



LAKEFIELD
LITERARY *Festival*

2004

YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST
WINNERS

2004 Senior Fiction Winner

Blue Tiles

by Kristin Valois

Grade 12 – Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

You let out a loud sigh as you realize the cart that you've given your precious quarter to has a bum wheel. Attempting to manoeuvre through parked cars to the grocery store entrance, you stop, pat your pockets, and rack your brain for where you left the list. It can't be in the car, can't be on the desk... right next to the phone. Dammit! Pushing the cart is more of an obstacle than you bargained for. Its intense need to be oiled is almost as bad as the constant jerk to the right that threatens to send you careening into the grey-haired older lady who has stopped to feel the lemons. You fumble with your purse, fishing out your coupons carefully collected throughout the week. Aha! Lettuce is twenty cents cheaper this week, and, for Chrissake, you deserve a break once in a while; the grocery bill seems to get longer and longer every week. Plopping your purse down in the cart, you remember how much fun grocery shopping was when you were a kid, back when things were simple and you didn't have to foot the bill. You realize that not one positive thought has entered your mind since arriving here.

You're weaving through the aisles, bypassing the convenience food section because the last thing you need on your mind is guilt for a few extra pounds or the toxic preservatives. You're through the entire store, past the bakery section, where you make up for the lack of preservatives with brownies, scratching the guilt for the extra pounds because life's short, right? You're circling back through the produce aisles, trying not to step on blue tiles on the floor, just like when you were a kid. Except you can't break your mother's back...you compromise...stepping on the blue tile means *your* back is broken. Glancing at the brownies in your cart, you decide salad is going to be on the menu tonight; life may be short, but calories live forever. You hope no one has been noticing your odd aversion to the blue tiles. Radishes, every salad needs radishes... don't step on that blue tile right in front of the stand... and that's when you see her.

It's a perfect double take; your neck snaps around, your jaw drops, and it's all you can do not to let out a sound. She's picking up lettuce, holding it up, presumably checking for brown spots – there has to be a reason it's twenty cents off. The normalcy of the act stuns you. She's still tall. Her hair isn't the white blond it used to be back in high school, but it's still blond, pulled back into a bun. She's wearing a black turtleneck sweater, knee-length skirt, and black heels, and her legs look like they did back in high school too – tan and long and lean. You're almost too afraid to look up, up to her face that you know will also be the same as it was. Naturally tanned with long lashes, perfectly arched brows, piercing cobalt blue eyes. Maridy's still inexplicably beautiful, and you still hate her for it.

She puts the lettuce in her cart, and as she turns, you catch a glimpse of her face again and feel relief. One thing has changed – she wears glasses now. Out with the cheerleader image and in

with the scholarly look. You guess that fifteen years out of high school probably should bring about some change. After all, you look completely different. As well you should. A lot has happened after high school, and you're a different person now. You don't need approval from anyone else. With that realization, it hits you. You have to hide! You can't be seen here, in a grocery store, undignified, clutching your coupons and pushing around your brownies! She cannot see you here, like this. You feel your face go hot and then cold as you try to nonchalantly pick up radishes. Concentrate on the salad. Radishes, mushrooms... with a dread in the pit of your stomach, you realize you need lettuce. You should have picked it up your first time around in the produce section, instead of hightailing it to the bakery department. How could you have forgotten? You're making salad... the spray nozzles start spurting water overtop the radishes, and it startles you.

You're not sure how to deal with this. She's over there; you're here, but you need to be over there. You can't do anything more to avoid it: you need the lettuce for the salad and, for Chrissake, the least you can do is be healthy. After all, she might not even remember you. Not many people you see from school do. Too bad the important thing is that you remember her. You think that maybe fifteen years is a long time to hold a grudge – that's supposed to be unhealthy. High blood pressure and heart disease are the number one killers among women. Your hands are clenched on the bar of the shopping cart; "Smile as you Save" stares up at you. The thought crosses your mind to just leave the cart and run. You absolutely despise seeing anyone from high school with their fake smiles and the vacant look in their eyes as they search their brains trying to find you. You're simply not remembered. You've faded into the background between their "big games" and "crazy parties." They might remember the jokes, but not the girl. Maridy would hardly remember a girl who followed her everywhere, idolized her, and wanted to be her. Your hands relax; you rub them together and fish for cream out of your purse to massage them. You take a deep breath, in and then out, and feel the cool wash over you. It's nothing at all; people see people from their past all the time. This time is different though. You know she can't be avoided; you can't play the tile game with her. You're not a lonely kid anymore, begging to be accepted. Besides, you know you look silly, hopping over the blue tiles, trying to get to what you need. It's the same way with Maridy. She's like a blue tile, but this time the rules have changed. If you step on her, she won't break your back.

