



**13<sup>th</sup> Annual Ben Strauss  
High School Essay Contest 2026**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

# Selah Buchanan

## *Blue Balloons*

February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013, was a day that should've been joyful and celebrated, but it soon turned into a bittersweet day that my family will remember forever. In a hospital in Ireland, a little boy was born but soon after the doctors realized that something wasn't right. He was rushed to the NICU and the doctors tried everything they could, but it was too late, and the cancer had already taken over his body. Seven short hours later the baby, known as Jared, had passed away, leaving two parents to go home without their child, and having to tell their two daughters what happened. I was too young to remember this, but I imagine it in my mind frequently.

Jared was gone but not forgotten and that's why we were on our way to remember him for his birthday. It had been 12 years later, and we did this almost every year, but it still didn't get any easier over time. Even just sitting in the car, the tears prickled up from behind my eyes like tiny needles. The blue ballon in the back seat glimmered as the bright sun glared, causing me to want to cry more. If he was still here maybe the car would be filled with laughter, instead of his absence echoing in the silence.

*What would be different if he was still here?*

My head was spinning: maybe I would still be living by the green fields of Ireland... maybe my family would be in a completely different place. I thought of all the different possible

outcomes of what my life could've been like if he was still here. I quickly was ripped from my imagination when the car reached a startling halt.

“Everyone ready to go?” my mom asked kindly.

*No. I'll never be ready to do this again. He should be here. This is supposed to be a happy day. Why did this all have to happen?*

Reluctantly I climbed out of the car and the door slammed shut behind me as I grabbed the balloon that danced in the wind as soon as I took it out of the car. You would think after twelve years of letting the same blue star balloon go that it would be easier, but it's not. We walked to the bridge with feeling like we had the weight of the world was on our shoulders.

The blue sky glimmered as my sister and I stood on the cracked wooden bridge for a picture. I heard my sisters' stifled tears, and I tried to control myself so that I didn't start crying too. The balloon tried to fly away but I wasn't ready to let go yet.

“Are you ready to let go of the balloon?” My mom said with sadness in her voice.

I felt the tears start coming at the thought of letting it go. It wasn't just a balloon. It was so much more than that. By letting go of the balloon, it showed how I was letting him go again and thinking that this was normal and it was a good thing. I didn't know if I fully believed that or not, but I had to try.

My sister whispered to me with tears in her eyes, “It's ok Selah... Don't cry. He's in a better place. It is all going to be ok. We will be with him one day but just not now. Everything will be ok.”

The balloon slowly comes out of our hands and flies into the sky like a bird on a mission. The trees everywhere stood as barriers threatening to trap the balloon right in the air. My sister and I hoped that the balloon wouldn't get stuck in its crooked branches. Thankfully the balloon didn't get stuck and continued to fly into the sky, blending into the blue bliss the father away it flew.

The tears rolled down my face, one after another, like a waterfall on a rainy day as my sister pulled me into a warm soft hug. Her hug was an anchor making me feel stable and making me know that it was all ok. I cried a river until I had no more tears to cry. We sulked back to the car, sat in the defining silence, and went about our day like nothing else had happened.



Everyone sees things differently and little things can mean different things to others. Many people will just see a blue balloon floating in a beautiful blue sky, but I see my brother and the fact that every year I will have to let go of him again, like a family watching their oldest kid go to college. All I know is that I will never forget that day, changing my family forever, and making me see the little things differently.