



LAKEFIELD
LITERARY *Festival*

2007

YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST
WINNERS

2007 Senior Fiction Winner

The Sunset

by Max Lafortune

Grade 11 – Lakefield College School

I can still see the grass swaying in the wind as if nothing would ever change, the long, fluid blades stretching as far as the eye could see. How ironic it was that this summer would teach me more about change than I could ever have imagined. Mom got promoted; I got a new bike; he left...

Perhaps it started on that oh-so-famous last day of school awaited for so long (maybe since the first). I had officially finished grade one, and we were the oldest kids in the world, or so it seemed. It hadn't yet occurred to me that the biggest kid in my life was not a kid anymore. I ran all the way home with my schoolbag full of books to put away for the next few years. Little did I know that their true value was not found in grade one, nor would it be discovered for many years afterwards. Math, Science, English, French, and Art. I didn't really care about anything but art. I was an artist, just like him. I was always an artist and was sure I would never think differently. My sketchbook told a story, my story. From Australia to astronauts, from superpowers to sunny days, it was all there. Some sketches we'd drawn together and others, I had drawn on my own. It was an emotional toolbox, filled to the brim and full of excitement, frustration, happiness, and sadness. There were no rules, no plans, and no limits. We filled the last page together. It was a masterpiece full of colour and love. We made it together with nothing special in mind. Those were always the best ones, though. When it came to naming it, I could never do it justice, so I didn't. Instead, I cherished it, keeping it safe for the two of us. I would never lose it, I said to myself.

August 1st wasn't what I had expected it to be; something had happened. I knew my mother well enough to know that no matter how much she assured me that everything was fine, something was up. I thought maybe she'd lost her job. If only it had been that simple. August was by far the best month, however, so surely things would brighten up. It was sad to see the summer coming to an end, but nothing could have beaten those daily swims and ice cream sandwiches. "We need to talk," she said. I wondered what I had done wrong. "It's... it's him," she managed, before a tear streamed down her cheek. Numbness. I couldn't quite comprehend this statement, and yet it had resonated so soundly within me that I could feel the emotions pouring out. I was sad, then scared, then angry. I ran upstairs while trying to fight back the tears and grabbed my sketchbook. I searched for a surface upon which I could dispel my feelings, but realized that the book was full. I came to the last page, and without considering my actions, tore it out and began to crush it. It was so unfair. Why was this happening to me? What had I done that was so wrong? Then I saw the crunched-up sketch in my hand and could not believe my eyes. What had I done?

The next few weeks were hard, harder than ever before. We visited every day as if the hospital was my second home. I stayed as long as I could, sitting beside the bed and often dozing off beside

him. He would say, “Don’t worry, kid; artists never die, remember?” I wish I could have believed him. But then he said something that made me think. “Whatever happens, you know how you can find me,” he offered.

And then it happened. I awoke one morning with my mom beside me, giving me that look which I had come to recognize. It was as if time had somehow sped up in the few weeks that we had left together, and now it felt as if they hadn’t happened at all. With my family close beside me, I paid my respects, and we said goodbye for the very last time. I couldn’t recount the feeling if I tried. It was unlike anything I’d ever felt. But, as the days turned to months and the months to years, I gradually forgot all about the time we had spent together; instead, I became caught up in the less important things in life.

Grade 12 was busier than ever, with university applications, quantum physics, and varsity sports. One day, Mom asked if I would grab her a box out of the attic with some finance information in it. I picked up the box, but then noticed something I hadn’t seen in quite a while. It was my sketchbook from my early days. I opened it hesitantly, only to find some memories I had long since forgotten. I carefully flipped through, absorbing each sketch one at a time. Then I turned the last page, and there was something extraordinary. It was my drawing – our drawing. At first, I couldn’t remember if I had kept it or not, but then I was certain that I had discarded it on that oh-so-awful day. I picked it up carefully, as if not quite believing it was real. It was a sunset, a vivid portrayal of our favourite setting. Featured were two silhouettes, one of a grown man and the other of a child sitting next to him. The two observed the natural beauty, one which could not be matched. After a while, I heard the stairs creak as Mom came up to see what I was doing. “Oh,” she said, “I couldn’t let you part with that.” We embraced without speaking, almost as if we knew what the other was thinking. Then she whispered, “turn it over.” I spun the sheet to reveal a message that had not previously been there. “He wrote it to you,” she revealed. It read: “You know I’m here. Don’t ever forget.” I couldn’t help myself, as a single tear hit the page. At that moment, my grandfather was closer to me than he had ever been. Finally I had found him, and this time it was for good.