2004 Senior Fiction Runner-up

Prisoners of Another Man's War

by Leah Burnie

Grade 11 – St. Peter Catholic Secondary School

“I can't escape, Joseph.”

“It's okay, Tommy Boy. I am not afraid, and I am sorry that we're both still here.”

It was a cold winter night, and from his dimly lit window Thomas watched the people walking home, as he stared bitterly through the metal frame. He had been wandering in and out of consciousness this evening, like a drunk staggering in and out of his local pub. He sighed deeply, turned away, and curled up in his cheap metal cot to keep warm.

“You know,” Thomas began, “I remember Father would come home around this time from the factory – or the whisky house – with another story to tell us about the war.”

“Oh, yeah,” Joseph recalled, “that sure as hell put us to sleep didn't it?”

“Of course,” Thomas joked. “When he tucked us in, that man really made me question a thing or two about life. ‘You boys are lucky there ain't no damn fightin' now. We had it rough, seein' fellas die right after we shared a good laugh or a good drink with 'em. I tell ya, it just ain't right what those “Germs” did to the world. Could make a man damn near crazy just to think about everything he'd miss, bein' there, dyin' there. I'm still sorry I was there.’” Thomas laughed at the thought of his father's repetitive war speeches. He had them all memorized. He paused and shook his head. “It's ironic though, isn't it? A couple of years later we were fighting those same damn ‘Germs.’”

“I suppose,” Joseph answered, “but at the time we didn't all have much of a choice, so we signed up anyway.”

“That's true,” said Thomas. He sat up looking sullen and weary. His handsome auburn hair fell dull and unhealthy over his scarred forehead, and was tousled from his hand that frequently ran through it. His long lashes swept over his deep-green eyes like moss on a weathered rock. His young war-torn face was scarred with guilt, regret, and accumulating sorrow. The laugh-lines that once outlined his bold lips were fading, along with the memory of laughter. He risked a smile in remembrance of the past.

“Joe?” Thomas said, his smile vanishing as if it had never appeared. “I think this place is driving me mad. People come through here all the time, pointing, giving me looks. I don't want their damn pity. I don't even know what I did to deserve a place here.”

“Well, Tommy Boy,” Joseph said in comfort, “I understand. The drugs and nonsense being passed out here is enough to drive the strongest man into madness.”

“Not to mention those dark shadows that lurk on the walls,” Thomas said uneasily.

“What shadows?” Joseph asked, confused. “Don’t be so melodramatic.”

“Honestly!” Thomas cried. “Every night I see these dark shadows flash quickly on the walls; don’t you see them?”

“No,” Joseph said, almost mockingly.

“Well, sometimes I try to hide under the bed, but I’m too afraid to move. I hate this damn place; it makes me claustrophobic.”

“That reminds me of the time when Dad found us drinking his whisky in the barn,” Joseph chuckled.

“Oh yeah, and we hid under his bed because it was the last place he’d look!” Thomas laughed at the memories; those were the greatest times. “Then there was that time in high school when Mr. Harvey came to class still drunk from the night before and tried to teach us physics!”

“Yep, good ol’ Bobby Harvey,” Joseph said with a fading smile. “He died in cousin Georgie’s platoon a few squads ahead of us, somewhere in Poland.”

“I forgot he enlisted,” Thomas said sadly.

“Yep,” Joseph said, “well, why not? He had nothing left here anyway. His wife died of heart failure and his boy ran away. He might as well die fighting with nobility than with a bottle halfway down his throat.”

“It’s kind of like what Dad used to say of the war, ‘we were all victims,’ and so was he,” Thomas said dismally. “Machines trained to battle another man’s fight.” Thomas’s eyes drifted toward the window again, looking at the now deserted city streets.

“So this is hell,” Thomas thought. “It must be. I’m in a cell with little to do but wrestle with myself and my sins. My mind is aching, and my emotions and memories coil like these twisted sheets, and tangled, uncomfortable jackets.”

