



LAKEFIELD  
LITERARY *Festival*

2001

YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST  
WINNERS

2001 Senior Fiction Winner

## Autumn Epiphany

*by Catherine Ward*

*Grade 11 - St. Peter Catholic Secondary School*

The chilly, late fall wind caught Beth's blond hair, tossing and throwing it around against the backdrop of a steel-grey, afternoon sky. She pulled her denim jacket tighter, wishing she had worn her sensible, winter one instead. It was an "I told you so," moment her mother would love.

The day was grim in Winston. Grey skies, miniature drifts of grey snow clinging to blades of dead and wilted grass, and grey people, setting into depression at the thought of another inevitable winter. She walked slowly, snuggling back into her coat as much as it would allow, trying to forget about the last few weeks.

Anna was always the outgoing one. She had the ability to capture everyone's attention. She dazzled them with sparkling white smiles, her silky, dark hair, and transfixing eyes darker than coal. In comparison, Beth was the fairer one; nonetheless, she acted as more of a shadow in social situations. She sported blond, shoulder-length hair, had green eyes, and was of medium build. Beth was just your average type, someone who blended in, and was often overlooked. Anna had been her link to the "good life." Parties, the popular group, and public recognition were Beth's only by association.

Beth's brow furrowed, and she drifted into a reverie. There hadn't always been problems with Anna – at least none she had immediately noticed. She dreamily recalled the trip to the coast that she and Anna had taken the previous summer. Delighted and utterly weak with ecstasy after months of begging and pleading, they had boarded a plane bound for Vancouver and two weeks of freedom, fun, and sunshine. She still heard the splash of water spraying the hulls of the yachts in the marina and felt the fine mist as comforting as a mother's cool hand on a fevered brow...

"You're getting yourself all wet Bethie!" Beth hazily made her way back into reality to find herself being misted by the spray from Mr. Layton's garden hose. "It's a little too chilly to be wandering around the streets soaked through! You seemed to be enjoying it though? Smiling as big as Texas when I noticed ye!"

"Just not paying close enough attention, I guess!" Beth joked. "This weather is scrambling my brains!" Mr. Layton laughed heartily, shook his head, and returned to washing his car, probably the last time he would do so before it was too cold.

Beth also continued on her way, while white clouds of breath launched themselves in front of her face, as she puffed up a small hill. Her smile was gone now. She floated back into her mind again and racked her brain for where, when, or why things had gone wrong.

Beth had thought it a coincidence that troubles between her and Anna began shortly after she started getting involved in things. She joined the art club and tried out her voice in a coffeehouse, surprising even herself by her hidden vocal talents. Through various activities, Beth had made new friends, but always Anna had remained number one.

Perhaps though, Anna had not seen it that way. Anger stirred in Beth – something she was not used to. Rarely did she ever provoke or promote fights, not wanting conflict, backing down early with a total lack of confidence. It was ridiculous that Anna could have been jealous. She had masses of friends and admirers all around her. Why would she not want the same for Beth?

Now, Anna and Beth never talked. Anna would walk by Beth in the hall at school, glancing at her, detached and cool. It was as if they were barely acquaintances.

Beth paused a moment on the paved sidewalk, overcome with a terrible ache that hit her like a truck. It came from her very core and made it difficult to breathe. She missed Anna desperately. She felt as if she had lost a large chunk of herself, so large, in fact, that she wondered sometimes if it was something physical, easily noticed by passers-by and talked about with cruel curiosity.

She looked above her, through dried and crumpled, crackling leaves clinging valiantly to stark, black branches that had given up on them weeks before. She stared at the hopeless grey sky, sure that if she could identify with anything at the moment, it would be those miserable leaves and that desolate sky.

Prophetically, a gust of wind came along and caught an unsuspecting leaf, plucking it forcefully from its place on the black branch and sending it gusting sporadically in large, lusty spirals. Finally, it came to rest, nestled in a nearby evergreen shrub, safe for the moment from similar attacks.

Beth stood, rooted to her spot watching the strange dance in its entirety. Calmness crept over and into her, basking her insides in a warm, fuzzy glow. She had always thought that description to be slightly nauseating when reading it in stories, thinking it to be completely unrealistic, but it was incredible how accurate it was.

As quickly as it had come, the moment was over, but it left a satisfying residual, as if her heart was wearing a sweater. Beth turned, meandering back the way she had come, deciding that she would start for home, head finally clear, and the hollowing ache gradually subsiding.

The realization had crept up on her while watching that battered leaf. It hadn't fought back; it didn't have to. It had completed its purpose and moved on. It would become part of the ground and help a new leaf just like it grow, come spring.

