



LAKEFIELD  
LITERARY *Festival*

2002

YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST  
WINNERS

2002 Senior Fiction Winner

## All That I Am

*by Chenoah R. Ellis*

*OAC – Lakefield College School*

*Sitting*

*Here I am*

*Here is all that I am*

I feel light-headed and I stop writing. What comes after the end? Not after the end of life, but the end of anything? When anything ends, what comes after? What happens after the story's over? Once the conflict is solved, what is there? What follows the nadir? I get up and I close the blinds, and then open them again; my physical aching is surpassed only by my dwindling mental state. They told my family I'd take a while to recover. I don't know how many whiles are in a lifetime, but right now it feels like only one. Everything around me is pale, and it makes me feel unhealthy. Someone sent me flowers. I hadn't cried till then. I didn't want to be vulnerable, but more than anything I didn't want flowers. I don't want people trying to heal me. They don't know that I'm the only one that can do that. I'm not sad or scared or anything that they tell me it's normal to feel. I feel enlightened – as if every unnameable burden has been lifted and replaced with something far more fantastic.

*By the window*

*Shadowed in pretence*

*Covered in many truths*

The truth is that the sun is shining so bright outside my window and reflecting off the mirror on my door that I am blinded. That is the only truth I am willing to recognize. Everything else is fallacious, created by everyone else to confine me to myself. I would rather be blinded by the truth than trapped by fabrication. But that doesn't matter; nothing I feel is acceptable. What is real is not who I am. That's what they tell me. As though taking drugs to fog my confusion makes anything clearer. They know these things, though. They haven't got feelings like mine; they can't hear their heart breathe, but they've got PhDs and a cheque from the government. What could I possibly know about myself? I am only insane. There is no synonym for insane. They need to make everything simple for us because we make everything so complicated.

*In the corner of the kitchen*

*I've been here awhile*

*I hope you haven't been looking for too long*

I didn't mean to do that. I was just dancing. Laughing. Who were you dancing with? What a stupid question to ask. I was dancing with myself. On my report they say I was dancing with the devil. They think I'm the devil. That's why I laugh. I can't possibly be as important as that.

*Waiting for answers  
To the questions  
I have only just learned*

I start to hum the tune to the static in my head. They ask me so many questions. I don't think it's important for them to know the answers. The answers are me, and I know them. I dance around like I always do. I'm okay. I'm not crying. I dance faster and faster until I can feel the non-existent breeze wash over me. Faster and faster. I scream out to the soundproof walls, "Can you believe I'm this good and I never took lessons!!" Silence answers. Just like it always does.

*Hoping  
For a solution  
To any situation I must face*

Is it good enough to hope? What is hope? Someone else's friend once told me that hope was an ally to those without ability. Ability. They think I have a lot of ability. You have the ability to get better. You have the ability to be normal. I know what I have. I have hope. I have hope that no matter what they give me here, no matter what they tell me, or what they make me do, I will never be normal. I don't need to get better, I'm the best. But they think not. And I felt sorry for them and their naivety, so I didn't try and explain. I pull the curtains closed and turn on the florescent light. It makes me feel ugly. I wash my face. The cold water has turned warm on my hot cheeks. The mirror depicts the image I am. All that I am.

*It's dark outside  
And my window to the world  
Shows only my reflection*

I'm here to prove that I'm okay. I've been sitting on my bed since the sun set. I get up and dance around the room. One sweaty hand attached to a scrawny arm, attached to me, opens the curtains. I stare out into what is the night. What is black? I wonder if the world just disappears when it's dark. Who would notice? Maybe it dances around itself, only stopping when dawn hits. All I can see is the reflection of my outline. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make them cry. Nothing's wrong with laughter. Nothing. You're a beautiful dancer. Thank you. I laugh aloud. No point in concealing my hilarity from my reflection. I squeeze my eyes tight. I try to write again. What comes before the beginning? Not before the beginning of life, but the beginning of anything? When anything commences, what comes before? What happens before the outset? I start to write; this is my beginning and what came before doesn't matter.

2002 Junior Fiction Winner

## The Peculiar Theft of the Opal

*by Eric Francis Mason*

*Grade 9 – St. Peter Catholic Secondary School*

As twilight descended on the serene landscape of Vavasour Hall, a faint breeze stirred the oak trees. The well-tended flowerbeds and gleaming marble pillars attested to the wealth of its owner, Lady Holbroune, countess of Surrey. A banquet was to be given in honour of her niece, Claudia, who was staying with her for the duration of the holidays. It was she with whom Lady Holbroune was speaking.

“Claudia dear, would you please tell Thompson that Lord Holbroune is not to burn incense during the time the guests are here?”

Lord Holbroune, Lady Holbroune’s son, had recently converted to Hinduism and was eagerly embracing, not to mention devoting all his cash to, the entire mysticism that surrounded the religion. Her thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of her first guests.