“I wish now I never signed up,” Thomas said, so that Joseph might hear him. “I missed out on my world by trying to defend someone else’s. The things I miss most are the people and places I am beginning to forget. So much for being a war hero. Where is Dad when I need him most?”

Thomas shook his head and lowered it so that his tearful eyes could be hidden. He began to tap his foot on the bedpost.

“Calm down, Tommy Boy. You know sometimes I think you didn’t deserve a place here, or in this war; the world needs more of your philosophies,” Joseph said serenely with a wink. “It’s okay, Tommy Boy. I’m sorry...”

Thomas suppressed a quiet grin. “I can feel them coming now. It’s getting colder,” Thomas shivered. The door of the cell slowly opened as two squat females hustled into the room.

“You can turn on the lights, Thomas, if you want. I was just coming to give you your medication,” said one woman kindly. She had thick square glasses and a neat brown bun on her head behind her white nurse’s cap. The other gazed at Tommy underneath short black bangs. She turned on the light.

“Good evening Charlotte,” Thomas said weakly, squinting at the brightness that entered the room. “I was just telling Joseph how cold it was in here.”

“Joseph?” questioned the black-haired nurse, confused. Thomas didn’t like her very much; her smell resembled the smell of sour milk.

“Oh, I see,” Charlotte sighed. “Would you like another blanket, dear?”

“Only if it isn’t white,” Thomas said sneeringly. “I’ve grown to hate this colour.”

“Yes, of course dear, I understand,” Charlotte replied. “Would you like the light kept on?”

“No!” Thomas groaned. “I can see more of that colour, and those shadows will come back.”

“Those are just the vehicles outside, dear,” Charlotte explained. “They can’t hurt you.”

“I know that!” Thomas snarled. “Just, would you please get me another blanket?”

“Of course, dear,” Charlotte said soothingly.

“Charlotte?” Thomas inquired as the nurses turned to leave the room, setting down his pills and a glass of water.

“Yes, dear?”

“I’m not crazy. I just feel like a prisoner... you know... in here.”

“Of course, dear.”

Charlotte and the other nurse then left the room, closing the door behind them.

“What happened to him?” asked the black-haired nurse, as they began travelling down the whitewashed hallway. Other patients were peering tiredly out of the tiny windows at the top of the

other doors, longing to find a way out. The quick short steps of the nurses across the concrete tiles sounded like a small army as they echoed off the tall, brightly lit ceilings.

“Quite sad really, Margaret,” Charlotte replied. “He was found wandering around England after the war, alone and silent. Luckily he still had on his dog tag, so he was brought to the police; one of his squad leaders was contacted, and he transferred Tommy here, near his hometown.”

“Why?” asked Margaret.

“Well, apparently his brother took orders from him to check out an abandoned house, in a small town in Italy, and poor Joseph was caught and taken prisoner into the enemy’s hideout somewhere in town.”

“No!” Margaret cried, shocked.

“Yes,” Charlotte said sadly. “He was reported lost, but Tommy left his squad to look for him about a week later and found him lying, horribly wounded, outside of an empty schoolhouse. Apparently Tommy held him until he passed. His squad found him still clutching Joe’s dead body about twelve hours later. His father comes often to visit, but poor Tommy doesn’t want to see him.”

“Why not?” Margaret asked dully.

“He doesn’t know what to say.”

Back in his room, Thomas eyed the empty bed beside him and said, “do you remember what you said to me Joe, the day I found you?” He smiled weakly.

“I said that it was okay, Tommy Boy. I am not afraid, and I am sorry we are still here.”

Thomas sighed and let a tear fall as he gazed out the window once more. “I’m sorry too, Joe.”

2004 Senior Fiction Runner-up

Rippled Glass Observations

by Emily Ann Lamond

Grade 12 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School

The water falls gently. You feel drops on bare legs as a sunbeam pours into your eyes. You stare down at flat stones, dark with a patch of moisture as glass reaches a point above your head. There is something about a greenhouse, the scent of dirt in your nose and the crispness of tulips, the intimacy of clear walls. It is damp inside the greenhouse, but it is a pleasant mist from mechanical devices, not the heaviness of a warm wet day. Here, it is possible to breathe deeply. The sun always seems to be lighting up the vivid greens and browns that crowd the glass room. You pass through an arch of fig trees and come across a dark dip filled with lazy goldfish. It is very silent in a greenhouse. Take long sniffs, sigh, and smile. There is no one to see you.

