

# If We Had a Living Wage



As part of our neverending work to highlight every person's right to the dignity of a Living Wage, the Tompkins County Workers' Center held the *Living Wage Visioning Contest* in 2016, co-sponsored by the Tompkins County Office of Human Rights, Sustainable Tompkins, and the Multicultural Resource Center. The Contest sought works of art from workers in our County on the theme: "how might your

life and the life of your family change if you made a Living Wage?" The people entering the Contest were able to submit a work of art in ANY format. We got 18 excellent entries, most of which you can view in this booklet. Some entries are electronic – a visual dance and a song – which you can experience in full through the links we provide to Youtube.

We had 11 judges, including myself, who spent many hours sifting through the Contestants' entries. It was a painful and difficult judgment process for all the judges to try to rank these creations, and we honor them all here. We hope that you enjoy them as much as we do, and that you'll join our campaign to make a Living Wage the standard for everyone.

— **PETE MEYERS, TOMPKINS COUNTY WORKERS' CENTER COORDINATOR**

"It was an incredible honor to be asked to be a judge for this contest, not because I thought it would be easy but because I was being asked to do what we all need to do, be an active witness. We need to open our eyes and see the people who slave away at minimum wage jobs for endless hours and still can't feed their families, get an advanced education to move ahead, or pay all of their bills.

"Each person who submitted an entry took time from what little time and energy they have to share in complete honesty and vulnerability what their

lives are like and how earning a living wage would feel like freedom, enough to secure their sense of dignity. We are entering into what may be even more austere times for our hard working minimum wage citizens and we are going to have to fight even harder in government to protect what safety nets we can and as a community we will need to step up and see that we are all family and we live on the backs of each other.

"We need to figure out each for ourselves how much we really need and how much we can share. I think that a lot of people

like to write off the lowest class economically. They choose to be there, or they are lazy. What the TCWC has been able to show with this event is what we all know in our hearts to be true: that all of us are the same, all of us have the same desires; all of us have the same ambitions; all of us have the same hope to be treated as a human with respect. These 18 entries express this so eloquently and I hope that everyone's take a moment to read them and then joins together to take part in a community where everyone has a voice and a place."

— **ANNA KELLES, TOMPKINS COUNTY LEGISLATOR, DISTRICT 2**

With the exception of 1st Prize Winner Leslie Prunty's *My World Is Very Small*, which appears in this paper's center spread, the entries we received appear in alphabetical order, by author.

Media inquiries and requests for additional copies of this publication (or for permission to reprint these works) can be addressed to the Tompkins County Workers Center at (607) 269-0409 or [TCWRH@tcworkerscenter.org](mailto:TCWRH@tcworkerscenter.org).

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# Living Wage Song

TERESA BEHAN

If I had a living wage  
Maybe I could afford some new water  
One that isn't fracked or flaming down  
If I had a living wage  
I'd be telling Trump to go to the border  
I'd be telling Clinton to get out of town  
If I had a living wage  
Maybe I could feed my dog  
Maybe and I could feed my kids  
Maybe if I had  
A living wage  
Maybe I could have my own place  
to live  
But right now things aren't so very good  
I struggle, struggle all the time  
Me and my friends you know, we

All feel the same  
Everybody needs some time  
If we had a living wage  
We'd have a better life  
We'd tell the man just what it's like  
Maybe then we'd all drive electric cars  
Maybe then we could see the stars  
Maybe then we'd have solar homes  
Maybe we wouldn't have to work our  
fingers to the bone  
If we had a living wage  
A living wage x2  
If I had a living wage  
I wouldn't have to try like that  
Maybe I could put a garden in just for fun  
If I had a living wage

Listen to it at  
[youtube.com/watch?v=HEHArLuEk0o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEHArLuEk0o)

I would smile maybe more  
I know the people need it too  
Don't you?  
Me and you x3  
Need a living wage  
Living wage x7  
Oh this county's built on principles  
Resources to be renewed  
I'd like to see your daughter have a  
new pair of shoes  
I'd like to lose these blues  
Oh hell with a living wage  
A living wage x2

## Trippsart

RICHARD BROCK, SARAH KORMAN, AND CORRY WIGGLE

(Narrative submission with Trippsart, visual media)

My idea is that as long as money is the authority in the world "A living wage," will continue to be an oxymoron. I have developed a technique that creates an image I describe as a fractal. With manifestation as the motivation to use my idea, even if the fractal is not the desired product. I imagined a task, washing the dishes, that must be done, and I said "How can I do this necessary, mundane, task and, at the same time get .... (enter desire here)." What was created was "the dot." I started doing art with a pencil and a blank piece of paper, what I did was, I covered the paper in little dots and I started recognizing images that appeared three dimensional. I then realized that my dot would always be different than other peoples, so I started experimenting with asking other people to help me with my dot art, to both contrast and compare. I decided that this form of expression was what I liked and wanted to do. A revelation came to me about the quality of the image; that I could increase the quality of the image, to an even more pleasing image, if I would try connecting one dot to another, to my pleasure it worked. Along that same line of thought I started connecting the lines together, this new creation being called a "Figure," then the product of the connection of the lines, "the figure," I would connect with another of the same with a straight line. This creates what I call a "Big One." At this point, connecting the newly created "Big One," again with another "Big One," this being the last connection, creating what I describe as a "House." After these connections have been made,

creating lines between these "houses" will result in geometric patterns that I decided to put color in and Trippsart was created. I call the art "Trippsart" because my friends call me Trip. Putting down in words the process required to complete this sequence can be very difficult, the actual process, as can be seen with a demonstration, is "So easy a five year old could do it." The reason I believe this is relevant to a living wage is that with my idea an original piece of art is created EVERY TIME.

My experience with the dot has convinced me of extra-terrestrial life, so far as, I believe that every time a dot is made in this spirit, these extra-terrestrials profit. Describing these extra-terrestrials as some sort of fungi from space. With every dot and line, mastery over the fungus is created resulting in new fractals every time. What I would like to do is recreate society using the dot in a similar fashion as we use currency today. The reason my idea is so cool is that when done the right way it creates water, as well as all of the other wonderful things it does, with a little imagination, all of the "the other wonderful things it does," can be almost anything. To me, the dot is a contract. The ET's have agreed to help me however they can, so by dotting for me, you get benefits from same aliens.

If you haven't seen the movie Star Wars this next part will not make much sense until you do; the dot is a link, for lack of a better term, to the Dark Side of the force. This process of "dotting" creates what might be defined as a pyramid scheme, I



would be at the top, and then the first person that I got to dot for me being next down on the pyramid and so on as the progression of people in the world create their own dots. The revelation I have had from the dark side describes what the pyramid looks like, with the original dot, the individuals tier on the pyramid is created, then the first dot-to-dot line creates a chair on that level of the tier. The next step being, connecting two lines together, with a straight line, making a table with the chair. The third step is the most difficult and also the second to last step of the sequence, connecting the newly created "Figure" with another of the same likeness, creating a bookshelf to go with the chair and table. The last step is the combination of the product of the third step, the "Big One" with another like itself, again with a straight line; which then in turn creates a staircase going up to the next level of the pyramid, connecting you to your Dark Master. I am entering this contest with this idea because of what an impact it has had on my life, and I believe that this contest may provide me with the much needed opportunity to get some exposure to the world.

I am entering this contest with two partners, the breakdown of the "Trippsart," structure of influence and control of resources goes: Trip 60%, Sarah 25% and Cory, 16%. I realize that the math in that equation doesn't quite add up, but with Trippsart miracles happen every day.

# Living Wage

SHONNTAY BUTLER

What is this thing that they call the living wage, when families can barely maintain?

Mothers become single while fathers keep leaving trails of despair; forcing mothers to lose their mental frame!

Lost sleep over little feet's...

Lack of memory due to the fact they have to eat.

Seconds become minutes; minutes become hours; hours become days of lost time without sleep!

Lo sign Public Assistance and the decrease in Food Stamps causes my bills to add up!

With rent, electric and needing more eats; combination of clothing and basic needs I'm staring at defeat!

You expect so much when there is nothing to give... Then wonder why people continue to have kids!

Some say it's easier to over populate and live off the system, than it is to fill out a simple job application.

How could they make it on their own? The system seems to be forcing people to give up!

"Damed if you do OR be Damned if you don't!"

How is this helping a single mother on Public Assistance with four kids? So again, I ask **what is this thing they call "living wage"!**

They say dream of a better future! Mine's include a better job, better house, and better car!

They say strive until I meet that destination but lack of child supervision continues to cause roadblocks!

I'm tired of flipping the same burgers I flipped yesterday; feeling underpaid and underappreciated! Working every day and still can't afford to pay my rent! It's time I consider full time assistance from the government! All four kids will have something to eat but mentally I've accepted defeat!

