

Finding the Writer's Voice

Orinda's 2014 Youth Ink winners

By Laurie Snyder



Three of Orinda's youngest authors could barely contain their excitement April 24 when learning they were the winners of Youth Ink 2014. From left: Lindsay Kornguth (second place), Sarah Inouye (first place), Katie Lyons (third place). Photos Ohlen Alexander

"All serious daring starts within." – Eudora Welty, "On Writing"

A few voices rang strongly through the Orinda Library Auditorium on April 24. Most were barely audible, forcing parents, teachers, friends, and neighbors to lean forward, straining valiantly to catch snippets of the powerful prose penned by 13 sixth to eighth grade students. Participants in this year's Youth Ink Writing competition, many of the girls present had dared to address soul-shattering grief and the growth that comes from rising above loss – the loss of a pet, a peer's respect, one's physical functioning, friends and loved ones.

"Then I remembered all the teasing, bullying," wrote one. "Life can't go on forever, but death sure can," observed another. The softest of voices seemed to pack the most punch. Adults in the nearly full auditorium found themselves meditating on the meaning of life.

Youth Ink is organized each year by the Orinda Junior Women's Club (www.orindajuniors.org), recipient of Orinda's 2013 Volunteer of the Year Award for efforts to provide volunteer support and raise funds annually for a diverse range of East Bay programs, including aging and end-of-life services, hospitals, the Educational Foundation of Orinda, Orinda Action Day, Haley's Run for a Cause, the Lamorinda Fourth of July Parade, Shelter, Inc., and STAND! Against Domestic Violence.

Any one of those causes would be

laudable enough for any respected public service organization, but in many ways, the Youth Ink competition is one of the most important programs presented each year by the Juniors because the contest not only helps emerging writers to find that elusive voice inside, but enables each of those same authors to courageously stand before their peers and confidently say, "My voice matters. I won't be silenced."

The guest speaker for the 2014 awards ceremony was Orinda resident Tamara Ireland Stone, author of the companion novels "Time Between Us" and "Time After Time" (tamarairlandstone.com). Currently working on her third novel, her work is published by Disney-Hyperion, and now appears in more than 20 countries. "I write," she said, "because, throughout my life, words have been my best friends." She spoke of the power of words to save readers, and the responsibility of writers to use their skills to better, rather than weaken the world.

Youth Ink also receives support each year from the Friends of the Orinda Library, Orinda Books, Orinda Community Foundation, and the Orinda Library. Judges in 2014 were Hummingwords founder and Amherst Writers and Artists Method workshop leader Cynthia Leslie-Bole; 2013 California Book Award winner Melanie Light; Intuitive Writing Project founder Elizabeth Perlman; and Jana Rains, author of "Muriel Robbin's Fact Book."

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Youth Ink Winners 2014

- First Prize: Sarah Inouye – "Listen"
- Second Prize: Lindsay Kornguth – "A Prisoner in My Own Body"
- Third Prize: Katie Lyons – "Why Did I Listen"
- Honorable Mention (alphabetical order):
Isabella Bianchi – "Listen to My Heart"
Alexandra Gallagher – "Walking the Stairs to Death"

- Sage Kang – "Don't Judge a Fish"
- Janet Lee – "For the World to Hear"
- Angeline Liu – "Learning to Listen"
- Alexandra Reinecke – "Claim on Forever"
- Hannah Simmonds – "Goodbye"
- Lauren Staelin – "Heartstrings"
- Lynn Wilder – "Goodbye"
- Zoe Zabetian – "The Silent Room"



The talented writing tribe of Youth Ink 2014. From left, back row: Isabella Bianchi, Lindsay Kornguth, Katie Lyons, Tamara Ireland Stone (young adult author and Youth Ink awards guest speaker), Alexandra Reinecke, Lynn Wilder, Janet Lee, Angeline Liu, Hannah Simmonds; front: Alexandra Gallagher, Sarah Inouye, Sage Kang, Lauren Staelin; not pictured: Zoe Zabetian.