

Sara Carmichael

Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Interlochen Arts Academy, Interlochen, MI

Educator: Brittany Cavallaro

Category: Poetry

The Challenger Shuttle Disaster, 1986

1. Allan McDonald, watched from the control room in Cape Canaveral, Florida

This morning, my wife decided that
it was time for us to buy an answering
machine. I chuckled into my oatmeal

until I discovered that phones still ring
in the mountains. Our daughter leaned
into my shoulder and asked why

we went on vacation in January. I didn't
know how to tell her that it wasn't a vacation.
She can read the newspapers to find out.

She told me that she wants to be just like
Christa McAuliffe. She reminds me over
and over *I touch lives. I teach.* Just as long

as she doesn't become an astronaut. Christa
proved that I can't stop her from dying
even if I design the shuttle myself.

2. Alison Cohen, watched from her home in Lanham, Maryland

The day that I almost rear ended Christa
was a Monday. "Leaving on a Jet Plane"
trickled from the car speakers and the kids

sang all the wrong words in the back.
Christa was outside my window before
the brake lights had even calmed. She told me

that she was late. She told me that she was
never late. She told me that she was sorry.
The kids whined and I invited her over

for a glass of wine. She laughed and
I could see the lines around the corners
of her lips. I didn't notice as the kids

said goodbye and joined other families.
I knew they would make it to school.

Christa rested her chin on the frame

of the window and said that she'd better go.
As I watched her pantsuit walk away
I wished that she was my mom too.

3. *Barbara Morgan, watched from the stands in Cape Canaveral, Florida*

I was supposed to be Christa McAuliffe.
As I watched her in the parade, I hated
myself for being the one standing

on the sidewalk, but then she winked and I felt
myself smile. She was the same person that I'd known
minutes ago before the parade started

while we were just people. Now she's *Christa*
McAuliffe and I'm the person standing behind
her in all the pictures. Her husband told me that

he can't tell us apart anymore. I wonder if
anyone would notice if I lived her life on earth
while she was out there mothering the stars.

4. *Grace Corrigan, watched from the stands in Cape Canaveral, Florida*

My husband kept reading the newspaper.
The headline read "*We've lost 'em, God bless 'em*"
and he gripped the pages so hard

they ripped. When Christa was little
she would always take the crossword
from him and fill the boxes with random

letters. But the day that MEN WALK
ON MOON adorned the front page
she wouldn't pick up any other section.

She told me it should be women. I didn't expect her
to die for it. At teaching school,
the twenty year olds kept asking me why

I went back at sixty-five. This afternoon,
my granddaughter called to tell me
that she started Girl Scouts. She can find Christa's pin

at the bottom of the Atlantic ocean. After I hung up
I turned to my husband and said *I think one day*
I'm going to explode.

5. *Holly Merrow, watched from the Concord High School gym*

As I sat in "The American Women" class
I didn't recognize her as one of them.
She passed out our tests just like

any other teacher. Once Mrs. McAuliffe

turned to the blackboard I creased
my test into a paper airplane,

only for it to crumple in midair. I filled
the test with pencil lead and let it sink
onto her desk. I folded every exam

into a different shape until I noticed
that for once I knew
the answers. The day after my father

told me that she herself sank, the letter
of recommendation that she had
written for me came in the mail.