Lost feelings like I'm stuck in a maze; back breaking decisions which ultimately affects children for days! I heard this saying "it takes a village to raise kids" why does it feel like my village is against me? Is this a set-up or test of my humility?

# If I Made a Living Wage

ELLIOTT DELINE

If I made a living wage  
I think that I could disengage  
The guilt I've felt for being alive  
And doing what I must to survive.

The time wasted, the sickening rage  
Uncivil servants in my face  
Accusations, threats, and lies  
Profits from my teary eyes

My mother's silence  
My father's shame  
The intergenerational pain  
"We pulled ourselves up, why  
can't you?"  
"A college degree should get  
you through."

Set aside material needs  
What I want is Dignity  
But in addition, let me see...

(If I made a living wage...)

I would pay my share of rent  
Repay those from whom I'm leant

I could afford a therapist  
For my mental health laundry list

Henceforth, I'd have less PTSD  
Fewer nightmares and anxieties

I could go for coffee with new friends  
And also afford my medicines

Maybe I could get a guitar  
Or even, dare I say, a car?  
A couch that isn't falling apart  
Supplies with which to make some art

I'd get a lawyer, who isn't free  
And sue DSS for harassing me  
And Sally Mae for swindling me  
And transphobic employers for  
firing me

I'd also save for a kayak or two  
Or maybe just a big canoe  
So we could go and have a  
good time  
As far as I know, that isn't a crime

I would never have to fill out forms  
Prove I'm poor enough for alms  
Or be accused I lie and whine  
When I try to claim what's  
legally mine

I'd keep writing books, and with  
more promotion  
My sales would really pick up motion  
I'd create my own  
self-publishing collective  
For trans and queer writers who are  
also rejected

I would travel to places where I  
could swim  
And build my cats a jungle gym  
I'd be able to just relax and chill  
And buy the foods that don't make  
me ill

Yes, If I made a living wage  
I think that money could assuage  
The peach of mind I've  
been deprived  
And maybe then I'd truly thrive.

# The 15 Dollar Dream

CHRIS GEORGARDOUDAKIS

When I go out in public each day

I think myself smart and in my own way – a good decent man.

But for show right now, I don't have much to put forth. Though

I want that for me and each family friend to somehow

Earn a "Living Wage".

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If I could make that grade as soon as they would – I'd feel

Happy and satisfied. Now, I'd be respectful. Outside respected. Oh my! Oh my!

My esteem would wave high and for sure my work attitude – be better directed.

Today, in my mind I'd do extra and for each task complete with the

Thank you – my response would not be neglected.

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When break-time comes I'd sit politely socializing – both checking messages

And chit-chatting-with others. First about our job duties

And work orders. Then, on my time happily concerned – I'd phone family

With plans. Or message my children to check about school.

As this I would now be able to afford to do. It's the 15 dollar dream. Inside.

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After lunch and after all breaks I'd know the game plan.

My mind would stay positive and my attitude focused – concentrating

To finish my job. As my now respected attitude and sense of detail

Finally, finally is rewarded with pay! Then if staff finds somethign

I've forgotten to do or my mistake, I'd say – I'd certainly do it your way.

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Now shift over I'd be able to stop and breathe. Looking around outside

I'd see a life ahead. Not misty and iffy but real as I'd have money

With which to lie. As I had been ruling things out, I now could buy

Something extra to eat or take the children somewhere to do.

Or save money for what I think I could do again – with someone elite.

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So, in the end, with shoulders high and an honest smile on my face

I feel a sense of pride as I'm making a "Living Wage". A job with pay at a union wage.

One to like and keep. A family lifestyle I'm really thankful for where I can clothe

And feed my three. All from an employer who now respects my work sweat. All day standing

And bending my knees. My wage! My wage! I feel good inside. The 15 dollar dream

# a eulogy for momma

JOHN GUNN

everyday I saw momma wake up at 5:45

pa sat for toast at 6 and she'd iron her black & white uniform

in only the way she could lips pressed-

toes curled-

bangs perfectly straight-

she wouldn't come home until midnight

every.single.day

\*\*\*\*\*

and I miss[ed] momma every.single.day

\*\*\*\*\*

sneeze. Sniffle-a-choo.

Mommas bones became brittle

her smile faded

her eyes depened

& she knew.

\*\*\*\*\*

The minutes passed by faster-when she could sit up

but slower when blood poured from her mouth

tubes were in and out of her unmentionables.

\*\*\*\*\*

And pa sat by her till midnight every.single.day

& then momma was no more.

\*\*\*\*\*

pa comes out his room-every morning for toast-

at 5:45 now

and i wonder

what those extra 15 minutes were for when momma was still here

## 3RD PRIZE WINNER (2-WAY TIE)

# Living Wage and Reclaiming My Humanity

STEPHANIE HARRIS

"Every time I hear the door opening, I feel the person coming into the restaurant and taking a piece of me". I work at Mehaks Indian Cuisine, located in Ithaca, NY and I make \$7.25 an hour-which is about half of what the proposed living wage is for Ithaca. My co-workers, Heidi, said the aforementioned quotation when musing on how she felt during a Friday night shift. At first, I was taken aback that she said such a claim. As a server, it's engrained into the way you think that you just have to accept the flow of customers that come in on any particular night. You don't question any of the pain you feel in your body from the long hours and various tasks that you have to do, because it becomes an accepted part of your lifestyle.

But there is a certain danger than comes with this complacency. You become your own worst bully. Your mind goes through the motions of accepting the work conditions and the derogatory treatment by people as part of the work that you've chosen to participate in.

When your wage is based off the number of people who walk through the door of a particular restaurant, there becomes the inherent need to sell yourself.

The money I make for a living isn't based on how much I make per hour.

It's based on who walks through the door of the restaurant.

It's based on the whim of a person and their feelings about my service.

It's based on the inherent assumptions the customer makes about my persona, the type of work I do, and why I do it.

The amount of money I make in order to survive is based on how much of myself I give to the customer, and after working for five plus years in the service industry, this aspect of garnering income is the most soul crushing. From my experience, the part of this work that chips away at your soul is the sense of hopelessness and uncertainty about your income. When you come into work on a particular day, you don't know how many people will come in to eat that day. You don't know what their mood will be. The pervasiveness of

uncertainty has the potential to, and can, overwhelm the psyche of the worker. You feel defeated before you even come into work for the day.

The uncertainty of whether you will be able to make ends meet, coupled with the loss of hope manifests as defeat. You have to work so many hours just to ensure that you will have a roof over your head and food in the fridge that you don't feel as if your time belongs to you anymore.

The most common phrase becomes "I'm tired...I don't have time to..." and essentially, you lose that magic about yourself that makes you who you are.

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My family history informs why making a living wage is so important to me. I watched for years as my father worked 60 hour work weeks to support a family of five all by himself. His salary was well below the proposed living wage for Ithaca and it took a significant physical, mental, and emotional toll on his person. He became a drug addict to cope with his work week and I never really saw him much, except when he came home to give his pay check to my mother. Soon my mother also second-hand succumbed to my father's drug addiction. His addiction made her a bitter and paranoid woman and she took that out on me and my siblings, often in violent ways. It hurt me so much to see my siblings suffer because of my parent's personal problems stemming from working such long hours for little pay. I don't want to see the people I love succumb to addiction and anger because their pay is so little.

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I currently work two jobs, totaling a 50-hour work week. The reasons I work are various: I need to take care of myself, I need to make sure my siblings, who live in NYC whilst I live in Ithaca, have enough money for food and school supplies. I work so my father's life-consisting of his work ethic and drug addiction, don't go in vein. I work so the people I love can suffer a little less.

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Making a living wage would allow me to develop my individualism. It would allow me to reclaim my humanity. Working for so little money since I graduated college killed my spirit and enthusiasm for life. I don't have time to develop myself intellectually when more than a third of my week is dedicated to working jobs that are unrelated to the professional academic life that I want to pursue.

A living wage would make achieving financial security an easier feat. My primary motivation in being financially secure is not so much for myself, as it is for my siblings. My younger sister is going to college, and I want to be able to co-sign a loan for her if she needs it. In order to do that, one must be on solid financial footing themselves. Additionally, she is a minor and we have had run-ins with family court stemming from cop visits during drug-fueled arguments by my parents. I want to make a living wage so that if the day comes where I have to prove to a judgment that I am financially stable enough to take care of a minor (my sister is 16), I can do so without having to worry that my sister will be placed in the care of strangers who might abuse her.

A living wage would give me peace. I want to enjoy Ithaca without fear of losing the people I love the most due to monetary constraints of the way they react to the stress caused by these financial deficits.

A living wage gives me freedom and I want that more than anything for myself and my fellow Ithacans.