The Cry of the Loon

by Samantha Petrini

Grade 11 – Lakefield District Secondary School

The sun had yet to break the horizon. The water was perfect – the only disturbance coming from the even strokes of the paddle. The strokes were fast and powerful but made no sound. Those strokes were what I needed to try and calm myself. I was paddling with muscles that had been trained over the years so that I didn't have to stop and think. Thinking was the danger zone and would bring up so many horrible thoughts. Everything was still fresh in my mind – the screams, the hurtful words, the slap, and the loud bang that came as I slammed the door. The sound of the loons' mournful cries were something that usually calmed me, but today all it did was make me feel the anguish over what had occurred between my mom and me.

My parents had always said to their friends, "Tammy is such a strong, capable young woman." "We are so happy to have a girl like her." "She's our little angel." Where had those words and ideas gone? So many things had changed over the last few months. Nothing was the same. Everything had transformed and it was all too fast for me.

It started with the death of my father. My dad died of a heart attack about two months after his 47th birthday. I was always close to my dad, and because of that I was so bitter that a great man like him was stolen from me. I would never find sympathy in my heart for death. I was so bitter and angry that I completely shut everyone else out, including my mother. She said it really hurt her because I wouldn't talk, but I didn't care; I was hurt myself. That was when the fight between us started.

My mom is the type who wants to sit down and talk about her feelings, and that is one thing that I really can't do. I hate to communicate when I'm upset. During the past two months we would acknowledge each other, but that was about it. Early this morning I was up doing my routine, wandering around the house, because I can never sleep anymore, and that was when my mom heard me and decided to come and talk to me.

"Tammy, I'm really concerned that you are doing yourself harm because you won't talk about anything that happened that day. You need to talk about it and listen to me too." There was a slight pause, and then she continued, "I'm afraid that you feel responsible for what happened to your dad."

That hit me right where it hurt. You need to know that the day my dad died, he had been out training with me for my upcoming rowing match. He had complained that he was tired and weak, but I convinced him with my puppy-eyed face to come anyway. Later on that day I found my dad lying on the ground, dying, and I had no idea what to do. I just stood there and watched him die. I

don't remember too much beyond those few moments, but they remain so clear to me. I do recall that I started yelling for my mom, and when she finally arrived, it was probably too late. I remember her screaming at me to move, to call 911, to do something. Her screams turned into painful sobs as she held her dying husband in her arms. The whole time I just stood there as this awful image was seared into my memory.

I do feel responsible because at his funeral everybody was talking about how I didn't do anything. That was the worst part. I already knew that I should have done something, but I froze. Now he's gone because of that. Everyone had nothing better to talk about except what I didn't do. Those whispers and disgusted looks hurt me in a way I never thought that I could hurt. In no way could they think that I would just let my dad, my best friend, die as I watched. They had no right!

My mom was right. I did feel responsible for my dad's death. The problem for me was that now she was addressing this. I had the words imprinted on my mind that she had screamed at me. "Run! Go get help now!" The look on her face was something that haunted me even more than her words. I was always so used to seeing the look of a proud parent, and this expression, this look of disgust and hatred, was a shock to me. Now she was saying that she was concerned about me. Every instinct told me that my mom hated me because I took away her husband. I really felt that I couldn't talk with her since I believed that secretly she blamed me too. I had this feeling because she couldn't even look me in the eyes for the first few weeks after my dad's death. She was avoiding me when I needed her the most. All of these feelings came out when she finally confronted me.