A cast-iron bench appears at an opportune moment when rest is desired. You sit for a moment in calming contemplation. A young couple strolls by, fingers entwined, casting bright glances around the room. He watches her spill a drop from a curved leaf, her upward gaze caught in a moment. His hand lifts as if to draw her close, but she is already there. Feathery fringes of plant shade the meeting of silent lips. You look away wistfully. An older man stops and stares into the shimmering pool of orange and gold bodies. A felt cap hides thinning hair. He strokes a purple iris, and a diamond falls from his eye to drench petals. He is distant from the world of roaring cars. A tired mother with a small girl points to a bending rose, its face opening into the face of the child. There is a high chirp of delight, breaking the tranquil length of forgotten time. You get up and turn to enter the adjoining brick building full of books, falling under a new law of solitude.

Voices murmur, keyboards tap, pages turn. The teenagers on the computers giggle foolishly as a little boy comes running. His anxious father, with an armful of books, chases after him and pulls him to the checkout. A girl shelving books slouches by with earphones blasting. In a far corner, two gangly boys watch movie credits with blank looks. People as plants. You feel drops on bare legs as a sunbeam pours into your eyes from a large window high above. A woman drinks from a water fountain, straight hair waving over her face as she bends. You stare down at smooth stone, moisture gathering and snaking outwards towards you from the fountain's trickle. There is something about a library – the smell of ink, paper that contains a hint of cigarette smoke, and the sense of knowledge hidden within. The air is regulated, moisture-free.

Sunlight streams over green and brown covers that crowd the shelves. You pass through aisles, occasionally picking up a book. A student lies in the middle of the stacks, absorbed in research. There is a worn red chair visible at the end of the shelving. In it perches a middle-aged man with a vacuous look. A few books lie unopened in his lap, mingled with a thin yellow sweater. His hands cradle his belongings in a moment of suspense. You move away. In an alcove at the back of the library lies a table covered with opened texts of all sizes. A tiny girl kneels on a chair and leans

her whole body over a picture book. Her blond hair tumbles around her face as she flips pages and mumbles to herself the story she sees. She looks up from the pile of books and stirs, uncomfortable with strange eyes. Her words soften like dying rain. You slide away, so that she might not be disturbed.

2004 Junior Fiction Winner

Let's Play Pretend

by Kate McLeod

Grade 10 – Crestwood Secondary School

I pulled the purple diary from the clutter of the closet. I opened it and giggled at the picture that fell out. It showed a sticky-faced Lauren, grinning from ear to ear, with her arm around my shoulders. It had been taken last month at the zoo, less than two months after I had stepped in to fill the gap in their small family.

“Hey, sleepyhead!” cried Lauren as she opened the door to our shared bedroom and clambered onto the bed. She smelled of toothpaste and the flowery shampoo her mom bought at the drugstore. I handed her the picture. She sighed, “I wish mom would let me hang it up.” I shrugged and turned back to the diary; it was my turn to make an entry. With the pink marker I clutched in my hand, I drew a picture of the two of us on the swings at the playground.

“We should go to the park,” I said, admiring my artwork. She glanced out of the window and shook her head. “We can’t. Look at those clouds.”

I nodded. “Then let’s go get breakfast.” I pulled on my slippers, and we headed down the stairs. As we passed the dining room, we saw Lauren’s mom sitting at the table talking on the phone with her head held in her free hand. Parts of her conversation drifted into the hallway.

“I just don’t know if I can keep it... a new baby... Lauren...” I looked over at my friend, her eyes wide with shock. Her tight curls jumped as she shook her head and ran back towards the bedroom. I tiptoed up the stairs behind her, not wishing Mrs. Austin to notice us.

When I reached the bedroom, I found Lauren with her Barbie suitcase already half-packed. She gave me a meaningful look; I nodded and added my teddy bear and pyjamas to the pile of things to go into the suitcase. She smiled brightly and hugged me.

We crept back down the stairs; this time each of us carried one end of the tightly packed suitcase. I pulled on my running shoes as Lauren looked thoughtfully at the fall jackets hanging on our hooks. She shook her head firmly, leaving them untouched. She helped me to get the suitcase over the railing of the back porch. We then jumped after it and began hiking down the block.

We spent the morning wandering around the neighbourhood. We stopped to visit Ms. Jenson, the librarian. She let us each take out a book and gave us cookies to take on, what she called, our “adventure.” We went from there to the park, where we spent an entire afternoon playing pirates with some of the local kids.

