

It's my true honor to introduce the 3rd-place recipient of this year's PPW Award: Tafarah Cherilus and her essay "My Mother's Commandments," written for Sam Pittman's Writing with Style course.

Tafarah's essay is an interrogation of many faiths: faith in religion, faith in parenthood, and faith in oneself. Written in the style of the Ten Commandments, this essay catalogs a list of alternative commandments professed by the author's religious mother. The essay calls to mind a few lines from Kristin Chang's poem "Churching": "Godhood is just / like girlhood: / a begging to be believed." We see the repression and restraint bound up in these maternal commandments. But we also see the author's mind hard at work as she questions and challenges these received ideas about love, propriety, and confession. What emerges is a moving tale of self-liberation recounted by a bold, singular voice.

The committee praised this essay for its inventive structure, its evocative use of detail, and its profound sense of introspection and discovery.