"Tammy, I just really feel that we need to talk about that day." That was how she got the ball rolling.

"I don't need to talk about it. I just want to forget all about it, not drag it back out of the closet. I know that you blame me and I blame myself, so let's just leave it at that." I really didn't have enough sympathy for my mom to even talk about it with her. I could see in her eyes that what I had said really angered her, and I prepared myself for the worst.

"How could you even accuse me of thinking something like that? You are my daughter and I love you. I don't blame you for anything that happened. Didn't you hear what the doctors said about your dad? His heart was weak and could have given out at any time."

At this point I just lost it and broke down crying. "Remember those words you screamed at me? You kept yelling at me to do something. Now you want to pretend as if you never once blamed me. I saw your face! I heard your words, and afterwards you couldn't even look at me until now. I know you blame me! I blame myself! If I hadn't pushed him to come training with me, if I had known what to do, then maybe he would still be here. I miss Dad just as much as you, but I am the one who has to live with all the 'what if's.'"

I knew that I had gone too far by accusing her, but she wanted me to talk, so now I was talking. "I hate you for blaming this all on me. I hate that you're the one here now instead of Dad!" Those words were like a fatal punch.

“I don’t blame you, Tammy! Every day I wish I could have changed what happened, but I can’t.” My mom fell to the floor and sobbed, “How could you even wish I was dead?”

“I wish you were dead every time you act like this. Mom, I hate you!”

For the first time my mom stood up, looked me straight in the face, and screamed at me, “well, you only have me.” Then she did something that neither she nor my dad had ever done before. She raised her hand and slapped me hard right in the face. I stumbled back accepting this blow, but then she did it again, all the time saying, “I love you, Tammy.”

I ran. I went to the only place where I felt safe and comforted – the water. I got into the canoe and paddled as hard as I could. The tears were streaming down my face, but I didn’t notice because my whole face felt numb. My mother had done something I had never experienced before. She had hit me.

I sat in the canoe a long time, hoping that my mom would call out for me, but I heard nothing. Then I remembered all the hurtful words I had said to her. It was as if I had slapped her in the face too. I did love my mom and couldn’t imagine her dying either. She didn’t deserve to hear those words.

Things had to get better, and maybe I was the one who had to set things right. I sat in the canoe and watched the sun break through the horizon. I gazed at the awe-inspiring spectacle. In a matter of seconds something as extraordinary as a sunrise changes into the ordinary sun. Change was something that I would have to find a way to embrace. The loss of my best friend, my father, was something I could never accept, but I would have to move past it. My mom was not the enemy. Death was the enemy, but it was the inescapable enemy that I would have to face. My mom had experienced the death of her husband, her friend, just like me. I needed to set things right. Then I heard someone calling my name, and when I looked, I saw my mom standing out on the shoreline, waiting for me.

As I began to turn the canoe around, I saw a loon surface right beside me. It gave out its mournful cry, as if calling for its missing child. As I watched, a gosling began to surface.

It had responded to the cry of the loon.

1807

by Celina West

Grade 12 – Kenner Collegiate Vocational Institute

The boat rocked back and forth; the only sound to be heard was the crash of waves against the large cargo ship. The bright sun cast looming shadows against the hull as flecks of seaweed surfaced in the water, adding a green tinge. The night before had brought a dreadful storm, one which caused the ocean to open up and almost swallow the ship whole. But now, all was beautiful and calm, and the day was promising to be glorious and bright. An observer off the coast of Africa would have seen the sailors mopping the deck and enjoying the sun, unaware that in the cargo hold below that deck another storm was raging.

The captain of the boat looked down from his platform, taking in the sight of his sailors and the endless ocean in front of him. A man of fifty, he was by no means young; many years on the ocean had weathered his once handsome face. He took one last look at the sun and descended the platform.

“Derrick! Go down below and bring the animals up for some fresh air,” the captain said, a sly smile spreading beneath his long, matted beard.

“Yes, Sir,” replied Derrick.

