

2026 Elie Wiesel Competition

3rd Place (Tie) Senior Poetry

Abbie Spencer, 9th Grade

Cape Henry Collegiate, Amy Martin

Carried Forward

My great-grandmother kept history
In places no suitcase could hold.
She carried a country in her spine,
A language tucked in her mind,
And a past that refused to stay behind
When the ocean closed behind her.
Germany still echoed in her footsteps.
It lived in every corner of her house:
In every photograph,
Every book,
and every teacup.
It lived in the stories she told her daughter,
my grandmother,
Of her once peaceful life,
Torn by chaos and destruction.
These memories were passed
down through decades,
Like a small flame that keeps burning
Even after the candle is gone.

She was the keeper.

Not of artifacts,

But of atmosphere.

The feeling of rooms before voices disappeared,

The weight of silence after neighbors vanished,

The sound of a world learning

How quickly it can change.

She passed down memories,

Her story,

The way that many families pass down heirlooms—

Careful and trusting that someone else

Will feel its weight.

These memories reached me

fragmented,

Just as history might be softened by time,

But never erased.

I carry her memory differently.

Not in my spine,

But in attention.

In the choice to remember slowly,

To hold stories,

To let the silence of memories speak

Without an explanation.

My great-grandmother kept history for us.

Not frozen, not finished,

But breathing.

Hearing these memories,

I understand:

Some pasts are not meant to be escaped,

Only carried forward

With care.