

Published September 21st, 2016

An Artist's Prompt

Submitted by Charlie Keohane



First place LYAS writing category winner John Kalil Photo provided

Every year, the teenagers who run the Lafayette Youth Arts Society host a writing and photography contest for middle schoolers, arranging prompts, judges, monetary prizes and an awards ceremony. The contest has flourished over the past years, and has attracted hundreds of budding artists to submit entries.

John Kalil is no exception.

After two years of receiving honorable mentions, John, who was an eighth-grader at the time, claimed first place in the writing category of the third annual LYAS Writing and Photography Contest at the Lafayette Library Community Hall on May 15. The hall was filled with proud parents and excited teens gathered to celebrate the winners.

When asked if LYAS sparked his passion for writing, John responded, "I was somewhat interested in writing when I was a lot younger, but when Linnae [former LYAS member] came into my sixth grade English class to talk about a brand new writing contest, I immediately knew I wanted to enter and started my entry that night."

John said it was not only rewarding to win first place after receiving honorable mentions in the first two years of the contest, but to read his first entry and see how much he has grown as a writer since then.

The winner of the \$250 grand prize and a book shared some insights he gained through his participation in the contest. "Don't be afraid to step outside of your writing comfort zone," John said. "My first two entries were fantasy/adventure stories, but only after I stepped out of the box and wrote more of an emotional piece did I win. Never be afraid to switch things up in your writing."

This was John's last year participating in the contest, as it is only open to middle schoolers. Although he said he is sad, John is grateful for the experiences LYAS has given him and plans on continuing writing in high school.

At the ceremony, other winners read their stories or presented their photos to an audience of peers and parents before claiming prizes of money, books and other gifts.

"We're really fortunate to live in a town that supports creativity," said Uma Unni, founder of the LYAS. "We have so many supporters and sponsors from the community - for example, some of our main donors are the Sunrise Rotarians, the Lafayette Community Foundation, Lori Legler of Alain Pinel Realtors and The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. On top of that, there are several local businesses who have really supported us over the years, like Pizza Antica and Patxi's and Powell's Sweet Shop."

LYAS plans to release the prompts for the Fourth Annual LYAS Writing and Photography Contest on Nov. 14. Middle schoolers are encouraged to enter, and express their creativity and passion through photos and words. For more information, visit lyas.org.

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