Derrick stopped his mopping and slowly moved towards the hatch in the deck’s floor. He dreaded the moment of pulling it open, staring deep into the darkness of the cargo hold below. The smell was always what disturbed him. Working on the docks for most of his life, Derrick had seen and smelt many different things. And yet, the stench that rose from the darkness below was enough to make him retch. Derrick could feel the hot sting of bile rising in his throat, the tears glistening behind his hard-set eyes. It was the smell of hundreds of bodies and carcasses packed tightly together. It was the mixed stench of sweat, urine, and feces, as well as an overpowering smell of vomit. That was the worst. It was a smell so rancid that no one above board could ever escape from it. No matter where Derrick went, it followed him like a ghost, haunting him and reminding him of what he had witnessed.

As he pulled open the door, low moans and muffled whimpers swept through the darkness; they knew what was coming but could not muster the energy to fight. It was a losing battle for them, something they had come to accept long ago.

Descending the stairs, Derrick gazed at the horrific sight he had witnessed every day for the past three weeks of the voyage: naked black men and women, chained together side by side, covered with their own feces, unable to move. Their lifeless eyes, the whites in stark contrast to

their dark, sunken skin, stared into the distance. Derrick and the other sailors unlocked the chains, unable to look at the human beings they were treating like animals.

“Let’s go!” bellowed Derrick, as the men and women made their way up the stairs. There were those who were too weak to move. The dead from the previous night would have to be dealt with. The captain would find some way to dispose of their bodies later – in front of everyone, even the children.

Derrick squinted from the bright sunshine as he returned to the deck and proceeded to group the blacks together, shouting with an anger he could not explain.

“Time for the entertainment, men,” growled the captain as he surveyed the group in front of him. The years of being at sea had made him tough and hard, a man unwilling to compromise his pride and dignity for anyone. Many of the sailors worshipped him because he was “able to deal with the filthy vermin” in such a “befitting way.” But Derrick despised the man. As yet another man was being whipped and beaten, Derrick found himself unable to watch the scene before him.

The quieted whimpers of a young woman brought Derrick back to reality. A young girl, probably no older than twenty, her body weak and motionless, was being carried by four men to the side of a ship. There sat a large piece of wood, a shaft from an old carriage, with two sets of chains attached to either side. Wasn’t this the girl who had lost her baby last week, two days after its birth? The captain had decided that there would be “no need for a baby where the cargo was going,” and he had tossed the crying infant overboard without a second glance. The young mother had collapsed in tears, screaming for her child. Now she was about to meet the same fate as her son. Derrick could see in her lifeless dark eyes that she had given up the fight; she would never be profitable now. As the captain pushed her towards the edge of the ship, the only sound was the splash of the ocean as her body sank below the surface.

“Who’s next?” the captain asked, leering at the slaves in front of him.

“Pick me,” thought Derrick. “I cannot endure this massacre any longer.”

And with that last thought, First Mate Derrick Anderson threw himself overboard, leaving the carnage behind.

2007 Junior Fiction Winner

Constantine's Last Walk

by Erik Blackthorne O'Barr

Grade 9 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School

The cannon fire grew closer with each thundering belch of rock and iron, as the walls of Constantinople, a wonder of the world that had never been breached save for treachery, groaned under the strain. Buildings crackled with scorching heat, set ablaze by pitch-covered arrows. The shouts and screams of the dying echoed in the empty streets of the once great city. And Constantine XI Palaiologos, last emperor of the Byzantine Empire, last emperor of the Romans, and last emperor of the greatest and most influential nation the world had ever seen, walked quietly amongst the rubble.