# Occitan Sonnet to a Dying Wage

CALEB WILLIAM HAINES

When I consider our names forgotten:  
We spent half of our days, working and beat.  
When I consider, our time downtrodden:  
In factories, fields, and blistering heat.  
When I consider, we were not considered:  
Our toil, our wear; unjust recompense,  
When I consider, I am embittered:  
The landlord is knocking, and asking for rent.  
When we considered, the time we wasted:  
Our parents were freed, not living at work  
We considered, it's time to face it:  
We stare at the sun, fingernails full of dirt,  
We considered, when living to make it.  
Our wages reborn made our families first.

local writing contest. Really open guidelines, any medium, only for local workers paid less than so given much. So little. And money on the table. It looked at me with something like the evil-tinted glimmer of gold, or like some pet up for adoption I might've always dreamed of, but now can only look at with wearied irony. Am I really going to have to pick you up? Couldn't be more apt, right on the nose! I simply must. Now I owe it to my yet-excitable and less-rusty self to act.

Can I write though? I mean, can I write any more than this? This rote record of trudged through mornings, exhausted evenings and the vain complaints against it all I'm too embarrassed to find vent or willing ears for? Chin up pup. Well I'm going to make something like an honest effort, at least. Hold myself to that much.

Actually feeling proud of myself today. I didn't get stressed out all day. Last night two co-workers were over late, and after some serious cases of the postwork sit-downs, one of them pulled some Marx off the shelf, Wage Labour and Capital. My friend described it as Capital, the sparknotes. We read some chapters passing it around. We got all into labor power, and the kind of commodity, in form of labor capacity the worker trades for pay... It got me thinking a lot, and the point is at work I just put this very deliberate 'meter' on my 'labor power'. I was like the fucking Terminator. In slo-mo. \$10/hour speed. I droned along at a setting, as careful kept as business owner's expense accounts. There were some times it didn't work. I couldn't hold the pace, there was just too much work. But I didn't stress. It helped a lot.

End of my shift the nightboss asked me, actual tremors of desperation and appeal performing across their face, if I could come in tomorrow morning. They knew they needed this 12 hours ago, they knew they needed it a week ago. I covered the same shift last week. They do nothing about it then hold off til the last second to ask like it were a crisis. I caved. You always think about your co-workers.

Slept in for the shift. Hungover as hell and sure I was looking it when I came in elevensomething, not ten. Someone was already there doing what I'd come in for, though I didn't recognize them. A tempworker. Just call the agency, they send someone along in a snap. You can put em

## Here Nor There

TRAVIS HOWARD

Here again, as I gather to some semblance of cohesion my sore limbs and with concentrated effort scrape myself spatula-like out of the bed. Good Morning. It almost done I consider with sober lack of expectation what I'll make of it. The morning or myself? Scramble them both, they're done for. But I regenerate tomorrow. It's all as well — another morning dishes itself up like clockwork and hey don't I get my fair chance to meet it that much readier every day? If I can maintain.

Went to the woods again after work. What a contrast. God, why do I feel like I can't even function? Here nor there. It's like I escape with my life and, cradling it precious, make for isolation only to find it displaced in my confused flight.

Woods again. Thank Beauty. Even if I don't find myself, I still can see. Some greens never fail. Some clouds still wander with allure, and like poets in lyric retreat, *I breathe again*.

Sitting with a tallcan of Steel Reserve sure, and the mosquitos worse than managers, but breathing.

I used to escape so easily. It was as natural as the unguessed destinations I found. Then there weren't the responsibilities of course. It was a simple joy and instinct to go to the woods. I'd refresh my senses and appreciate some independence from society's commercial reality. The woods were an exciting offering, a constant lovely opportunity that amplified civilization's shortcomings...

Now I seek in need, in desperation, and find myself thwarted. I came here too quickly. I shut my eyes and ran for some transcendent relocation, some cure to wind me back together, some key that would settle in filling the space between me and my disassociated worklife.

I know I'm dramatic. I can't help it, or I won't. I cling to something fiercely. I treat things like they're serious. It's like I take my joys and dreams so seriously. It's practically grave. I kick hard and hatefully at them threatened. I can't talk about it. Complaining, that's not attractive. I know how much I have is huge. Relatively, I thrive! But that doesn't put me off the vision. Doesn't put me off imagination. When you've imagined what might be... built it in your heart with meticulous care, checked it against reality and felt it sturdy enough to climb toward... how can you stop? How can you unsee, how forget?

It's just there's places one can have been, one can go, lives people get, windows into visions, truths and traumas, that knowing, seeing, going to... become an automatic exile. Some people come from them, right off, born into the place that's not allowed. Some travel between worlds well, translating between, bridging gaps, perhaps inching forward society's understanding... but most don't get that ticket... Agh its a bloody mess, I can't say anything.

At the coffee shop today waiting by the bathroom I saw a flyer for a

on whatever. \$10/hour. So I got disciplined and sent home.

Remember; every time you come in when you should be off, on a favor or whatever (it's always a favor, sympathy and solidarity, or payback for the time you needed it— never the money that appeals. It's funny this amount we concede to, working away our energy day after day to lump together an eventual sum covering the basic support and maintenance of life.... when looked at in the off-hours, held up as an incentive, a single opportunity...it holds no appeal, and appears rather like a mean joke. We're willing to do it on the long term, where it adds up to our survival. Looked at in focus, from the workers instinctive bargaining perspective, it's a pittance. What my time? In exchange for that? The next eight hours' installment in a position of constant task and expectation with your only freedom in thoughts, tied by context to a simple trapped annoyance or a circular and intimate analysis of exactly all the ways this job is fucked. What i tread over anyhow. Stupid.)... yes well the point is, remember when you come in on that favor, they've got you and

your held to all the scrutiny and demand they always pin you under. Might just lose your job on that favor.

Don't try and write at work. Funny 'at's the only time I feel like it anymore. All the possibilities come boiling up just then expressly when I cant. The excited will to actually try seems suddenly ripe. That special energy of wanting to begin... nothing seems more valuable... as it fritters delicately for survival in the tiring and contracted mind.

Why couldn't I have felt this at eight this morning? Yes then all I felt was my back, my sore shoulders going through the coffeemaking motions, throwing back a pair of generic tylenol.

Okay got my idea for submission. Had a nice diverting brainstorm as I whiled away the work. I should do this more.

I'm going to write a short story that doesn't quite let on its setting. We start in a coffee shop, following the idle thoughts and motions of a regular. They are most relaxed. They consider the possibilities. They rifle through the friends places projects they may visit. Every option seems utterly possible to this

curious unparcelled breezy loafer. In the casual movement through their day a different sort of world, an alternative future, worked out and layered in details as though it were just so natural, is revealed. Tantalizingly revealed. I want the reader to see, to see it materialized and working, and to want it, want it badly.

That sort of seeing when people witness some form of even modest resistance triumph, or get swept up in a demo that was really lit, or how participants in Paris strikes and communes had to feel when for some brief hour the old customs and constructs quaked and shook weightily into a baffled silence, the ground remained firm, people took gladly to whatever work was needed, and it was seen for a moment just how things might look. What— not hopes— more like dreams and exultations might enter collective hearts to be felt and shared in large.

That's how i'd like my story to come off. If you could make someone feel that... no see it...

I don't think I'm gonna get that entry in on time. I'll regenerate tomorrow. I'll have more chances.

## Life with Living Wage

**JOHN HUTCHINSON**

Everybody wants and likes to work with a livable wage. The livable wage in Tompkins County, New York is \$14.34 per hour at this time.

Currently, the livable wage is enjoyed by county workers and does not include everybody who lives in the county. If I was working for this wage, there would be no doubt that I too would be better off than at present because I am single and do not have any children to care for. The income flowin ginto my coffers would be useful in paying the necessary expenses, which include rent and utilities. There would be money left over for food which I would stockpile for winter, and any other inclement weather conditions.

Also, I would spend more time shopping at Walmart, where I could afford new clothes to replace the worn and tattered older garments which I have worn for quite some time. I would be more altruistic towards others in that I would contribute to charities on occasion. I would make donations to the

American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the SPCA to help out our furry, four-legged friends.

As well as bills and charities which use up a chunk of change, I could devote more time and effort for recreational pursuits. There would be cash for bowling and golf which are my favorite hobbies. The more I practiced, the better I would play.

There would be money to pay for repairs for my car which is fourteen years old and tends to need repairs every few months. As cars cost a lot, paying for insurance, registration, gasoline and license plate fees would be less demanding on my bank accounts and credit cards.

Some money would be put aside in one or more savings accounts in some of the local banking institutions that I do business with. As I continued to work and earn, I would have the satisfaction of increasing these accounts on a weekly and or bi-weekly basis. Some money would possibly be available for investing in

precious metals which would one day go up in value, primarily gold and silver coins and bullion. I am of the strong belief that everybody needs to prepare for the future.