Beth understood now. She knew it wouldn't be easy losing the best friend she'd ever known, but like that small leaf, the connection had been lost. Anna had been a part of her for so long, she didn't know anything else. As things go, both of them had grown up and, as a result, grown apart. Letting go was never painless. However, Beth could recognize that when one came to the end of a

path, new ones appeared with new options, leading the way to brighter tomorrows than one ever dreamed possible.

Although the wind still whipped around her, prying at her jacket, turning her cheeks cherry red, and tiny, fall snowflakes had begun to rage madly about, Beth felt as if her winter was already over. Spring was just around the corner, filled with shining opportunities and growing hope for new independence.

2001 Junior Fiction Winner

## Bitter Cold

*by Daria Robson*

*Grade 9 – Kenner Collegiate Vocational Institute*

It was freezing. The vexatious wind howled, teasing the trees and tossing the few remaining multicoloured leaves. The full moon slid across the cold, star-filled sky. Below, the wooded end of the park was silent. There were no birds, for they had all flown south or were nesting in the tall branches of the swaying trees, and all the creatures of the woods were snuggled up nice and cozy, safely asleep until spring. The wood was deserted save for one lonesome figure, huddled close, deep in a corner. Her back was pressed up against a tall oak tree in the bushes, knees curled up tightly against her chest in an attempt to draw as much warmth to herself as possible. Her small, bony fingers clutched a tattered, thin corner of a blanket, once a light blue, but after so many nights spent like this, now a light shade of brown. Her frail body was shaking with a force so impossibly strong.

She kept thinking about happy memories to distract her mind from the gnawing cold, but that alone was a challenge, for her short life of merely eleven years hadn't been full of happiness. There was a hot, steaming bowl of chicken soup and a comfortable bed with lots of pillows and downy comforters surrounding her. Just thinking of warm things sent shivers of heat coursing through her veins. Gradually, though, the numbing sensation in her feet became unbearable and she had to move, knocking herself out of her reverie. She blinked, causing the tiny crystals of ice that had formed on her eyelashes to break off and flake to the ground.

As the wind abruptly picked up again, the girl tried to hide herself under her blanket. No good came of it. Had she made the right decision to leave her house two weeks ago? It wasn't as cold then. Maybe she should go back, but to what? There may not be anything to go back to except more pain, but for how long would she be able to last out here in the cold without any shelter? As she wiggled around, curling into an even tighter ball, she knocked her arm sharply against the trunk of the tree. She snapped her arm back against her chest, wincing at the violent burst of pain. She slowly pulled up her sleeve, her numb fingers barely able to grasp the cloth, and glanced at the still tender bruise on her forearm; it had only just begun to diminish in size. She touched the raised scab on her once-swollen lip. No, she thought, I made the right decision.

The girl tilted her head up towards the sky brimmed with clouds and heavy with snow. I should get some sleep, she thought. It's going to snow. But no matter how hard she tried, she just couldn't find sleep. The cold wouldn't let her be. Suddenly, a fit of coughing overcame her. Painful spasms racked her tiny body. She moved her hand up to cover her mouth. The spasms subsided. As she slowly removed her hand, she noticed it was covered with specks of blood. She quickly forgot the pain, for she had learned at an early age to deal with it. Instead, her mind raced back to the last time she had a fit like that.

When her cough came, she had been sitting on the steps of Sandy's Variety, asking the passers-by for spare change. The store clerk came out at the sound of her coughing. She picked her up, carried her inside the warm store, and gave her a steaming bowl of soup and crusty, delicious bread. She felt so content. She remembered the kindness the woman had shown her.

She slowly opened her eyes and looked around. With a sudden burst of happiness, she realized that she was no longer cold; she was warm, no not warm, hot! The heat was so intense that she removed her shirt and pants, tossing them to the side. For the first time in a long while she smiled, looking up at something only she could see, eyes shining. She held her knees close, not because of the cold, but for the comfort it brought. She closed her eyes tightly. When she opened them again, she could see tiny snowflakes falling all around her. She was overcome with the urge to laugh out loud, a tiny sound but full of emotion. The effort soon left her exhausted. Taking one last look at the trees lightly covered in snow and oblivious to the wet trickling down her cheeks, she whispered her last words: "Thank you." Her eyes closed one final time. Her limp body slumped to the ground. Two snowflakes landed lightly on her eyelids, frozen in place for moments, before slowly melting.

## Making the Bland

*by Tim Alleway*

*OAC – Crestwood Secondary School*

I'd like to announce that I am officially giving up. No, that's wrong – I'm giving in. I'm giving in to the enormous pressure that corporate-creationist pop has put onto the music lovers of earth. A thick, heavy, bubblegum-flavoured influence has burrowed its way deep into our heads, invading our airwaves and musical consciousness like a metaphorical tick that would writhe, push, and infest itself to the point where it is heard, but simply unfought, unnoticed. But really, why would I want to resist it? Why wouldn't I want to buy into such a popular musical phenomenon?

