



# SCHOLASTIC ART & WRITING AWARDS

founded in 1923, the Scholastic & Writing Awards is the longest-running, most prestigious recognition program for creative teens and the largest source of scholarships for young artists and writers in the U.S.

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## Frances Farmer

*Frances Farmer (1913-1970) was a film and stage actress who rose to fame in the 1930s. She received her Scholastic Award for this essay.*

## God Dies

By FRANCES FARMER

No one ever came to me and said, “You’re a fool. There isn’t such a thing as God. Somebody’s been stuffing you.” It wasn’t a murder. I think God just died of old age. And when I realized that he wasn’t any more, it didn’t shock me. It seemed natural and right.

Maybe it was because I was never properly impressed with a religion. I went to Sunday school and liked the stories about Christ and the Christmas star. They were beautiful. They made you warm and happy to think about. But I didn’t believe them. The Sunday School teacher talked too much in the way our grade school teacher used to when she told us about George Washington. Pleasant, pretty stories, but not true.

Religion was too vague. God was different. He was something real, something I could feel. But there were only certain times when I could feel it. I used to lie between cool, clean sheets at night after I’d had a bath, after I had washed my hair and scrubbed my knuckles and finger nails and teeth. Then I could lie quite still in the dark with my face to the window with the trees in it, and talk to God. “I am clean, now. I’ve never been as clean. I’ll never be cleaner.” And somehow, it was God. I wasn’t sure that it was...just something cool and dark and clean.

That wasn’t religion, though. There was too much of the physical about it. I couldn’t get that same feeling during the day, with my hands in dirty dish water and the hard sun showing up the dirtiness on the roof-tops. And after a time, even at night, the feeling of God didn’t last. I began to wonder what the minister meant when he said, “God, the father, sees even the smallest sparrow fall. He watches over all his children.” That jumbled it all up for me. But I was sure of one thing. If God were a father, with children, that cleanness I had been feeling wasn’t God. So at night, when I went to bed, I would think, “I am clean. I am sleepy.” And then I went to sleep. It didn’t keep me from enjoying the cleanness any less. I just



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knew that God wasn't there. He was a man on a throne in heaven, so he was easy to forget.

Sometimes I found he was useful to remember; especially when I lost things that were important. After slamming through the house, panicky and breathless from searching, I could stop in the middle of a room and shut my eyes. "Please God, let me find my red hat with the blue trimmings." It usually worked. God became a super-father that couldn't spank me. But if I wanted a thing badly enough, he arranged it.

That satisfied me until I began to figure that if God loved all his children equally, why did he bother about my red hat and let other people lose their fathers and mothers for always? I began to see that he didn't have much to do about hats or people dying or anything. They happened whether he wanted them to or not, and he stayed in heaven and pretended not to notice. I wondered a little why God was such a useless thing. It seemed a waste of time to have him. After that he became less and less, until he was...nothingness.

I felt rather proud to think that I had found the truth myself, without help from any one. It puzzled me that other people hadn't found out, too. God was gone. We were younger. We had reached past him. Why couldn't they see it? It still puzzles me.