Finally, a livable wage would have an even better effect on me besides having a few extra dollars to spend. The livable wage would have the added benefit of instilling in me a greater amount of pride and accomplishment. A job which pays well would aspire to work harder and work well. It would by far give me a better attitude and better work ethic towards the work I do. I would tend to have greater confidence whenever I budget or itemized revenues and expenditures. There is no doubt in my mind that \$14.34 an hour, when multiplied by a number of set hours, yields a good sum that I know is coming my way, and thus contributes to my sense of security and well being. If money does not buy happiness, like some people say, it still comes pretty close to that.

# My World Is Very Small

LESLIE PRUNTY



The owners often say, "You, our employee owners, mean so much to us. We care about you." We don't have to care about you no benefits Never CUT pay we can fire you no. No any time CUT hours, NO sick days Never days tiny insignificant ER worm better!

Wake up!

We know better!

Their actions tell the truth. Their actions say, "You are insignificant. We can replace you instantly. You are on your own."

We pay so little that we attract poor workers. I've had to endure supervisors with very toxic personalities because positions are hard to fill.

It's an idea dreamed up a long time ago as part of a deliberate system to make a few people very rich, while the great many people below who do the work to make them rich go without. An old system done in a modern way. A system built on a foundation that is a pack of lies.

People have come to expect so little: "Be happy you have a job," they admonish. I want more from my job. I need more. But this job is like so many others.

When I go to work something begins to close in on me, starts to suffocate me. It's the humiliation of having a job that is utterly thankless.

I work in a chain pharmacy. It doesn't pay enough for me to live on, so there are a lot of things I can't do... a lot of life I can't live.

The greatest proof of their neglect is my pathetic paycheck. After eleven years I got a dollar raise. Now I make ten dollars an hour.

It's a... system that works out nicely for them.

I think sometimes that if I didn't have my husband, my family, and I had only this job to look forward to every day... Well...

I have nothing to show for all my years there.

Now I can't work more than my average. I can't make up time I've lost. I get no sick days.

I'm locked into poverty. They cut staff and hours... but... expect us to work harder.

I have problems. It's hard for me to improve myself. I feel like I'm trapped in a nightmare.

...in dire need of self improvement, or the absurdly monotonous nature of my daily tasks. All of the thinking... and feeling have been removed from my job. I'm numb, slowly dying

I am stressed out either from dealing with the public and the certain unpleasant individuals that treat me like a lowly servant when they themselves are...

STRESS

BORED

frustration  
madness  
anxiety  
despair  
helplessness  
anger

Then there were the times they slashed my hours because Obama care was going to begin. They redefined part time in order to avoid giving me benefits.

My world wouldn't be so small.

I have nothing to show for all my years there.

I think sometimes that if I didn't have my husband, my family, and I had only this job to look forward to every day... Well...

I have problems. It's hard for me to improve myself. I feel like I'm trapped in a nightmare.

...in dire need of self improvement, or the absurdly monotonous nature of my daily tasks. All of the thinking... and feeling have been removed from my job. I'm numb, slowly dying

I am stressed out either from dealing with the public and the certain unpleasant individuals that treat me like a lowly servant when they themselves are...





I wouldn't have to worry about everything so much.

I know things wouldn't be perfect, but my world would be a lot bigger. So much better....

I dream every day about what life would be like if I made a living wage.

It would be such a relief... I could feel better about myself, hold my head a little higher.

I could buy more food, better food, different food, different food.

I could buy ART SUPPLIES!

I could buy things for others.

I could visit my family more often.

I could buy some new clothes.

We could treat ourselves...

...maybe go to the movies great ent.

I could take my mother on vacation

We could buy things we needed when we needed them.

I wouldn't have to worry about bills so much.

We could save some money, maybe even get a house someday.

I dream a lot about that. A place that is really our own. It wouldn't have to be big. We'd have some land, a really huge garden....

We could take REAL vacations.

But these are just dreams, big dreams, empty dreams, and daydreams don't get you any where. Sometimes it hurts too much to think about what could be.

I wouldn't have to be so

I could face emergencies with more confidence.

terrified of getting sick or hurt and losing my job and my apartment.

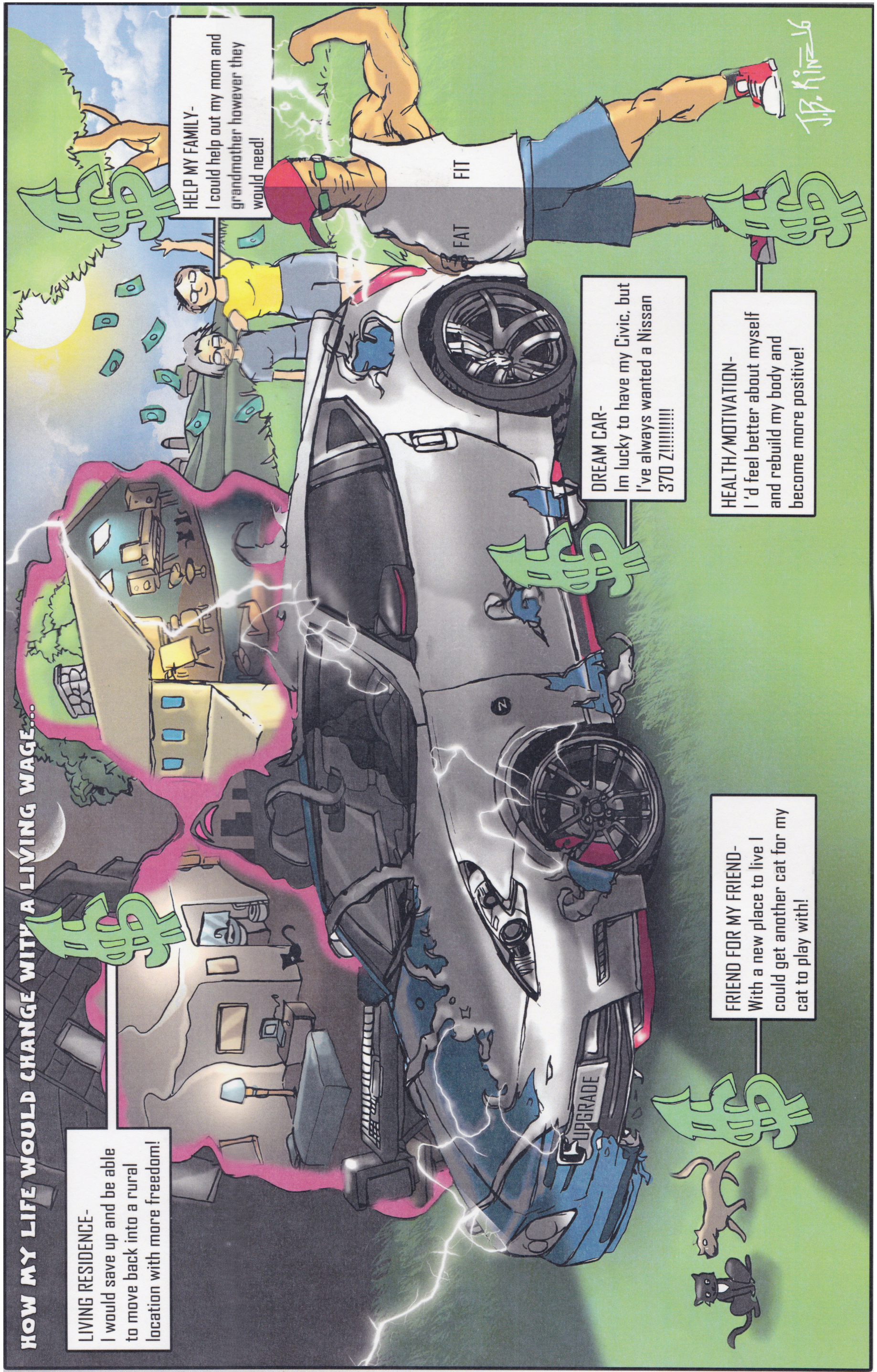
...I think about what we would plant there, all of the sunny hours spent either tending it or relaxing in it with my husband.