The thought of sitting back and relaxing, letting O-Town's "Liquid Dreams" lull me into happy submission, just makes me smile. Of course, initially, I may have to fight the urges to think that something so innocent-sounding could actually be a vague reference to – gasp! – nocturnal emissions! But then after that, there'd be no cares and no worries! I'd just let my mind and opinions gradually soften up, and pretty soon my brain would be more sweet, candy-coated and sheltered-over than a football-sized Skittle. What a sweet deal!

Never again would I have to think to myself, whilst strolling down the aisles in Music World, "Hey, that song really struck a chord in me! Listen to those lyrics! Such musicianship! I should pick that album up!" No, I could just skip right over to the Top Ten rack, then fill up my sparkly, pink trough with the sweet, sweet goodness that is our society's bubblegum pop.

Of course, once I join the masses, I'll probably have to destroy all of my psychology books and burn pretty much anything on my shelf that provokes self-introspection, to make room for my 'N Sync action figures. What do you think Britney Spears' favourite brand of antacid is? I'll have to make sure I'm well stocked because I know the transition away from depth and complexity into the new realm of hundred-dollar tickets and "gettin' down and movin' all around" won't be without its share of nausea. But it'll be worth it! I can lie back, and, having already numbed myself into questionable contentedness with Christina Aguilera's unrelenting presence, let each new band entertain me each week! All the catchy two-riff songs, the wildly innovative ways to rhyme "lazy" with "crazy," and, of course, the mind-blowing usage and range of the word "baby." I just can't wait to be subdued, a proverbial unthinking pancake being smothered with the non-threatening, baby-doll, t-shirt-wearing, thong-flashing, pierced-belly-button syrup that is today's pop music.

And for those who wish to stay unindoctrinated, I'll have to ignore what they say. Originality! Actual personal reflection and meaning? That's crazy talk! Now, let's see more people doing choreographed spins on fold-out chairs! I'll have to ignore it when people tell me I've been brainwashed. When someone tries to trick me by slipping in Jimi Hendrix, or Tool, or, heaven forbid, a Led Zeppelin track into my mp3 player, I'll have to dispose of it immediately; then, while clamping my hands over my ears and singing "I Want It That Way," I'll just try to envision

Brittney's tummy, a plasticky, tanned, and perfect six-pack that I could never achieve (even through extensive research in *Teen Beat* and constant dancing to her videos), swaying back and forth in my face.

Maybe what we need to do is, without risking *too* much independent thought, form some kind of small shanty town that could grow into a metropolis, which could evolve into a country (a nation of pop fans) to segregate ourselves off from the rest of the world. We'd be "Backstreet Boysians," or "Aguilerians," or whatever. We wouldn't need to choose one specific pop song as our national anthem because it could just change every week! And we wouldn't need school, or jobs, or social lives, because the answers to our deepest fears and problems could be found simply by "shaking our bonbons." And we will just ignore the cold, blatant fact that our eyes and ears are shut to melody, meaning, and depth in music. After our civilization has formed sick and obsessive pop-based religions, thereby having martyred all its pop icons, cracking the sweet bubblegum womb of all moral fabric we'd have created with twelve-year-olds eating Ecstasy and losing their virginity to Justin Timberlake look-alikes over the background ambience of b4-4, we'll be forced to move on, consolidated by our undying love for pop music, and eventually focus on the next big thing.



2001 Junior Nonfiction Winner

## All is Fair in Love and War: A Memoir

*by Anusa Panchalingam*

*Grade 9 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School*

“Good afternoon, Mrs Willie,” I say as I enter her room.

She sits in her wheelchair, looking out of the window. She is wearing the same old red skirt and white blouse she usually wears, and on top of the blouse she wears a beige-coloured, long sweater.

I volunteer once or twice a week at the Civic Hospital to fill my volunteer hours. My job is to take care of Mrs Willie, a 65-year-old woman who is originally from Amsterdam. Unfortunately she has a bad memory. She retells her stories over and over again, but as a volunteer I have to be patient and listen to her repeated stories.

“Hello, I didn’t notice that you were here, child. Isn’t it a beautiful day?” says Mrs. Willie.

“Oh, yes! Do you want to go for a ride through the park, Mrs Willie?” I politely ask.

As I push her wheelchair through the hospital hall towards the park, she exclaims, “You know what? When I was a child, I would spend the whole day outside with my friends if it was a beautiful day, but these days kids sit in front of the television. Telephone and television were considered luxuries in my days, but their absence didn’t mean we didn’t have fun. We usually played the guitar and harmonica at home. Boys went to school and girls helped at home with household chores.”

She rambles on as usual about her past life, all of which I’ve probably heard about a hundred times. I just watch the trees until she is done, but then suddenly her voice becomes softer and quieter and then stops. I look at her face and notice that her eyes are staring at something. I follow her eyes and see a mother with four children playing ball on the right side of the path through the park. I sense that Mrs. Willie is going back into her memories and that she is becoming emotional. So, I push her towards a bench without distracting her. I sit beside her on the bench and watch her.