One by one, they began to drift home for dinner. I could see Lauren was hurt but resolved. “We don’t need them,” she told me, “We can just stay here tonight. The Indians slept outside. We’ll play Pocahontas.” I was uneasy about this decision, but I trusted Lauren and told her so.

We ate our cookies and then read our books until it began to get dark. Suddenly, the forests surrounding the park, so perfect for playing hide-and-seek or Robin Hood, seemed dangerous, full of things that I was certain ate pretend Indians. Lauren cast a similarly uneasy eye over the forests but turned, as if unconcerned, back to her story. I returned to my book until I noticed the droplets of water blurring the words on the page. I looked to Lauren for an answer and watched as her eyes lit with an idea. “The library!” she cried triumphantly. I quickly agreed, happy to get away from those woods.

We started up the streets we had walked a thousand times before, but in the dark they were much harder to follow. My stomach flip-flopped as passing cars made the shadows dance eerily around us. We clasped hands and continued our march, with the Barbie bag bumping along the sidewalk behind us.

Soon, none of the buildings looked familiar. All were much bigger than any I had ever seen. The streetlights made the windows gleam like laughing eyes. But none seemed to be laughing at anything I would find particularly funny. We huddled in the doorway of one of the nearest and least-menacing-looking buildings to give ourselves a moment out of the pounding rain.

“What if she can’t keep it?” she asked me.

“The baby?” I asked, as if she’d already told me.

She nodded. “When Daddy died, she cried all the time and kept asking the ceiling why she couldn’t keep him. I don’t want her to start crying again if she finds out she can’t keep the baby either. Maybe...” she was cut short by a pair of blinding headlights pulling up in front of the doorway where we were huddled.

“Lauren?” called the voice that stepped out of the car. It moved into the lights and we saw that it was Mrs. Austin; her face was red and streaked with tears.

“Oh, no,” whispered Lauren dispirited. “She’s not allowed to keep it. I just knew it.”

The next morning Lauren came solemnly up to the bedroom where I was anxiously waiting. Her mother had called her down earlier for a talk. I thought she must have been angry about having to come and find us.

“If we had taken our jackets, I think we would have been okay,” I started to tell her, but she shook her head. “She wanted to talk about the baby. She says that no one is going to take it away from us, that it’s ours for good now. She said she’s going to need me to help out a lot. I’m going to be a big sister, you know.” She stared fixedly at the floor.

“Then what’s the matter?”

“She says I need to stop playing with you now that the baby is coming.” She laid a picture of herself in front of a monkey cage on the bed. Her face was covered in cotton candy and her arm was held at a strange angle. “She says that eight is too old to have an imaginary friend.”

2004 Junior Fiction Runner-up

The Gift

by Terry Hart

Grade 10 – Adam Scott Collegiate Vocational Institute

“Happy birthday to Harry, happy birthday to you,” my mother and I sang to my father on his 38th birthday. I was so excited for him to open my present that I could barely contain myself.

“It’s kind of small,” he said jokingly as he slowly unwrapped it.

“Good things come in small packages,” said my mother with a smile.

“Hurry up, Dad,” I said impatiently. He went even more slowly. He pulled out the tiny, roughly carved canoe I had worked so hard on. “Not bad for an eleven-year-old,” he said.

“Dad, do you think that maybe we could go on a real canoe trip someday?”

“Sure, son – someday,” he said. “Now, where’s my cake?”

Then he put the little canoe with his other gifts, as if it was nothing special. I could have bought him a cheap-looking model that was made in China, and he would have been just as happy. I was crushed.

I went upstairs without saying goodnight. I opened the window for some air. The night was calm and cool, and I listened to the sounds of the city for a while before turning out my light.

* * *

Five years went by. I kept asking my dad when we could go on a canoe trip. He always came up with excuses. He was too busy with work, he didn’t like the outdoors, there was too much to do at home. But then, on my seventeenth birthday, my wish finally came true.

“I’ve decided to take some time off work to go up north on this canoe trip of yours. So it’d better be worth it.” He still didn’t sound very enthusiastic about the trip.

“Come on, Dad. It’ll be fun.”

“Yeah, I’m sure it will. But when I’m not working, I’m not making any money.”

Of course, I knew we were financially drained. My mom had recently lost her job, and we had been forced to use some of my savings.

“What about the money Grandma gave me?”

“Sure, that’ll go far,” he said sarcastically.