Happiness might be less of a stranger. I'm not hoping for a lot. Just basic things I think EVERYONE should have.

ffb 2016

# Upgrade

JASON KINSEY



**HOW MY LIFE WOULD CHANGE WITH A LIVING WAGE...**

**LIVING RESIDENCE-**  
I would save up and be able to move back into a rural location with more freedom!

**HELP MY FAMILY-**  
I could help out my mom and grandmother however they would need!

**DREAM CAR-**  
I'm lucky to have my Civic, but I've always wanted a Nissan 370 Z!!!!!!

**HEALTH/MOTIVATION-**  
I'd feel better about myself and rebuild my body and become more positive!

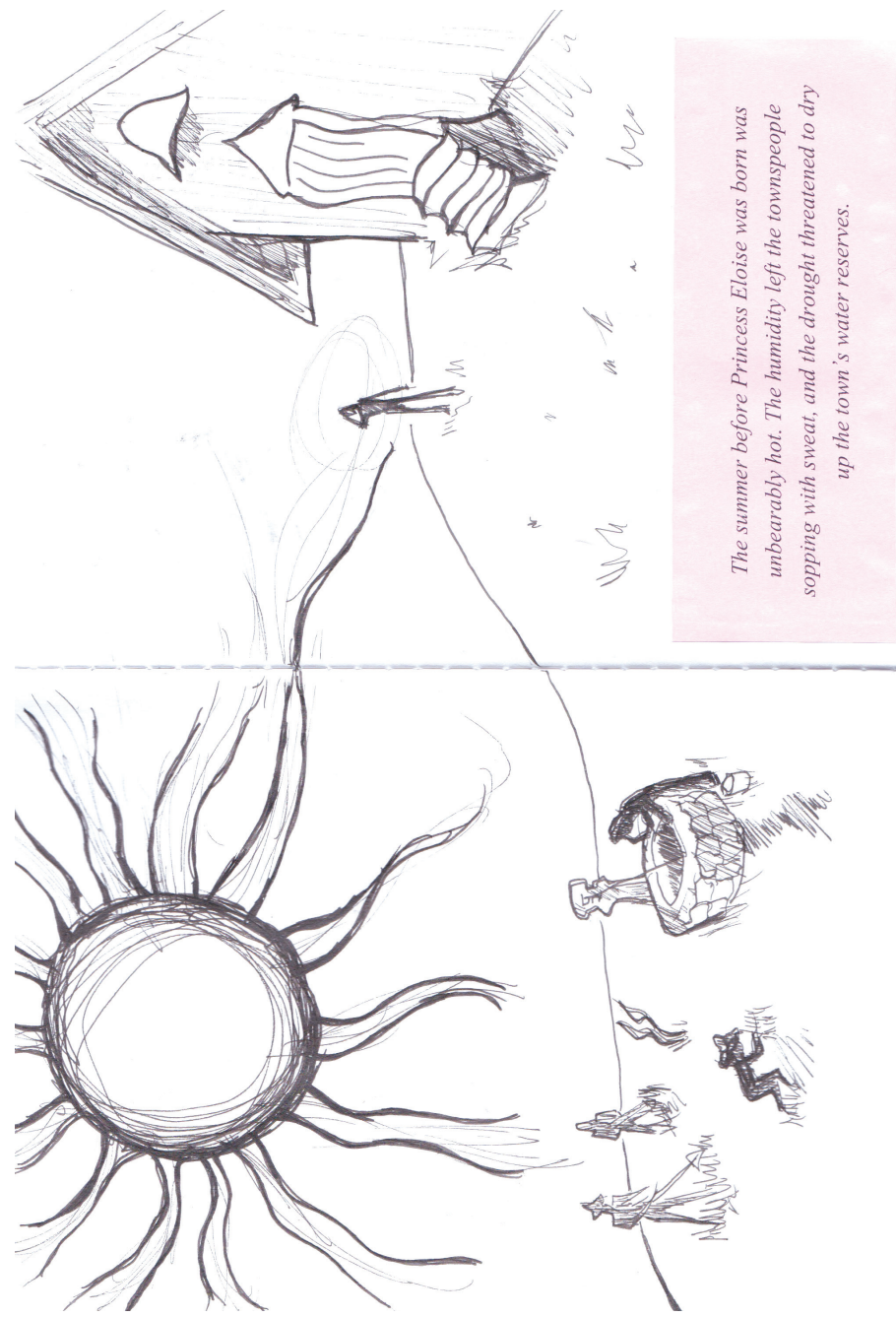
**FRIEND FOR MY FRIEND-**  
With a new place to live I could get another cat for my cat to play with!

J. Kinsey 16


2ND PRIZE WINNER

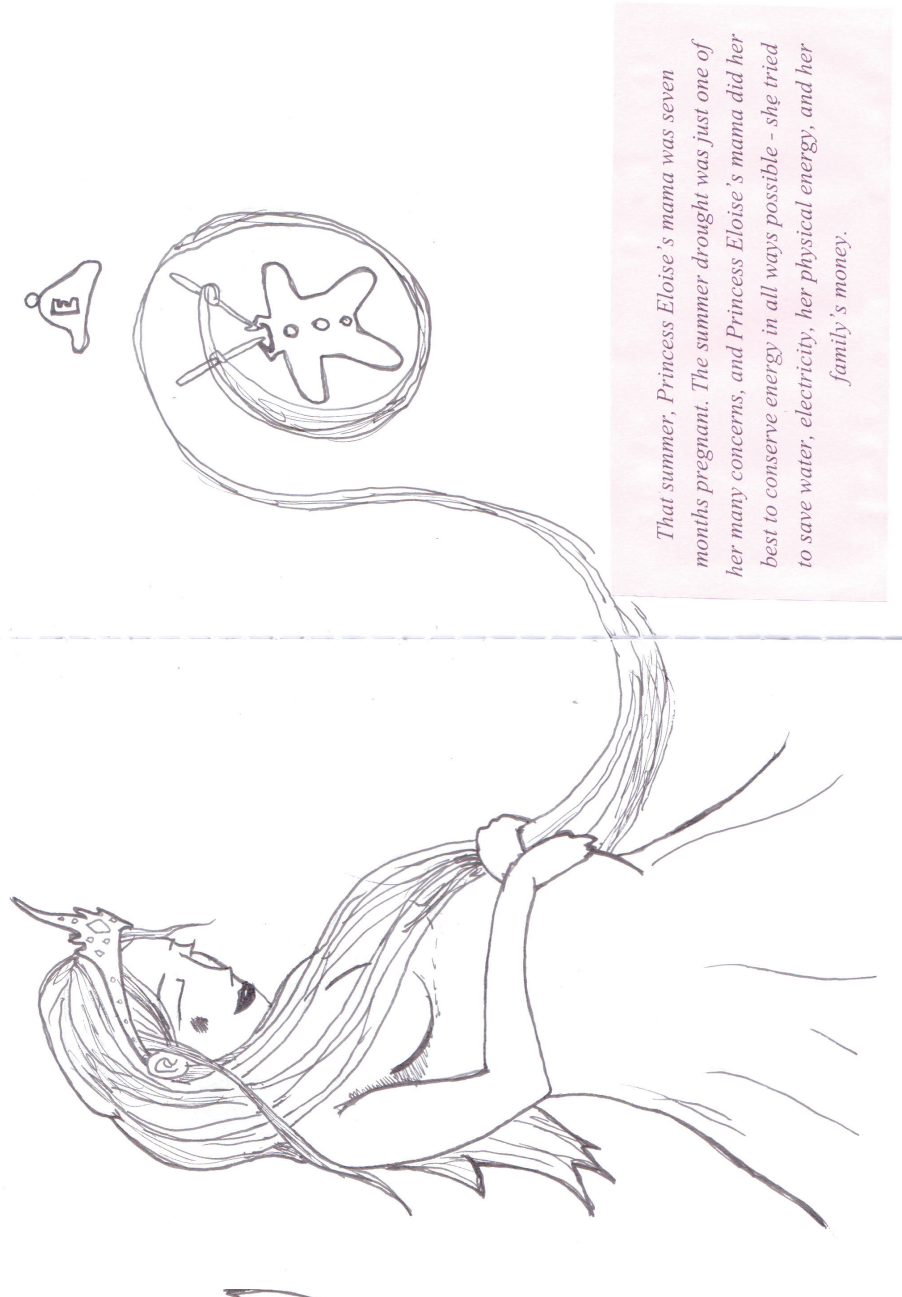
# Princess Eloise and the Magical Living Wage