“Senator and Mrs. Warburton of the United States, m’lady,” announced Thompson, the butler, with a slight bow.

“Lady Holbroune,” said the senator, “I want to tell you how proud I am, along with my wife, to be your guests tonight.” Here he indicated the figure behind him arrayed in pants and extracting a cigar from her sequined purse.

“I am very happy to have you here, Senator, and you too, Mrs. Warburton,” replied Lady Holbroune untruthfully, hiding her dislike of her guests.

The other guests began to arrive, and shortly Thompson announced that dinner was, indeed, served.

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In the mahogany dining room there was a feeling of quiet contentment, occasionally shattered by conversation arising from Mrs. Warburton’s area. The Bishop St. Dennis complimented his hostess on the excellent quality of the beef ragout.

“I am exceedingly glad you enjoyed it,” replied the countess, but her attention was diverted by the inquiries of Colonel Venier, a collector of oriental art, on the subject of the fabulous Duboni Opal she was now wearing.

“Yes, it came from India and was a present from my late husband.” She blushed a little and added, “Its estimated worth is 100,000 pounds.”

“It is indeed a wondrous jewel,” said Lord Holbroune’s friend, the Greek poet Mr. Spriodon Tanalonzo, who gazed rapturously at the opal. “I wish I had its full worth for the financing of my new play.”

“It’ll be smashing, mother,” said Holbroune arrayed in silk and velvet and sporting a large turban. He was interrupted by Mrs. Warburton complaining about the lack of money for the suffragettes and the weight of her large necklace.

“Absolutely scandalous, the lack of funds,” she said. “I do declare I have a blister on my neck from the weight of the necklace. Ornaments are always so heavy nowadays!”

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Thompson was serving cocktails in the drawing room after dinner, and the guests were all quietly conversing with each other, with the exception of Bishop St. Dennis. The colonel was discussing Far Eastern Art with Lord Holbroune and the poet Spriodon. Claudia was contemplating the finer points of Plato with the senator, while his wife and Lady Holbroune were considering the latest Paris fashions.

And then the lights went out.

There was a scream and confusion reigned. When the lights went on again, Lady Holbroune said feebly, “My necklace, it’s gone!”

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The persons and possessions of the guests were searched thoroughly, but to no avail. As they sat in the drawing room, Mrs. Warburton said shakily, “All this commotion, I really must have a cigar.”

She extracted one from her husband’s cigar case, but he protested.

“Remember your digestion, darling,” he said. “I wouldn’t think it advisable so soon after dinner.”

Bishop St. Dennis was conversing with Lady Holbroune. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

“Why what’s this?” he said. “Pray excuse me.” And with a deft motion, he abstracted a scrap of silk from the countess’ earring. As he examined it, he observed that it was of a delicate Asian texture. Asking her permission, he inserted it in the pocket of his simar.

“I would now like to examine, if I may, the fuse box,” the bishop inquired. He was led to the fuse box; then he examined the surrounding area outside, the rose garden. He observed several footprints of small sturdy shoes.

“Yes,” remarked the bishop, “if I may speak with the gardener’s son, I believe I shall have the answer to this unusual problem.”

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The guests had now reassembled in the drawing room and suspicious glances darted around the room. Even the cheerful Mrs. Warburton felt the solemnity of the occasion as the bishop rose and began.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I have come to a conclusion.” He turned to the senator with a small smile. “May I oblige you for a cigar, sir?”

The senator grinned and open his cigar case, but instead of taking the one offered to him, the bishop selected one, peeled back the label, and took the Duboni Opal from its hiding place. The senator, his face suffused with blood, shouted an oath.

“Yes,” continued the bishop, “it was merely a matter of remembering some seemingly insignificant details. The senator was in financial debt. Mrs. Warburton’s ornaments are made of paste, evident by the fact that she announced she had a blister. This was due to second-rate jewellery, which can cause a rash on delicate skin, and not to the weight. Also, when Mrs. Warburton requested a cigar and chose one herself, her husband feared it might prove to be the one in which he had hidden the opal. The condemning evidence, however, was the testimony of the gardener’s son, who had been persuaded to shut out the lights at 9:00 p.m. when we all would be in the drawing room. The silk I found on Lady Holbroune’s earring was merely a red-herring to cast suspicion onto Lord Holbroune. It was too clean-edged to be a tear.” The bishop turned to the senator sadly. “It was very unwise.”

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The police were duly telephoned. As they escorted the senator out, Claudia remarked to Bishop St. Dennis,

“What an auspicious beginning for the holidays!”

