reluctant to write, which was too much like schoolwork. So I made a bet with them. If, as a group, they could make more words in ten minutes than I could from the letters in "educationally," I would give each of them a dollar. If they lost the bet, they would have to write. They lost and kept their end of the bargain. I read to them two or three examples of my own flash fictions and discussed story elements in their pictures. Then they pointed out details in their own work and the work of others. Finally, we began to write (I always write with students).

Nafesah Mohamad was a freshman who sat in the middle of the classroom with three other girls, all teasing each other and giggling. Her black and white photo was of a dog with glowing eyes in a shadowy room.

NAFESAH MOHAMAD  
McKinley High School

Mary wakes up and looks for her dog Fluffy. She wonders where Fluffy is, so she looks in the kitchen, the bathroom, and the living room. Fluffy seems to be nowhere. As she keeps looking, she senses a bark from the shadows outside. As she looks out the window, she shouts, "Fluffy, where are you? Come here, boy." She runs and skips as fast as she can, reaching out for Fluffy.

As soon as she steps out of the house she hears another bark near an empty path. The leaves are swaying as the birds chirp but Fluffy is nowhere to be found. The wind is blowing Mary's hair and gives her a sudden chill. She is staring in the air and still following the bark. She looks around, wondering what this path leads to. As curiosity vibrates from her ears she follows the path.

"Oh my, this is a long walk." She walks and walks. Her tummy grumbles and there is still no sign of Fluffy. She wanders on the path and again there is another bark. She quickly runs toward it, as if it is the only bark she will ever hear so she must chase it.

When she stops running, she sees this huge house with spider webs and moldy chairs, dusty and dark. As she wonders if she should look inside to see if her dog is there, again there is a bark. She hears noise inside the house. As she steps toward the door, there is a creak, and the door swings open and she sees Fluffy sitting next to a shattered mirror.