APRIL KREUGER AND IAIN MICHAEL

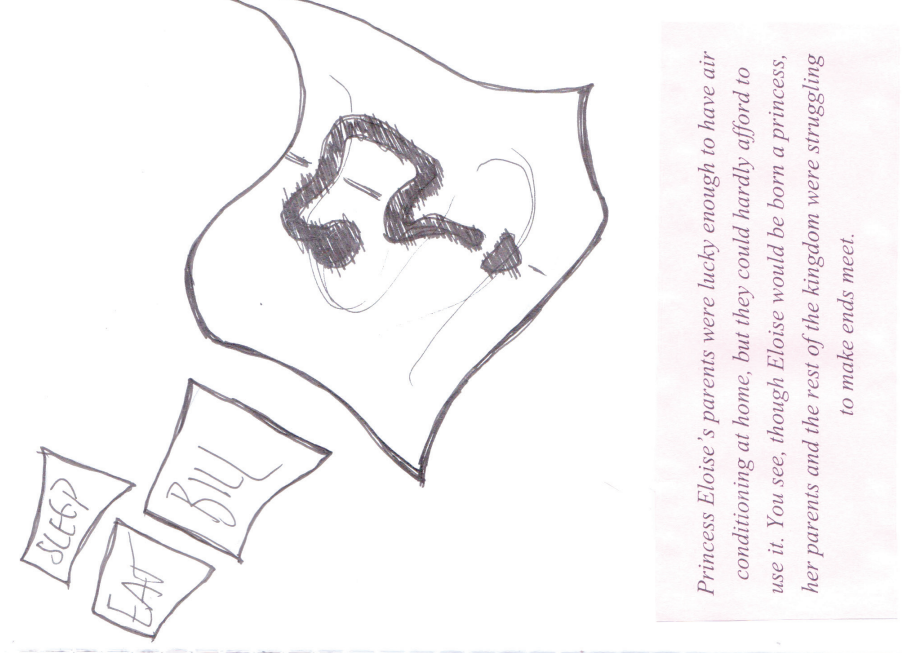


The summer before Princess Eloise was born was unbearably hot. The humidity left the townspeople sopping with sweat, and the drought threatened to dry up the town's water reserves.

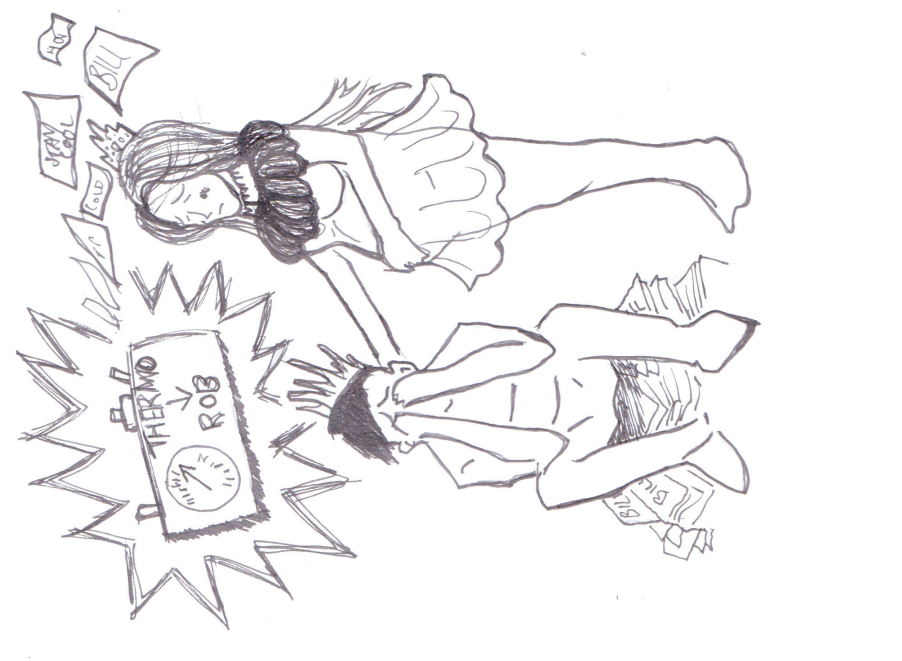
 Dedicated to Baby Eloise  
And all the hard-working families  
Of Tompkins County, NY

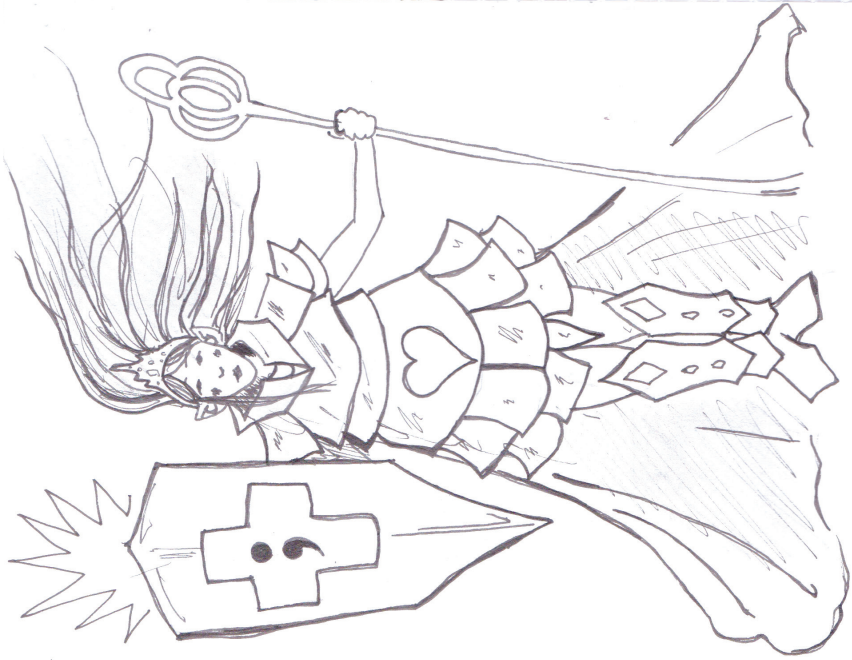


That summer, Princess Eloise's mama was seven months pregnant. The summer drought was just one of her many concerns, and Princess Eloise's mama did her best to conserve energy in all ways possible - she tried to save water, electricity, her physical energy, and her family's money.

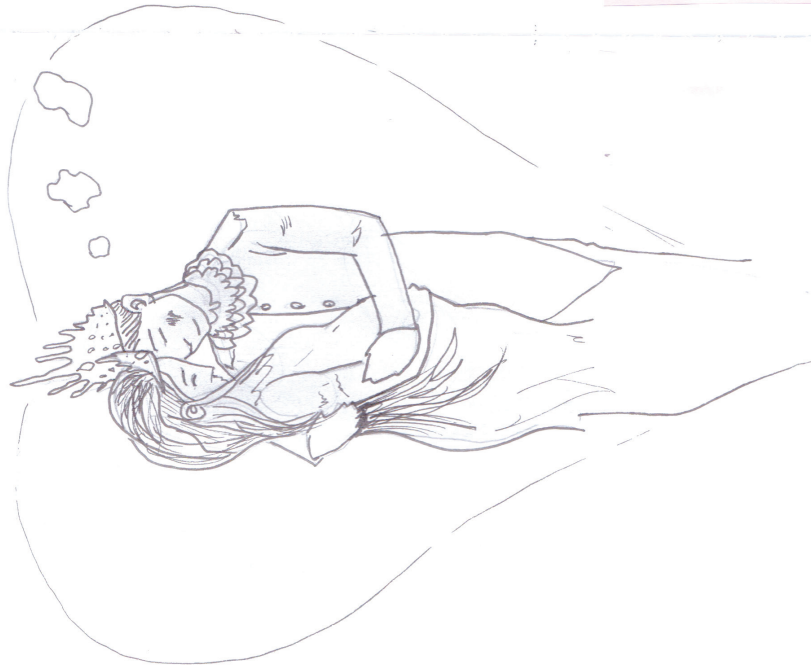


Princess Eloise's parents were lucky enough to have air conditioning at home, but they could hardly afford to use it. You see, though Eloise would be born a princess, her parents and the rest of the kingdom were struggling to make ends meet.

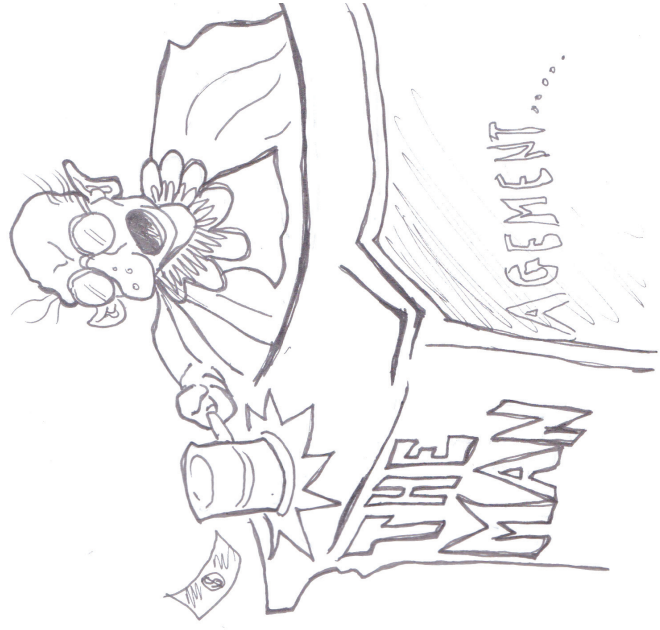




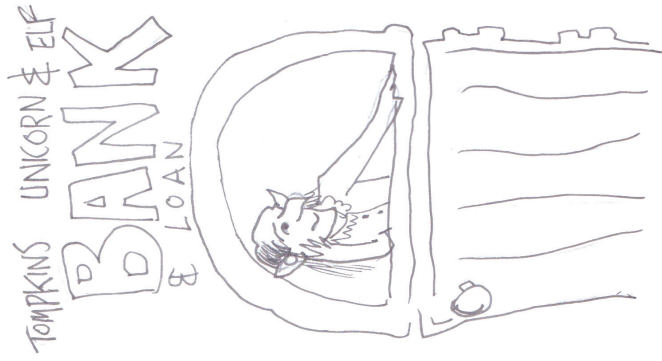
Princess Eloise's daddy was a chef and her mama worked at a mental health non-profit. Both of their work was demanding, mentally and physically. As hard as they worked though, they did not get paid enough to support their growing family.



