

First Place, High School Student Category

How I Feel About Space

I must have been five years old when we got that book,
The cover consisting of the cosmos captured in an image
From which I could not look away.
The pages spoke of more stars than our sun,
Stars living light years apart.
Galaxies to gravitational waves,
Pulling and tugging and keeping everything we know as our universe
In
stasis.
I grew up reading that book.
And when I had finished, I realized
That earth was too close to home
And the solar system too down to earth
When compared to quasars and stars and clustered nebulae and neurons,
Shifting outwards in the neverending expanse that was my mind
Once I came to the knowledge
That there's so much more to reality than meets the eye.
Can we comprehend the extent of the star to the left of the center in Orion's
belt? It's bigger and hotter than our sun, in millions of measurements.
But because of shapes and space between, it's barely distinguishable,
The prick of a dying candle in the night sky.
Can we comprehend that size?
The vastness of
Objects big enough to mess with space-time in one fell swoop.
Stars becoming supernovas and collapsing into black holes and starting the cycle
of Quasars swallowing stars and the light they emit,
Spitting them back into blackness to burn as something else;
And the universe is a shifting mess of impossibilities,
Of solar systems' whose mass is smashed into space centimeters thick,
And dark matter that isn't antimatter and doesn't not matter but that's no matter
Because we can't see it in the first place.
And tiny mile wide stars that are heavier than ours
Because they can't feel light about
The predicament of existing in a void.
Some people feel helpless about space.
There's too much of it, it emphasizes our own insignificance.
But I,

I'm don't feel sad about the smallness of my being.
I feel large, composed of stars,
A symphony of life and light written 13 billion years ago
When something swelled and the Big Bang sent mysteries blasting into creation.
I'm a speck, but every single speck of star and every atom of being
Built the foundation for the series of seemingly endlessness in which we exist.
The spark of it all, a thought caught between pages two and three in the intro of a
book That can't capture the cosmos beneath its cover.
To do so,
To learn it all,
Is simply impossible.

-by Jeanette (17), Colonel Richardson High School, Federalsburg, MD