

Summer of Hope
by Julia R. (age 13)
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*I tried painting
the rubber floors
in the old ski lodge
in July with my tears,
the cleaner's bucket
filled with foul-smelling
blue liquid,
"hope" she says,
"there's hope in this liquid."
if only there was.
not many come to the mountain
in summertime
where the black-eyed susans
sway in the breeze
that's tainted with the smell of dust,
or to the lake, clear 'til last year
when the hillside caved in
sent all the debris
sliding into that
perfect, crystal water.
the beach caved,
the water now a murky sinkhole
for mistakes
and pennies the tourist
throws in for forgotten wishes
that never get granted.
those who washed up
on the steps of the community center
sandy and wet, yet could
spare gratefulness
even as they lost their homes.
the water crashed
into the fields,
dug canyons into roads,
dug graves in a
roadside cemetery,
dug despair and pain
and suffering, but
"hope" she says.
"there's hope in this liquid."
and perhaps,
there is.*

I wrote this free verse poem for the first anniversary of the flood that occurred in July 2023, in my mother's hometown. We stay here every summer because my grandparents live in Ludlow and have lived here their entire lives. When the clouds and rain moved in, I could tell it wasn't going to be a regular storm. Then, the news struck. Roads were washed out. Homes were flooded, and businesses were closed. It all seemed surreal until we walked through town and the sight of the railroad tracks caved in made my mother cry. The flood continued to impact people's lives even after it happened. The grocery store got flooded, businesses shut down, the lakes closed, and worst of all, people lost their homes and their belongings. I spent a good part of the summer volunteering at the community center, helping those in need of water, food, and items. In these moments, I realized the full impact this event had on the community of Ludlow as a whole. A few days before the flood, I was in the Okemo Lodge when the cleaner was cleaning the floors with a blue solution. It smelled foul, but she seemed unfazed by the smell. I asked her, curious what the cleaning solution was made of to smell so foul, and she smiled at me and said, "Hope. There's hope in this liquid." Then, she walked off, humming to herself. I was so struck by her comment. How could hope smell so bad? I didn't get it at the time, until I witnessed how the flood brought people together, even though it was horrible. It united neighbors and strangers alike, and maybe, I thought, hope sometimes comes in different ways... whether in words, a blue cleaning solution, or a flood. Maybe, hope is all we need, because sometimes, hope is all we have. So when I looked at the water that lay stagnant in parking lots and fields after the flood, I knew what it contained. "Hope." I thought. "There's hope in this liquid."