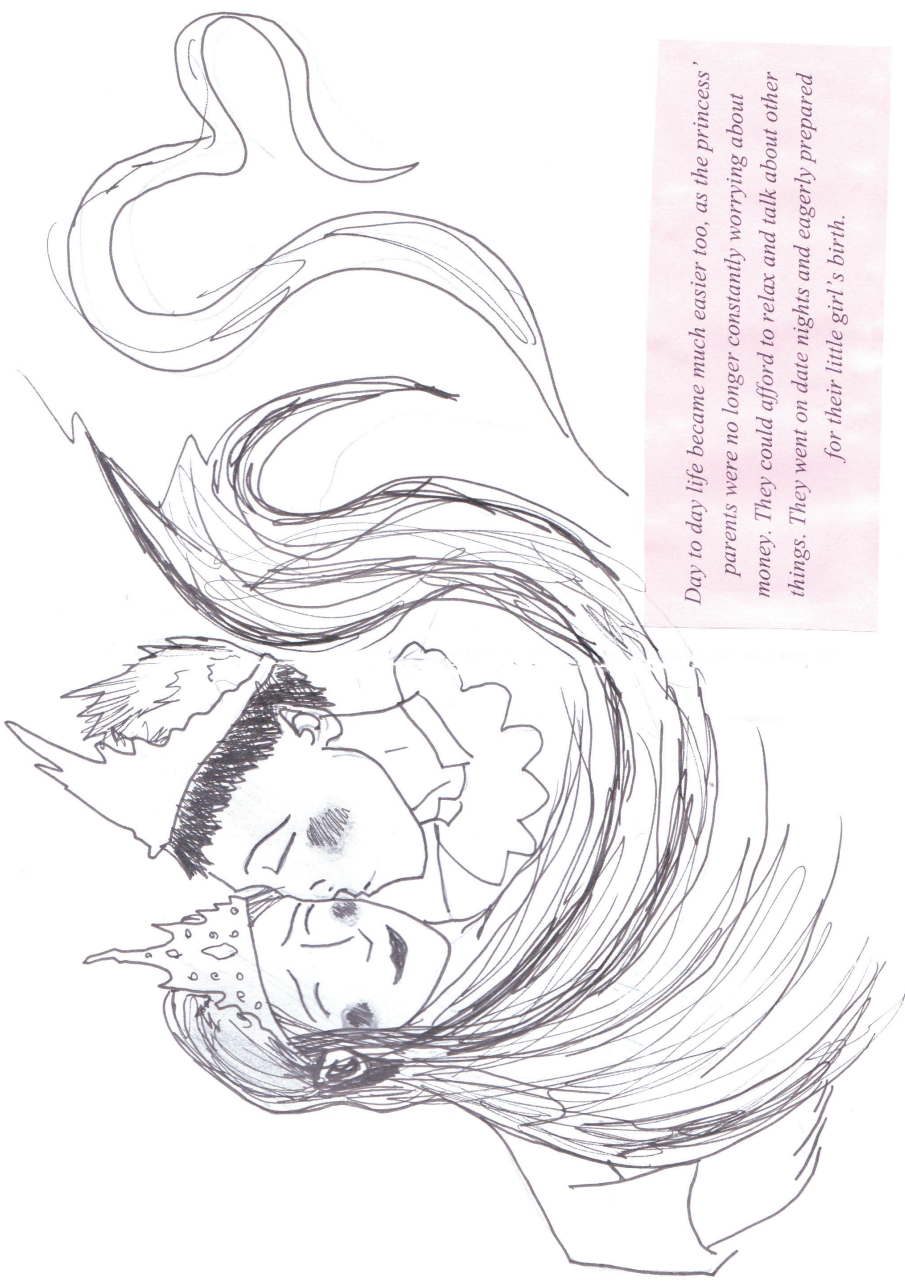
What did this magical miracle mean for Princess Eloise and her family? With a living wage, they could afford to buy all the things they needed, and many of the things they so desperately wanted.



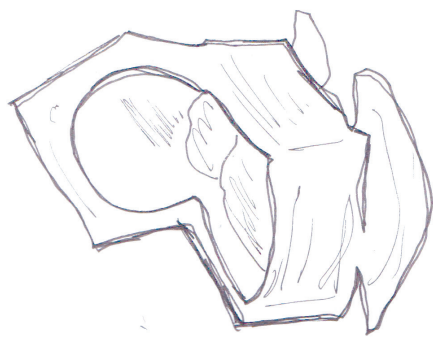
But then one day a miracle happened. A new law was passed in the kingdom: all workers would now be paid a living wage!



Princess Eloise's parents could now pay rent and go to the grocery store instead of having to choose between the two. They could pay their bills on time and not have to worry about their bank account.



Day to day life became much easier too, as the princess' parents were no longer constantly worrying about money. They could afford to relax and talk about other things. They went on date nights and eagerly prepared for their little girl's birth.



They bought all the things their family would need – a new crib and mattress, a bassinet, a bed frame and box spring for themselves, and a couch. They started saving for the future and set up an emergency fund, a college fund for Princess Eloise, and even a retirement fund for themselves.

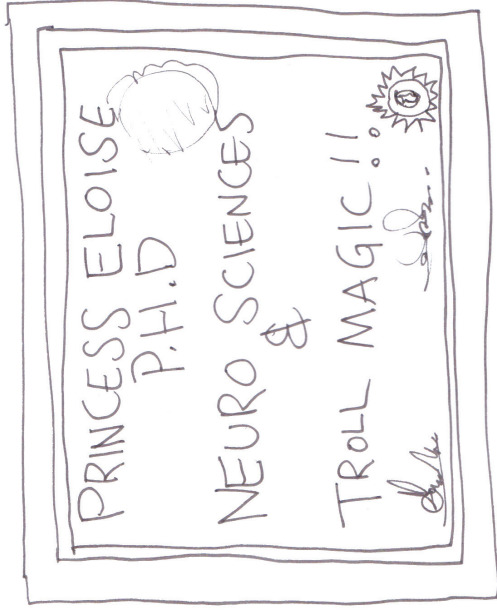


Because of their living wage, Princess Eloise's parents were able to afford ballet lessons, drum lessons, camping trips, and all the books she could devour.

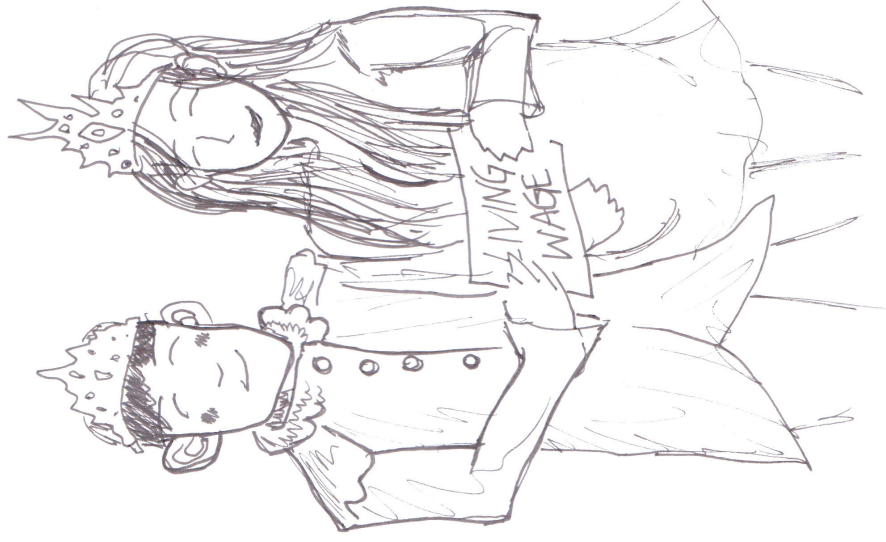


Then one stormy night in mid-October, Princess Eloise made her debut. She was born into a healthy, happy home where all of her needs were taken care of.