2002 Senior Nonfiction Winner

## The Invisible War

*by Amanda Rosanne Fife*

*Grade 11 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School*

I'm munching my chicken, watching my family's eyes trained on the TV through the doorway. We're having dinner, for God's sake; just turn it off. If you leave it on, one of you will say something about it. And then – once it's come into the sacred silence of our dinner conversation – the very discussion I've been avoiding will start.

In the end, my sister puts it up in the air. My father seizes it immediately, grumbling dejectedly about all the people killed and how he wants to see the terrorists who crashed those planes suffer for all the horrors they caused. He says he wants to know about the third plane – if it was related or not.

I want to tell him to shut up and quit talking. But instead I tell him what a girl in one of my classes told me – that the third plane was headed for the White House and that if the president had been killed, there would have been nukes shot off at every suspected country inside of a few days. This enrages him and he proceeds to tell me that I am grossly misinformed – no one is going to bomb anyone else until all the details are assured. "They don't want a war."

I would think differently from the way they talk about it on TV. They throw the word around like it's nothing special. "War imminent for United States..."

The conversation all goes downhill from there until I am debating the need for war, disputing the great conflicts of our history. "Whose brilliant idea was war anyway? Why do we kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong?"

"How else but with retaliation can we stop them?" my mother asks.

I am glowering now, trembling inside with the need to scream.

"We don't need to sink to their level to stop them," I grate.

"Let me put it this way," she explains. "If you're in the yard at school and somebody pushes you down, and you don't do anything, they're going to come and do it again. If you don't defend yourself or get your friends to help you – like the U.S. is doing with the Allies – they're going to come back with all their friends and run you into the ground!"

I sit there trembling with rage as the realization strikes me. They let me be a victim of war...

They let me lie there in that hell, entrenched in the war that was my daily life, living as the passive example they taught me to be. For three years of emotional and sometimes physical abuse I did what they told me to – because they were my parents and I was the child who knew nothing of the real world. I had to trust them. Obviously my gut instinct to tear my peers' throats out with all the rage that I felt burning in me was wrong and horrible. So I did what they taught me to.

And they taught me to take it – to be pushed down over and over and take the sheaves of insults and ignore my enemies. They were the ones, sitting there on my bed as I sobbed, convincing me in those deceptively soothing tones that my tormentors would lose interest and go away! They would not sit by and see a country fail to defend itself against international terrorists, and yet they sat by and watched their own daughter be terrorized into an emotional and social oblivion, passing it off as schoolyard troubles when it was truly nothing less than war!

I had certainly known before then that my parents were capable of mistakes, but it never occurred to me so clearly as it did at that moment. I felt as though my entire existence had been betrayed, as though they had molded my life to be a war, if only through their own stupidity. I wanted to scream, to hail my anger out on them, but my tongue held fast in my throat. These were my parents and all that we had been through together because of my childhood wars had strengthened us indeterminately. My mother and I, especially, were deeply linked. She had been my rock, my lone solace in those cruel years, and to turn and blame my suffering on her seemed worthless and more destructive than healing.

Back in the present day at the dinner table – as all these revelations spin in my head – I half consciously carry on my argument to its climax. I never say a word about my sense of betrayal. When I finally leave the table in furious tears and throw myself on my bed, my mother comes to comfort me and agrees, as I sob into her collar, that the example she gave was insensitive. Even in her righteousness she still finds it in her to see my deeper pain. She is one of the few who ever understood about the agony I feel. The only one, I think, who can see those festering slivers of harsh reality that still dig at my soul, even years after their infliction. Most people consider my past over and buried in my wake – Mom knows better.

I hope that I can someday be something of the mother that she is to me now. She is my friend more than anything else, my deepest confidant and my solace in the darkness of life. When hell on Earth has befallen me, she has been there, and to turn to her now and tell her that she taught me to increase that hell would be as close to a sacrilegious action as this atheist could ever get.

In my own way, I forgive my family for their blind betrayals. And even so, if I could change my childhood, I'm not sure I would. If I did not suffer, I would not know happiness. If I did not need security and love, I would not know my mother as dearly as I do. Above all, however, reigns the thought that we are the sum of our experiences. Without the wars I've braved – however much I suffered in them – I would not be me.



2002 Senior Nonfiction Runner-up

## The End of the World is Being Written

*by Quinn Damery*

*Grade 12 – Crestwood Secondary School*

It's 6:15 p.m., and it's time to get to work. I pull out my rough notes and prepare to shape my raw thoughts into a polished masterpiece. Truth be told, I don't really want to be here. I'd much rather be reading a book, examining the local geography with close acquaintances, or even learning how to cook a soufflé. Anything but writing an essay. Essays are the thorn in my side, the bullet in my brain, the knife in my heart. Essays ruin my life, but more importantly, they are ruining our world and its future inheritors.