“If you’re not going to enjoy this trip, then there’s no point in going,” I grumbled.

“Listen, Ian, I’ve already gone to the trouble of making all the necessary arrangements at work. I know how much this means to you.”

Well, it obviously didn’t mean much to him.

* * *

The five-day trip would consist of driving up to northern Ontario and paddling the Albany River. As the river was a very demanding one, the outfitters convinced us to rent the best (and therefore most expensive) equipment.

“I thought canoeing and camping were supposed to simplify things,” my dad complained. Neither of us spoke much during the long drive. It felt great to finally reach our destination. No traffic noises, just the sounds of nature, which was exactly what I was hoping for.

I was so happy to finally be in a canoe with my dad that I started off paddling very fast and accidentally splashed some water on him. I froze, expecting him to yell at me, but suddenly I was drenched from head to toe. We laughed together for the first time in years.

Later that day, we found a nice campsite and set up the tent. After we ate, we sat around the fire talking. It was great to feel so relaxed with each other. We watched as the stars grew brighter and my dad pointed out a bunch of constellations to me. I had no idea that he knew so much about what was out there.

“I always wanted to be an astronomer,” he said.

Each night, we settled into our routine of talking around the fire and watching the stars. On our last night, the northern lights appeared and we sat there in awe. And then he said the strangest thing.

“Thank you son.”

“For what?” I asked.

“I’ll be honest. I really wasn’t looking forward to this trip. But now, I’m really glad we could do it together. Even though it was a gift to you, it has turned out to be very rewarding for me.”

I was speechless. I went to sleep that night content and without a worry in my head.

The next day, as we paddled ever closer back to the routines of our everyday lives, I tried to keep in my mind all that we had experienced together – the river, the stars, the beauty of the outdoors.

As we came around a bend in the river, we saw a baby moose and her mother eating lily pads. Then they moved on, and we watched them disappear, completely unaware of what lay ahead.

First the sound came, like the roar of a lion. Then I saw in horror that the river came to an end a few metres ahead.

“Dad!” I shouted. “Waterfall!”

“Quick, Ian! Grab that branch”

I grabbed it and held on with all my might, realizing just how fast the water was moving. Yet everything seemed to be going by so slowly. I turned to see my father paddling wildly, desperately trying to stabilize the boat. He looked back at me and our eyes met. I will never forget how scared he looked. Then my father disappeared over the edge of the falls. I tried to yell, but no words came out. I had the sickening feeling that I would never see him again. I panicked and felt the sudden urge to let go of the branch and swim after him. But I held on. With tears in my eyes, I pulled myself up and climbed to shore. I ran along the bank of the river, but all I could see was the black, devilish water and no sign of my father or the canoe.

Search-and-rescue teams were sent out daily, but they found nothing. My mother and I were completely overwhelmed with grief. I kept seeing my father’s face, reminding me of the awful truth – it was all my fault. If only I had swum after him. If only we hadn’t gone on this trip. If only I hadn’t given him that stupid little carved canoe.

Two years passed before I was able to return to the river. As I knelt by the shore below the falls, I peered into the water. There, in a small pool, I saw the canoe that I had carved so many years ago. My father had carried it with him! The pangs of guilt disappeared as if they had never been there. My father had loved me and would always be with me in spirit. It was the greatest gift I could ever have received.

2004 Senior Nonfiction Winner

Why Generation Y

by Josh Luckhurst

Grade 12 – Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

We elude definition.

We have been born into trouble and raised eyebrows and whispered suspicions and wagging fingers. Monitored and dissected before we can speak, we are told of mistakes not to make.

“Do not make mistakes. Do not repeat these mistakes. Are you listening? Do not even think about it. Do not screw this up.” We are told this from the beginning.

We are run through the wheels of grand systems, fitted, and pressed.

We are appropriated.

We are cookie dough.

We have shouldered the consequences of actions we never took and we march, under bombardment by well-meaning threats and giggling media, under advice to never, ever do things we don't understand. It rings in our ears as we walk in single file:

Do not.

Be not.

Fear.

We have been ushered into bright halls and are accosted on all sides. We do not yet know what is happening. We have covered our eyes with our hands and are blinking hard, but everything is blurred. There are fingers grasping and prodding and correcting and straightening, to the tune of a symphony of rules. They divide us a hundred-fold and scream in our ears. We wonder if they realize we can hear them but do not want what they are selling.

Many “whats.”

