

## Bisbee teen wins poetry award

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Ember Gulden, 15, stands in the Copper Queen Library last week in Bisbee. Gulden placed second in her age group in the University of Arizona Poetry Center poetry contest.

Mark Levy/Herald/Review

**BISBEE** — “There is a silence at my school. A silence that masks, that shouts it’s emptiness so loud that the voices of each and every one of us become lost echoes never reaching the surface, and at the bottom of the well from which we are lost and drowning.”

This award winning poem, “The Weight of Silence,” was written by Ember Gulden, 15, who was awarded second place in her class group of ninth to 12 graders in a K-12 poetry contest sponsored by the University of Arizona, Arizona Public Media and the Pima County Public Library recently. The topic for the contest was: “What do you want the world to know about how you feel?”

Her poem begins, “On the hottest of days she wears long sleeve shirts, thin fabric covering miles of pain, engraved into her skin a branding that says ‘I feel broken.’ Those closest to me have dealt with a kind of hurt that is internal. Anorexia, depression, anxiety, attempted suicide. And without remedy it only grows. It eats away at a person.”

Further into it, she writes, “They talk to us about substance abuse, how it can ruin our lives and our chances of succeeding. But never do they ask why kids might do it. We are hardly told that drug abuse doesn’t have to be the first resort. Only why it shouldn’t. There are signs that say ‘eat healthy’. But there is not a sign telling you that every single thing about you is beautiful. There is a silence at my school. “

Gulden has been in the Youth Free Write program at the Copper Queen Library, guided by James Coull, retired educator, and Gretchen Hill, Montessori schoolteacher, at the Copper Queen Library, said her proud mother Alison Williams, library grant coordinator. She started when she was just eight years old.

Gulden said, “I mostly do stories, and sometimes, poems.”

She said her stories were surreal, yet realistic with “magical factors” to them. She is currently working on a story which is about a person “bringing the imaginary world into the real world.”

Her interest does not stop there. She also likes cinematography and is working on a film about a girl who loves stuffed animals, but who is also going through the stages of growing up and the ever changing reality it brings.

The poem came out of an English essay assignment in school she wrote about mental illness in teens. She turned that into her poem which she wrote at 2 a.m. “That’s when all the good ideas come.”

“I wanted to get the message out there that teens with mental illness have a hard time,” she explained.

Her message as well as her talent have been recognized with the award.

“I was surprised to win,” she added with a smile.

Gulden attends online school now due to the pandemic and she misses seeing her friends. She learns more in the classes in less time and has access to more courses in her areas of interest – cinematography and art history – which she feels are important to achieve her life’s dream.

“Going back to school is an important decision to make,” she continued. “And most kids want to go back, but I think it’s kind of selfish to not consider the risk to teachers and students. Sometimes we have to make sacrifices.”

One of the advantages of going to in person school are the clubs and extracurricular activities in which students can participate. However, online schools are catching up and offer some online clubs, she said.

“I’m looking at a pen pal club, but I haven’t joined yet. There’s a lot more clubs than I expected, even a student council,” she added.

For those who think they want to write, she said, “You have to find the things you really care about and don’t worry about what people might say. When you’re a writer, you have to focus on how you feel and express that. Don’t worry about who’s going to read it.”

Her poem concludes: “I apologize. I just simply can’t take seeing my friends shatter into fragments of a soul fueled by hatred for themselves, for others. We are supposed to be your responsibility, but it doesn’t feel like you care.

“Not everyone can go home to mom and dad, we don’t all have somebody to tell us how much they love us. Please, just listen. for once. This is a cry for help from each and every child who continues to survive the weight of silence.”

### **Ember Gulden’s award winning poem**

To read Ember Gulden’s award winning poem and all the others, visit the website:

[https://poetry.arizona.edu/blog/drumroll-please-presenting-k-12-poetry-contest-winners?fbclid=IwAR1MptngEOE0jK715nIm7-pG9kt1EZVTQFhCJbxXdXcmFLKPy-VLrFW\\_DC8](https://poetry.arizona.edu/blog/drumroll-please-presenting-k-12-poetry-contest-winners?fbclid=IwAR1MptngEOE0jK715nIm7-pG9kt1EZVTQFhCJbxXdXcmFLKPy-VLrFW_DC8).