The formerly magnificent city, the largest and wealthiest in the known world, where peoples from three continents had mingled and traded and fought, was now little more than a collection of dusty, sleepy villages surrounded by the enormous walls of more glorious years past. The crumbling homes and churches were empty and lifeless now, the few souls remaining like ghosts, flitting amongst the old marble and broken cobblestone. As Constantine shuffled in his long purple robes for the final procession to the Hagia Sophia, the greatest church of Christendom, church bells rang mournfully throughout the city for the last time. The sky was deep crimson, like a fiery halo around the city. A sign of an apocalypse, perhaps? Constantine neither knew nor cared. His city was to fall, his empire crumble to dust and remain only in memories and texts, and he was to be remembered as the person who let it happen. He had tried, of course. He had desperately sought aid from the Latins, the people who had destroyed his great city before in 1204. He had desperately sought aid from the Venetians, the Genoese, even the Pope. And now, trudging through the rubble-strewn streets, he sought aid only from God.

Crack! Another round of cannonballs smashed against the stone fortifications. The buildings shuddered. The procession continued; the priests in front of him, carrying the last remaining holy relics of times past, shuffled like dead men, accepting of their fate. The handful of citizens who had not fled in the last few years now lined the streets singing hymns. It looked like a funeral. It was. Constantine paused in the street, cleared his throat, his voice trembling with regret, yet not without a hint of hope. He spoke to the people now crowded around him, to the priests who had stopped in their tracks, and to the few soldiers left not defending the walls. He told them that there are few things worth dying for, and that all of them were now present at Constantinople. He thanked them for staying and fighting in the face of certain defeat. He thanked the Italian soldiers who had remained for an empire not their own, the small band of people who had answered his call to save the last great city of the Romans. He thanked them for their contributions and for accepting the fate that he, too, would suffer. He asked them to remember their ancestors, from Alexander to Trajan, who had gone to the ends of the earth. He turned to Giovanni Giustiniani, the leader of the band of Genoese who had stayed, fought, and died in the vain defence, and asked him

to take his wife to safety by ship as the city was overrun. And finally, he asked the people to forgive him, forgive him for any crimes he may have committed, for any ways in which he may have wronged them, and for presiding over the fall of the Roman Empire.

Constantine looked over his ruined city and his shattered people, and thought of the impermanence of it all. Perhaps it was brought on by the spectre of death, but it seemed as if time was on a shorter scale. The millennial history of Byzantium was destroyed by sword and fire in only two months. The life of the last emperor would end in a day, perhaps a week if Giovanni and his men could hold out. Yet death, true death, Constantine felt, would not come to him. He would live on, if not in heaven, then in memory, along with his empire. And so he asked for forgiveness in order to live eternally with a free soul. He went to his palace, with its peeling plaster and chipped mosaics, and asked for the forgiveness of his family and friends, for all the wrongs he had done to them; finally he went back to the Hagia Sophia, the last remaining house of God, now filled with people. He confessed his sins to the few emotionally shattered holy men, and under the red sky he went to the battlements to await his impending oblivion.

It took six hours. From midnight to the dawn of the sun, Constantine held the walls as they came crashing down under cannon fire. Giovanni Giustiniani had perished as the city burned, the flames matching the heavens above it. Thousands had died trying to take the walls, and yet the Byzantines and their emperor held them off. Finally, at six o'clock, on May 29th, 1453, the walls were taken – the walls that had stood strong for one thousand years, repelling invaders from the deserts of Arabia to the icy forests of Scandinavia. And at the main gate to the Queen of Cities, the last army of the Romans stood their ground against a force twenty times their size. Constantine watched as they fought desperately. His mind raced. He might be able to surrender to the Sultan. He could try to flee by ship. There had to be a way to escape. But his mind simmered and cooled: there was only one escape.

“The City has fallen, but I am alive,” the Emperor whispered. He threw off his purple imperial regalia. He took off his crown and laid it on the destroyed cobblestone ground. He removed his insignia, unsheathed his sword, and charged at the swarm of enemy forces, swinging his weapon to and fro. The last stand of an empire and a fitting act of defiance for one who now is with his people once more, for eternity.

Free for the Summer

by Christopher Pond

Grade 9 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School

It was the end of June. School was still in for most people, but we had just finished our exams so we were free for the summer. I was sixteen, with all the freedom in the world and the keys to the car. I had called some of my friends the night before, and we had decided that to celebrate our freedom, we would go canoeing. So we drove north through Burleigh Falls on Highway 28, with two canoes and a kayak on the roof of the car. When we reached Eels Creek, the four of us were tired of being in the car and ready to go paddling for the day. The boats splashed into the water, lunches were stowed, and we pushed off from the shore, I in my kayak, Dylan and Ian in a canoe, and Chris in his canoe.