Many “hows”.

No “whys.”

We are expected to rebel, given channels and padding and product endorsements. We wonder what we are to rebel against. We have middle-class lives, white-walled ambitions, and authority figures encouraging smiling, empty angst. Within their boundaries, of course. Of course. We are to worship symbols of symbols of symbols of memories of what it felt like to hold something genuine. We ask for something more, but are laughed off and given papers for our pleasure.

We want none of this.

We have dimmed the lights and see better, a parade of mannequins and jesters, clad in confetti and neon – and all of it for sale. Pretenders and provokers, all of them visions of refined happiness. We see that they continue to not make sense. We have given up trying to decipher their codes, throwing our hands in the air. We will never speak their language. We will not speak their language.

We grin.

We leave the building through the back exit into the most unfashionable of alleys. We know we are being chased and we confound at every turn. We recognize each other and run together. When they come looking, we are not to be found. We plunge deeper and farther away from where we are encouraged to go. We are writing our own tablets and singing our own songs.

No categories.

No division.

We do not need them.

We do not need *them*.

They frown and ask for reasons. They want us to explain ourselves. We turn up the volume. We do not know our selves. We never had purpose to begin with; how are we to have one now? We know one thing only and have practised it to an art:

We like this game.

2004 Senior Nonfiction Runner-up

A Defining Moment

(Some Memories Never Die)

by Kyle Bell

Grade 12 – Adam Scott Collegiate Vocational Institute

In my opinion our defining moments in life are events that change the way we perceive the world, forever altering the course of our life, or that of someone around us. Events such as these do not happen every day, but when they do, they are the type of occurrence that will stand out in our memories forever. I can remember several of these instances, and yet there is one that stands out clearly in my memory. It hits me with such a striking impact that I remember the details of it to this day.

I was eleven years old at the time and in the middle of my sixth year of hockey. At this time, hockey was one of the main focuses in my life. On one particular cold, rainy night, near the beginning of the season, while driving home from a game, my experience occurred. I remember arguing with my dad, as we often did after games. He was telling me what I'd done wrong and how I had to fix it. It was the typical "constructive criticism" rhetoric that I had heard on so many other nights. We were so caught up in the argument that, for a moment, we almost failed to notice the boy running along the side of the road. Without any reason, he changed direction and started to run directly towards our car.

We halted our conversation in midstream and veered to the right to avoid the runner. As we moved out, so did he. We were getting steadily closer, and he still wasn't backing off. I got a brief glimpse of his face before he reached the car, and what stands out most in my mind is the complete absence of any fear in his expression that would suggest he realized the severity of what he was doing. We couldn't move over any further on the road without going into the other lane, and before we realized he definitely was not going to get out of the way, it was too late.

Everything happened in a matter of moments. The brakes of our car screeched in protest as my dad frantically tried to stop the car. The runner jumped into the air, attempting to vault himself over our car. The front window shattered, spraying glass all over my lap as the runner's knees connected with our windshield. I sat there wanting to say something, but the words caught in my throat. I remember thinking afterwards, what would happen to us for hitting this person? Was he dead? Had we just killed someone?

What we found out later that night was confusing to me at the time. The person we had hit was in fact only nineteen years old. After he was taken to hospital, a large quantity of drugs was discovered in his system. When I was told this, I still didn't understand how something could be powerful enough to make someone do something like this. The boy's parents told us he had been involved with drugs for some time before the accident occurred. They hadn't spoken to him in

months and didn't even know where he was. They went on to tell us that it was with drugs that their problems began. They had urged their son to get help, but he had refused, telling them he didn't have a problem. Some of the kids that went to high school with him claimed that he had boasted to them of his athletic ability while under the influence of drugs. He had told them how much faster he could run and how much higher he could jump. He thought he could fly.

Although the news of his condition removed me and my father from any legal responsibility, it didn't change the sickening feeling of guilt we would have for a long time afterwards. It may have been an accident, caused by elements out of our control, but it was one of those times when I simply asked myself, "Why?" Why did this have to happen? Why would someone ruin their life this way? I suppose we all have some small piece inside of us that dares us to do what we know is dangerous and wrong. How well we control this part of us may often be the difference between a happy life and a miserable one, and even between life and death.