Then she says, “That family is just like my own family. The only time my family was always together at home was during the war. Oh yes, did I tell you about my life during the war?”

“No, you didn’t,” I say.

She begins to tell her story.

*Well, the war was from September 1939 to May 1945.*

*I was 4 years old when the war broke out in the Netherlands. My mom was listening to the radio and all of a sudden she moved to the window and stared outside and repeated "War! War! War!" She sounded so desolate that even now I still can envision her standing there.*

*Only for the grown-ups in my little world of mom, dad, brothers and sisters, and neighbours was war awful. For me, it was fun.*

*For the first three years of the war, my dad could go to work. After that, the Germans wanted his factory for their purposes. So, in 1943, my father was home from work. My sisters and brothers, who had been attending school, had to stay home as well. The country train that transported them to and from school discontinued running. The Germans had taken over almost all the schools, so anyone who had been attending school stayed home.*

*We lived approximately three quarters of an hour by train from Amsterdam. Our rural area was called Brock in Waterland. We didn't have electricity, and our light came from a gas lamp. My mom cooked on a gas stove; she was a very good cook. We had very little to eat after my father stopped working, so my dad and two brothers went to the farmers in our area to trade bed sheets and real coffee (that my mom had purchased before the war, knowing that this would be a very lucrative trade item and high in demand). My mom had a feeling that a war was going to break out, so before the war began, she bought as much flour, sugar, coffee, tea, towels, and bed sheets as her income would allow.*

*My mom was very industrious. She would clean a farmer's small dairy (a small cool sterile building, where the farmer would bring the milk from his cows). The farmer would give her a small pail of milk every day. My mom would take the cream from the milk and put it in large mason jars. We would cook and drink the milk or make porridge with it. We would sit around the coal stove and shake the bottle until the cream would form butter on top. We used the buttermilk for porridge also.*

*I loved to sit around the stove with everyone at home. Some were reading, but my dad and brothers had harmonicas and would play all kinds of songs. Of course we all took turns shaking the cream to butter.*

*Butter was an unheard-of luxury during the war, but we were so blessed to live outside Amsterdam, surrounded by farmers. Not that the farmers gave you anything for nothing. There were some very good farmers, but there were some that got rich during the war.*

*Sometimes the German soldiers would go from house to house to try to find men over the age of sixteen to work in their factories to make their weapons. Those men would then be taken away and would often be brought to Germany to work there.*

*My parents had taken in two young men who were hiding from the Germans, so that made five men who were trying to stay out of the Germans' clutches.*

*Those surprise checkups were called “razias.” During most of these times, my dad, brothers, and the two men, ran into the fields and just lay very quietly for hours until the soldiers went away. They also had a hiding spot under the stairs going up to the bedrooms and over the basement stairs. There the five of them would sit extremely quietly in very cramped quarters. The soldiers would ask my mom where all the men were who lived there.*

*She never blinked an eye and told them the same story... “I don’t know! If you people wouldn’t take away all the food, then maybe they could stay home. They’ve gone to find food.” As far as I know, the Germans never treated her badly and just left.*

*Often after lunch, my sisters would put the table and chairs to one side, wind up the gramophone, and play some dance music; they would dance with my brothers and the two young men. Sometimes someone would dance with me. I thought that was just so wonderful.*

*I knew very well that the war was bad because my mom and dad would talk about it. A person here and there would be taken by the Germans and mistreated badly. There were many more gruesome stories told at the table. I listened and felt very sad for those people. There is this one story, which really made me sad...*

*This was about a little boy who very innocently betrayed his father, who was hiding in the house somewhere. The Germans had asked the mother if she knew where her husband was and she had said “no.” Then one of the Germans asked her little son, who was about three years of age.*

*“I’ll give you a chocolate bar if you tell me where your daddy is.” So the little boy told him where his father was hiding. The man was pulled out of his hiding place and taken away. The little boy never saw his father again. I don’t need very much imagination to understand that later in his life this boy would just feel horrified and depressed about what he did that day, even though he was small. It was a degrading thing for that German soldier to stoop low enough to get a little boy to betray his father. As the saying goes “all is fair in love and war.”*

Mrs Willie starts to yawn, so I tell her that we can continue our talk tomorrow and that she should go to bed.

“You are right. I am a little tired,” she mumbles. I take her to her room and wait until she is comfortable and ready to go to bed. As I go to close the curtains, she says with a slight smile, “I had a great family and a great life!” Then she falls asleep. I turn off the light and close the door.

There aren’t that many people who will claim that, despite many hardships, they’ve had a great life. Mrs Willie is a strong person for having this outlook on life. If only we all could look back on our lives with the same acceptance and happiness.