Eels Creek snakes south, crisscrossing the highway until it makes a turn to the east, then flows under the highway and down to Stoney Lake. It is not an extremely challenging paddle, but there are parts that can become dangerous if you do not know where you are going. In the summertime, the water is relatively low and many of the spring rapids are too dried up to paddle through safely, but about one kilometre from the takeout place there is a waterfall – High Falls. High Falls is not a cliff where water goes cascading over the edge; it is more like a steep slope with many boulders disrupting the flow of the water.

We were packing up after our lunch at a portage that must have been the poison ivy capital of the world, when Chris decided he wanted to explore in the woods. We were to continue on – he would catch up. The three of us headed down the creek, excitedly talking about our plans for the summer and savouring the sound of our boats as they sliced through the water.

You know that you are nearing the falls when the water grabs your boat and you start fighting the current to reach the safety of the shore. You can't see the falls, but they're there. On this part of the creek the surrounding land looks as if you are on the Canadian Shield, because, rather than being limestone as at the start of the trip, the rocks are granite. Reaching the swifter current, we pulled our way to the portage around High Falls, hauled our boats out onto the granite outcropping, and walked down to the bottom of the falls, where the water swirls and bubbles like boiling water around the boulders in its path. We hiked back up to the top to grab our boats and carry them down and around the falls. Chris should have been there by that time, but he was not, and I was getting anxious. Where was he? By the time the boats had been put back into the water below the falls, Chris had still not arrived.

“Where do you think he is?” I asked the others.

“Aw, he's probably found some good place to watch birds; you know Chris,” Dylan said.

Dylan and Ian paddled the rest of the way down the creek to meet up with Ian's dad and get my car. They had the keys. I decided to wait for Chris.

It was getting late; the sun had started its journey toward the horizon when I heard it, a small cry above the tumultuous roar of tumbling water. I looked up to the top of the falls and could just make out a flash of yellow beyond the crest. Chris's lifejacket? "Chris," I called. No answer. Because you cannot see the top of the falls from the beginning of the portage, the only way to see who or what's there, is to climb up the falls...a pretty stupid thing to do. I tore off my shoes and socks and half ran, half swam to the base of the falls, where I started to climb. It is nearly impossible to scale a rocky hill with white water pummeling down on you, but with many slips and scrapes I finally reached the brink of the falls and found Chris's canoe, wedged between two rocks less than six feet from destruction. His crippled and shattered canoe was rapidly filling with water, but he was no longer in it. I turned to see Chris lying face down on a rock with his legs floundering like waterweeds in the strong current.

"Matt," he groaned.

"Thank God, he's still alive," I thought.

"Matt," he said, "I need to get out of here."

"What happened to you?" I asked. He winced.

"C'mon, we've got to get moving," I said. "Can you stand?"

He shook his head.

Chris's left leg was bent at a sickening angle. At first I thought that it was the water playing tricks on my eyes, but no, he had a badly broken left leg. I grasped his hands and "floated" him to the bank, where, with much difficulty, I hauled him up on my back and carried him over the portage to where my kayak was waiting. Chris looked up at me and said, "You should carry on; leave me here until you can get a canoe."

"But the others will already have the canoe strapped to the top of the car," I said. "Besides, you don't want to lie here for that long anyway."

He nodded. "Okay."

When we did reach the end of the creek, there was a note on my car, "*Hey Matt, Had to leave for town. Ian had to go to work. Your keys are under your mat, in the driver's seat!!*" (Their standard joke with my name). "*See ya.*"

Speeding down Highway 28 with Chris lying in the back and one less canoe to carry home, I began to question how much freedom we would have for the rest of this summer.