Some time after the accident, I remember asking questions about drugs. I don't recall exactly what the questions were, or even the explanations, but what stands out in my memory is how I reacted to what happened. I sat there with a lap full of broken glass and looked across at my dad, who was in a state of shock. I can only imagine what he must have been feeling. I was only in the passenger seat, and I was maybe as scared as I've ever been. I had never seen someone nearly killed up close before. To me it seemed like something that could only happen in movies. Not real. Not a harsh reality I would ever have to face in everyday life.

Much later, the severity of what had happened would hit me much harder. A 19-year-old kid was in the hospital with injuries that would completely change the course of his life. It would be years before he might walk again, and even if he did, his life would never be the same. In a flash of mere moments, a normal kid from a town I lived in had nearly been killed. If drugs could cause this, if they could snuff out a person's life as easily as a flame might go out on a candle, then they were something that I would avoid at all costs. Our goals, our aspirations, our chances to make something of ourselves should not be taken away by a stupid decision we make to involve ourselves in what we ultimately know is wrong.

2004 Senior Nonfiction Runner-up

I, Tortoise

by Lindsey Jeremiah

Grade 12 – Lakefield District Secondary School

With the return of first-year university students for commencement, came the thought that perhaps I have been left in the dust. However, by not adhering to the big fat double cohort and jumping on last year's bandwagon loaded with 17-year-old university-bound teens, I feel I somehow will come out in the lead. I will not beat them to the finish line, but I'll still win. Call it the classic "tortoise and hare" syndrome.

Students who anticipated the pandemonium resulting from the infamous elimination of OAC (Ontario Academic Credit/Grade 13 year) and watched from the sidelines this year will be rewarded. When they venture into the "real" world, they will be prepared and right on schedule.

The elimination of OAC has created a pressurized atmosphere. Students are pressured even more now by their parents, who feel pressured to pressure their children! In addition, there is the necessity to earn sufficient money for tuition and living expenses with one year less to work and save. According to statistics from the University of Western Ontario's *2004 View Book*, the average cost for a first year student living away from home is conservatively pegged at \$16,000. This is of no concern to students planning on independent financial support. For the rest of us, however, that one extra year of being able to make money while still in high school would have made a difference, even at a whopping \$6.85 per hour.

The outgoing Ontario Tory government really did have its priorities out of line. In losing Grade 13, we have lost both teachers and courses, which are the substance of any high school and are thus invaluable. For seeming so very concerned with education, you would think the Tories would have devoted more attention to high schools where, according to Stats Canada, more students end their educational careers than move on to the next level. No one ever fully explained how slashing \$2 billion from the budget was supposed to improve education. Further, the Tory deregulation of university costs has robbed many of the opportunity for a post-secondary education. Those students unable to afford the outrageous expense should have access to the highest quality education possible, without having to drop sixteen grand to do so.

On top of this political disappointment, I have recently heard many stories from students about the underage drinking scene – and they, of course, were sloshed when they told me. It does, however, seem odd that with such an open issue as this, the Tories would not have a thought or two to express. Yet I didn't hear a single comment, let alone a genuine concern, expressed by any Tory anywhere! I suppose sending 17-year-olds, who aren't even considered legal adults, to a place often referred to as a 24-hour party isn't an issue anymore when the consolation prize is that the government makes a few bucks as students start binge-buying highly-taxed alcohol.

On the other hand, I suppose the double cohort could be looked at as a way to cut provincial expenses and, perhaps, better prepare kids for the “real” world by applying a little stress. Maybe the rush sensation will even make them work that much harder to achieve great marks and one day work for something as great as say... the government. On the other hand, as a student representing the tortoise’s view, I can verify that the extra time has given me the opportunity to grow up at a comfortable pace, achieve the grades, and raise the funds without feeling totally spent, like too little butter scraped over too much bread.

Since this time one year ago, I have changed my career and university choices at least five times. This leads me to wonder if those who left on the bandwagon would have done the same if given the time for reflection. We need to realize that growing and becoming familiar with yourself as a mature person is a process that cannot be rushed or filled in on an info sheet. Maybe Ontario had it right in the first place. This is why Grade 13 should be reintroduced, and damn the expense. It has always been an essential year to students. Perhaps the new Liberal government has some ideas about this. I certainly hope so.

Perhaps some teens made the right decision and will be performing their first triple heart bypass by the age of 23. However, for those 17-year-old “grown-ups” out there flapping around inebriated on a campus five hours from home, I can only wonder if they’ll wake up, or one day be caught brooding over their \$40,000 hangover in a cloud of tortoise dust.