

## Fresh views arise from poets' work

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff Writer

ROCHESTER — One area poet asked where the sky ends for humanity and discovered a rainbow whose hues are made up of friends and at whose ends lies a pot containing harmonious dreams.

Another poet, looking at humanity, saw nothing but people's own foolishness, expressed in a murderous indifference that eventually finds a home within the poet himself.

Between these two young writers stretches a span called adolescence, but it's a gap bridged by a genuine concern for others that expresses itself on paper.

Eleven-year-old Collene Burns, a parishioner at St. Margaret Mary's in Irondequoit and soon to be a sixth-grader at Hosea Rogers Middle School, recently received honorable mention for a poem — "Where Does the Sky End?" — she entered in a creativity contest sponsored by the National Parent-Teacher Association.

Sylvester "Chip" Gause, a 1990 graduate of Bishop Kearney High School, had his poem, "Fools," published in *Poetic Voices of America, A New Collection of Poems in the English Language*,

*What fools are we;  
destroying innocent, unborn life knowing  
we are wrong.*

*My soul burns with;  
malice filled towards all "humanity" like  
an all consuming flame eating away at the  
world.*

*What a fool I am ...  
... for I hate.*

Excerpt from "Fools" by Sylvester "Chip" Gause

distributed by Sparrowgrass Poetry Forum, Inc.

Both poems touch on the problems facing society's forgotten people, including the homeless and the poor, and the values embodied by reaching out to those people. But each piece takes a different approach to resolving the issues it raises.

Collene's optimistic poem drew its title from the NPTA's contest assignment, which challenged students to create works of art examining the question, "Where does the sky end?" She answered that question by posing it to herself, an elderly woman, a poor person, several handicapped people, and then addressed the question to the rest of the human race.

"If we could make this world better and get along as friends/Together we could see the rainbow at the sky's end," she wrote.

Chip, on the other hand, saw no rainbow

— only the eternal flame of hate consuming humanity. "What fools we are; trying to harness energies out of our control ... but not being able to feed the poor," he intoned.

The two poets recounted the circumstances that led up to their works' creation.

Collene originally wanted to make a mural depicting a man walking down a road as scenes of his life flashed by. But pressed for time to meet the contest's deadline last January, she instead put pen to paper in a last-minute effort that has paid off with growing recognition.

About a half-million students, in grades kindergarten through 12, competed in the contest, which was split up into four categories. Collene vied for top honors in the grades four-through-six literary category, which comprised about 30,000



entrants.

Last March, her poem won first place in the six-county Genesee Valley Division of the PTA, and then went on to take top honors in New York state. She eventually received an honorable mention on the national level, and will receive a World Book Annual from World Book, Inc. *Reader's Digest* will also donate a book to her school with a nameplate honoring her inside.

Chip noted that he originally wrote his poem to enter Sparrowgrass' "Awards of Poetic Excellence" contest. Although he did not bring home any prizes, he noted that winning contests wasn't his main motivation to write.

"(Writing) is great to help me release stress," he said. "Some people would go jogging. I write poetry."

Likewise, Collene writes for the pure enjoyment of creating. She commented that she has been interested in books and writing since she first learned to read.

"When I was little, one of my friends used to come and ask me to play ... and I'd say, 'Let me just finish this chapter,' and I'd finish the whole book."

She and her parents, David and Margaret, were amazed at the reception their daughter's poem received. "I was excited and felt glad that my poem touched so many people too," Collene said.

Collene's mother repeatedly noted the encouragement her daughter has received from her success in the contest.

"I wish every kid had the opportunity at this age to get positive reinforcement for writing something like this that talks about helping each other," Margaret Burns said.

The family reported receiving letters and phone calls from around the country commenting on the poem's content. Collene's uncle, Father Elmer Schmidt, pastor of St. Ann's Parish in Hornell, even used the poem in his Pentecost Sunday homily and printed it in the parish bulletin, they said.

Another relative, Collene's aunt, Eileen Schmidt, figured in the poem's creation, Collene said. "Where does the sky end? ... For Eileen, my retarded aunt/To be able to

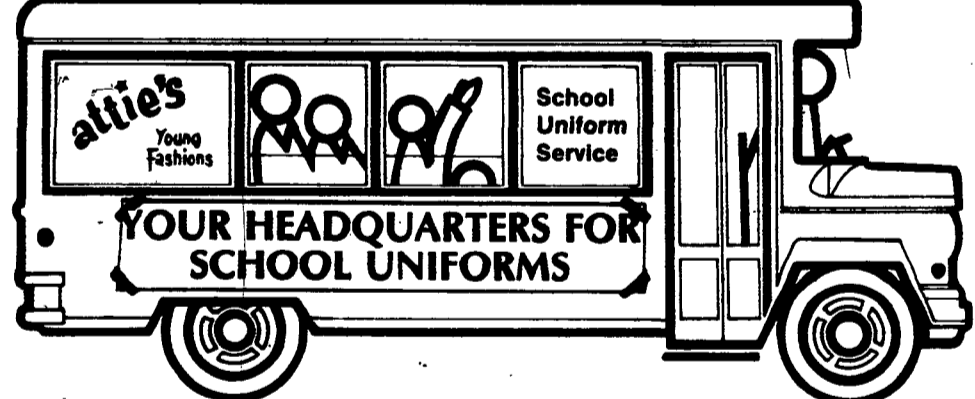
Continued on page 15



*Where does the sky end?  
For the elderly, it's a place with no suffering  
And everyone is very loving.  
To stroll down the lane  
Without a wheelchair or a cane.*

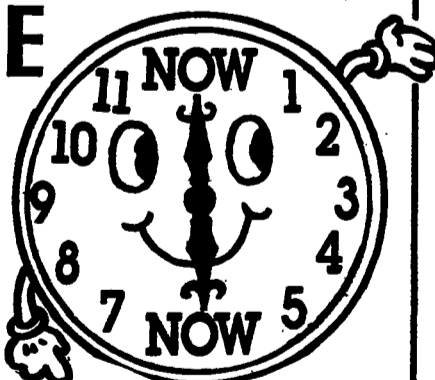
*Where does the sky end?  
For the blind to see autumn leaves falling  
And the deaf, to hear a cardinal or robin calling.  
For Eileen, my retarded aunt  
To be able to think fast, which she can't.*

Excerpt from "Where Does the Sky End?" by Collene Burns



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