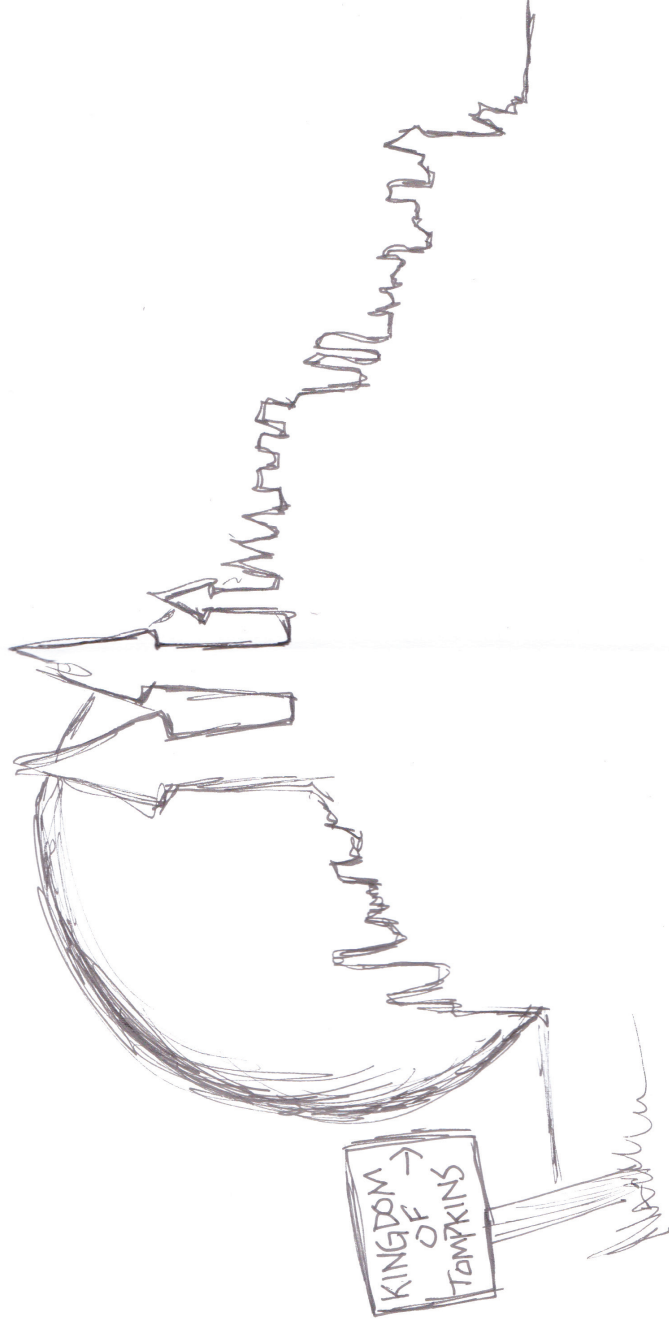




*Princess Eloise's college fund grew right along with her. And without having to worry about money, she was free to learn and grow to her full potential. She studied hard and was able to choose any college in the land. Eventually she earned her PhD and made enough money to take care of her own family.*



*Princess Eloise's bright future was made possible by the living wage her parents began earning when she was just a baby. The living wage set their family up for success and ensured their lives could be lived to the fullest. They were no longer fearful of their own survival and could instead dedicate their lives to serving others.*



*The living wage saved their family and all the families in the kingdom.*

**THE END**

## 3RD PRIZE WINNER (2-WAY TIE)

### Pride

TAL MINTZ

Burnt hands carrying calloused fingers  
I take pride in my work.  
Smells of meat and sweat stain my clothes  
I deserve every cent of that paycheck.

My co-workers threaten to strike for living wage, I cannot afford too.  
In a sea of high school students, I am trying to pay my rent.  
In a sea of debt, bills, and taxes, I am trying to stay afloat.

You see my dad was poor and his dad was poor  
And I'm poor but have a degree, but my child will likely be poor like me.

The American Dream of socioeconomic mobility  
Is now a modern day caste system where we celebrate the few  
who achieve.

But I'm lucky; please remember I am lucky.  
I make nine an hour when some make seven twenty five.  
I know there is a tremendous privilege in having loose change.

I'm not asking for handouts.  
The brand on my shirt is worth 62 billions dollars.  
I am worth the hours I work.

I live check to check to check; I want to afford to save.  
My car breaking down or any unexpected accident,  
Shouldn't be a death sentence disguised as eviction papers.

500 extra pennies an hour, 800 extra nickels a day, is the difference between  
buying garbage tags at Wegmans or living another week in waste.

You ask how my life would be different?  
How could it possibly be the same?

Working till 2 in the morn, flipping burgers, making fries, creating art for you  
to devour  
I take pride in my work.  
But it'd be nice to call in sick and still be able to purchase milk.  
It'd be nice to have breathing room in this constant state of suffocating.

There is no place in this country where \$7.25 puts a roof on your head.  
\$14.34 doesn't solve every injustice, but it will change my life.

# \$12,000

BAILEY OLMSTEAD

I leave for college in a week,  
Boston bound.  
My phone went off this morning,  
It was Boston calling me,  
Not literally, you get the point.  
But Emerson was calling me,  
I'm \$12,000 short, my bill is a month  
past due.  
I'm a kid, 18, maybe an adult, peach  
fuzzed and bright eyed.  
I don't have \$12 let alone \$12,000.  
My parents both work two jobs, I  
do too,  
I want to be a writer.  
The odds are slim,  
But my parents, they believe in me,  
Enough to put us all in debt.

They deserve a living wage.  
I do too,  
I deserve not to wake up to the  
phone calls on \$12,000 I don't own.  
I deserve not to reach for my wallet  
and have an anxiety attack,  
Worried that my supermarket  
arithmetic was wrong,  
And that the cashier will ask for  
money, that I don't own.  
I just want to go to school,  
Write,  
Change the world.  
I don't want money to hold me back.  
\$12,000 between me and my dreams.  
\$12,000.

# Thank You

**SPIRAL CRACKS (REMANU STEELE, BRIEL DRISCOLL, AND ROSETTE EPSTEIN)**

Watch it at [youtube.com/watch?v=a4mWvVcdlKE](https://youtube.com/watch?v=a4mWvVcdlKE)

# Reflections On Labor and the Divine

**LILITH XSERAPH**

The world is lit by the grandeur  
of man  
Fed by the grace of her hand  
Backs bent,  
In communion with the soil.

Whose endless love,  
Whose thankless toil;

With the last sun searing summer skies  
Spilled out on borrowed land  
Flames out with silent cries

“When then now will we reap  
our own?”  
What generation after generation  
has sown  
For all this we will not be spent:  
The magnates,  
The parasites can have our rent;

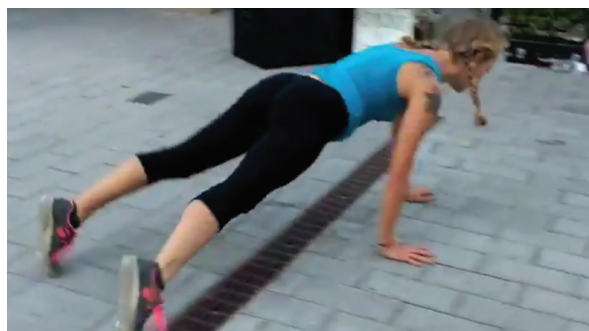
We will not be docile,  
Nor repent

For the sins of our masters.

For the kingdom of heaven is of  
the broken,  
For the kingdom of heaven is of  
the wretched,  
For the kingdom of heaven will pay us  
a living wage;

Sisters, brothers,

Even the skies can hear your rage.



# When Living Wage is Part of the Dream

**HEATHER TOWNSEND**

What would it be like to see three meals a day?  
If only I could have a job with living wage pay.

What would it mean to see their auntie not struggling?  
Even with the two jobs I'm exhaustingly juggling?

Heard a quote when I was a little girl:  
“One day the rich will have nothing left  
to eat but the poor.”  
Who knew that reality was right at my front door?

They say money can't buy happiness  
That cheerful smile can't stop the repo man from handling his business.

What would it be like to be paid for the work I put out

Instead of a check that subliminally says “figure it out”  
The employment system is a problem without a doubt.

I've always been told to work hard on my dreams  
They want me to wear a suit, they don't approve of my jeans.

A minimum wage and job based on commission  
can leave you powerless, hungry, and winshing.

To end my relationship with bill collectors, debt, and repo men,  
Living wage can provide financial stability I won't have to pretend.

The day I can be given living wage pay,  
these children who are innocently affected can benefit,  
I can truly say,