



LAKEFIELD
LITERARY *Festival*

1998

YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST
WINNERS

1998 Senior Nonfiction Winner

Pink Granite

by Chelsea Forrester

Grade 12 – Lakefield District Secondary School

I'm the first one to admit it. I had a sheltered childhood. I was living in the country, where there seemed to be no crime or violence. The only television we watched came from wholesome family channels, certain fluff on PBS and TVO. The eighties were for me a happy time of neon colours, puffy hair, and light pop music. My sister and I never fought, and so the only conflict I knew was a vague observation of some of my friends' families. I was a happy-go-lucky kid.

The idea of death never entered my Brady Bunch world until I was six years old. One spring day, my cat killed and dragged home a rabbit, a tiny speckled grey bunny. Blood covered the soft hair around its head and neck, which hung loosely. The milky eyes were still open. My cat paraded around the front porch with this lifeless rabbit in her mouth until she got bored and dropped it on the welcome mat.

My mother put the rabbit in a blue shoe box padded with Kleenex and cotton batting. A tiny funeral party solemnly proceeded down the hill at the side of our house to the field behind the vegetable garden. It had been raining for days. The ground was soggy and made weird sucking noises as we lifted our rubber boots through the mud. My father dug a hole, and the blue shoe box was lowered into the dark puddle. I found a chunk of pink granite nearby to place as a memorial to the rabbit we had known only in death. I don't remember crying, but I know that I thought about the blue shoe box for a long time, sometimes lying in wait under the shrubs and grass in the back field. It was then that I began to understand: nothing is forever, and there will be a time when everyone will be placed in their own blue shoe box.

Over the next few years a strange sort of collection grew up in that back field: a bird that had smashed into our kitchen window; a kitten we found drowned in the ditch; and numerous rodents and frogs. They had all checked in to our pet cemetery, housed forever in various makeshift coffins.

Each time another hole was dug, I lost another grain of my childhood. Death scares one. The idea of non-existence, a world somehow surviving without you, frightens people. It is hard to imagine how life could move on without us. But it does, it has, and it will continue to move on, to start over again.

Today I have a fascination with death that many people consider quite morbid. But when I think of a graveyard or funerals, I remember the space behind the garden, dotted with pink granite memorials.

And someday perhaps, I will return to my cemetery in the back field to stay a while.

1998 Junior Nonfiction Winner

Accepting the Truth

by Joy Kim

Grade 9 – St. Peter Catholic Secondary School

It was a sunny day, the beginning of a fresh new week. Having endured the hated, one-hour bus ride from school, Joanna walked up the stairs to her front door, proudly clutching her English test with its big red “A” in the corner. The thick blue carpet silenced her eager, running feet as she raced toward the sweet aroma of her mother’s oriental cooking. Speaking in her first language, Korean, she cried excitedly, “Mom, mom! I got an ‘A’ on my English test! 84%! Isn’t that the best thing you’ve ever heard?”

In a quiet voice, without emotion, her mother replied, “That’s nice, Joanna.” She went back to frying fish.

“Oh,” Joanna sighed, a little disappointed. She walked quietly to her room. She had no idea what was wrong with her mother. Slowly she put it aside, lay on her bed, and gazed at the painting she had done on the ceiling. It had taken ages to finish all the beautiful small angels painted there a few months before. Joanna was proud of her work, the angels she had loved as the Bible had described them. She was glad now she had painted her ceiling that way, in spite of the sore back it had caused.

Joanna suddenly felt blue. She put her favourite CD in her player, the *Titanic* soundtrack, and went to her desk looking for pastels and paper.

Working on an Easter card for her best friend Julie, Joanna didn’t notice an hour had gone by until she completed the card, held it up, and felt satisfied with the finished product. It must be time for supper; her mother hadn’t called her. Oh well, she had probably left something ready and gone to work.

It was at that moment her father appeared in the doorway.

“Kibbum,” he used her Korean name rather than the Canadian one her friends used. He sounded very solemn. It must be about Mother, Joanna thought. The two sat down on the floor at their low table.

“What do you want to tell me, Abojee?” Joanna spoke softly to her father in the respectful Korean way.

“Last night,” he sighed heavily, “while you were asleep, your mother and I had a phone call from your aunt in Seoul. Your uncle, my brother Dong Soo, was beaten last night by a gang of drunks on the street. He is in the hospital having surgery. He is badly hurt. He is near death.”

Her father’s voice was very controlled. He seemed to be both horrified and sad.

Joanna quietly set the dinner table, while her father set out the kim-chi, the hot salad which went so well with rice. Dinner was silent. Joanna felt so shocked that she had to talk with someone. After dinner she walked to the hall telephone.

Julie answered. “Jo, how are you? What’s up?”

“I have something to tell you, but you have to keep it a secret. Promise?”

“Of course,” Julie replied. For the next hour, the two friends discussed the news from Korea and the feelings Joanna had. Talking to Julie made Joanna feel better.

“Thanks, Julie,” she said.

“No problem, Jo. Don't worry too much. And let me know how it’s going for him.”

For the next few days the Kim household, usually very happy, was quiet and sad. Every night Joanna could hear her mother crying softly in her room and her father comforting her. Even at school Joanna's personality changed. She couldn't be outgoing and talkative. She was withdrawn, and her friends wondered why, but she seemed so glum nobody asked her about it.

By the end of the week, Joanna’s family was feeling better, having accepted the bad news and having heard no worse. Then the phone call came. It was ten o’clock at night. Joanna’s father answered the ring, and Joanna found herself drawing a deep breath. Shock came over her father’s face. Uncle Dong Soo had died.

Her aunt tried to console them. She said that Dong Soo’s injuries were so great that he would never have recovered fully and be the man he used to be. But they were so far away, and the tears would not stop for a long time.

At midnight Joanna lay in bed, her eyes open, but her tears gone. If she looked hard, there were moments when she was sure she could see Uncle Dong smiling down on her from among the angels in the scene on the ceiling. Once again she felt safe.