For decades, parents and teachers have censured students for their poor planning skills. Historically, procrastination is a mainstay in the personality of the teenager, and essays created it. "Write a fifteen-hundred word essay on how MacBeth's tragic flaw is his ambition." Shoot me in the head. Please, I beg of you. I'd rather shove my face into a box full of razors and blink. Every single mentally sound student I have ever met abhors the idea of writing an essay; so, as with almost every persistent virus in humans, they develop an antibody to them: procrastination. Teenagers will redirect their attention to any non-essay-oriented endeavour. During those death-row moments leading up to starting an essay, I will redirect my attention to cleaning my working space until it maintains the polished sheen of a sweating, bald man's head. Once, while I was starting an essay, my mother walked through and commented on how clean the computer room had become. She commended me on a job well done. She could have asked me to clean the entire house, and I would have done it. (However, another teenage antibody, referred to as "laziness," prevented me from taking on this task of my own free will). Little did my mom know that the sudden cleanliness of the computer room and my assigned task of writing an essay were in direct correlation with each other.

This awful characteristic is almost impossible to lose, too. Forget smoking and cocaine; procrastination is the hardest habit to break. You can see the evidence of long-lasting procrastination all around you. Ever notice how the government puts deadlines on national projects about ten to fifteen years in the future? It's because tasks like cleaning up the environment are almost as daunting as writing an essay. Nobody wants to tackle an assignment that large ever, much less right away. Musicians can write and record an album in about a month. Why do they always take six months to lay down tracks, you ask? They're spending the first five months cleaning up the studio.

I resent the outcome essays will have on my character traits. I'll never be able to take on a job right away. Eventually, I'll completely lose confidence in my abilities to perform as an active member of society. I'll turn into a recluse who never does anything significant, but has a very clean

dwelling. That's no way to go through life, constantly dusting surfaces. Essays are going to ruin my life and the life of every other person in the world.

I once watched a very informative report on the lifestyles of teenagers, done by the investigative journalism television show, "20/20." (Note: I was scheduled to be working on rough notes for an essay at the time). This report stated that teenagers require a minimum of eight hours of sleep a night in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The essays assigned to teenagers completely demolish this expectation of healthy living. The previously analyzed procrastination habit produced by essays inevitably leads to late nights slaving over a cancer-inducing computer screen. Essays are making a total mockery of the reputed journalistic skills in "20/20"! When I procrastinate long into the night, I'm surrendering precious hours of sleep, turning them into minutes, and those minutes eventually give way to seconds. "The conclusion – one paragraph, the purpose of which is to impress on the reader the thesis that has been developed" (M.L. Ford, *Good Techniques of Writing*, p. 48). By the time I write that final, all-important paragraph of the essay, I'm lucky if I can even remember what sleep is, never mind whether I will be able to obtain any tonight.

As I turn my gaze away from the frigid computer screen and out my window to see that the sun has replaced the moon, I'm flabbergasted. "The sun? But it's nighttime! What time is it? 7:30...a.m?! That's impossible! I didn't sleep! It can't be morning if I didn't sleep, can it?" My mind struggles to grasp even the most basic concept of time. "I was up all night writing this thing? It's not even that good! I've wasted my time! I'll never be able to get those hours back!" The essay-ridden nights of sleep deprivation don't come without their long-term effects. Sleep cycles are thrown off for weeks. Students spend spare minutes between classes with their heads against pillows while they stand inside their lockers, desperately trying to regain what they lost. The teachers –the same teachers that assign essays – have an all-too-simple remedy for the slumberless students: "You should really get to bed a little earlier; catch up on some sleep," they say. "You should stop giving me essays," is my quick-witted response. "They're ruining my life."

Some might argue that essays are a good thing. These people believe essays help individuals build logical reasoning capabilities. Have these people taken a look at the state of logic and reasoning in the world? It's in shambles! Pollutants from automobiles are deteriorating the ozone layer, which is causing more ultraviolet rays to enter our atmosphere, which is causing the polar ice caps to melt, leading to elevated sea levels. The logical and reasonable solution? Instead of repairing the ozone, they invented a car that will run off the water from the oceans that were raised because of the hole in the ozone caused by the pollutants from fossil-fuel-burning automobiles. Of course, when the oceans dry up because we're all filling our gas tanks, we're going to be equally screwed.

The other point that "pro-essayists" tend to make is that essays provide students with a strong foundation to learn how to argue. I speculate that arguing is just their form of procrastination and that they really have an essay of their own they should be attending to. With the amount of international tension, religious terrorism, and professional sports team rivalries present in the world, I think we could all do with a little less arguing. Can you imagine it? World leaders would be drinking pina colodas and discussing their favourite episodes of "Friends." Eventually, the world would become a much more compromising and relaxed place.

If we removed essays from our lives now, we could estimate that, taking into account about twenty years of habitual procrastination and five years to work out the kinks in our sleep cycles, the world would be a better place by the year 2027.