2007 Senior Nonfiction Winner

The New Fixation

by Caylea Foster

Grade 11 – Lakefield College School

I have come to accept my current state of “singlehood,” the life of a lonely wanderer. In fact, I embrace the solitude with open and welcoming arms. However, this does not seem to be the case with most of the young women my age. As with most teens during their high school career, the wondrous prospect of a significant other is almost too much to bear. It is in this insatiable need to be accepted by the opposite sex that many people lose focus and become encased in a world of lies. A young woman caught up in trying to find a boyfriend loses sight of the purpose of her being. Unfortunately, this blinding sensation extends to the educational aspect of a teen’s world as well. It deeply saddens me that my fellow classmates have sacrificed their intelligence for a life of dominated servitude to those who claim to be our equals. I would have thought that our society had developed beyond “dumbing” ourselves down to feel that we are wanted.

The immediate cause of this intellectual black hole is rooted within the girls themselves. The high-school years breed a whole new kind of female, a hybrid, if you will. This male-manipulated monster does not understand the meaning of homework or exams. It does not know what a test is or how to spell the word *hypothesis*. This thing does not realize the ramifications of global warming or what CNN stands for. Instead, this creature prioritizes popularity and acceptance above all else. The desperate need to feel wanted and attractive is what drives it to excel. And in our society, what do we all need to be accepted? The obvious answer is a beautifully toned physique, but the underlying message that is sent to the youth of our nation is not so simple. If you have a man at your side, you are considered the entire package. Brains, beauty, and a boyfriend – isn’t that right? Isn’t that what *Cosmopolitan* magazine preaches every month: to acquire a love, both pure and innocent? Well, personally I have had it with stereotypes and ridiculous expectations. Not only is this packaged deal overrated, but it doesn’t actually happen. In order to get that boyfriend, you have to sacrifice something. Since beauty is one characteristic that cannot be forfeited, why not yield the intellectual side of a woman? I mean who needs a girl who can say the alphabet when she looks good in a dress and kitten heels? And so begins the formation of a leviathan, an idiotic and intellectually stunted individual who has nothing better to do than search her horizons for someone only bound to destroy her.

Men, however, cannot be discounted from this phenomenon. They cannot be exempt from blame when the male faction of our society actually supports it. I realize that not every guy in high school wants that bimbo-blonde-Barbie who can’t tie her own shoelaces, but subconsciously every man wants to be superior. They have grown up with the knowledge that men have dominated every facet of life since the creation of Earth. They are the principals of the high schools and the leaders of war-torn countries, the creators of fire and the primary agents of change in our society. To be intimidated by a supposedly weaker sex is not only devastating but also damaging to their precious

sleeper hold on western culture. So the male teenagers of my generation (and others before it) have used their combined diminutive intelligence to devise a standard against which every woman will be measured. Women must not only be physically perfect, but also intellectually inferior in order for them to be considered remotely attractive. Look out girls! Not only do you have to wear makeup, but now you have to have an IQ of 50!

To give up what sets us apart from the other animals on this planet is demoralizing and criminal. We should not have to apologize for having the aptitude to finish a sentence or do spectacularly on a test. We definitely should not have to dumb ourselves down just to be able to be thought of as “girlfriend material” by the very people who oppress and belittle us. This trend has only caused the feminist movement to backtrack, taking us back to the days of frilly white aprons and tweed skirts. Back to when women were only good for cooking pot roast and looking pretty. What are we doing in school, if not to learn and gain knowledge? We sit in class every day listening to a teacher preach about the importance of tone and diction, only to throw it away like last year’s patent leather pumps once a pretty blond boy sends a smile our way. I don’t know about you, but I refuse to live a life of slavery. I refuse to lower my standards just so that my unappreciative boyfriend can drool over my best friend and act like a complete dim-wit in public. Is this the life we have chosen for ourselves? For our daughters? One can only hope that the few girls remaining in my generation will be smart enough to realize that this atrocity can no longer proceed, that our passion and zeal is too priceless a commodity to give up to our unworthy counterparts. Man may have created fire, but women know how to use it.

Education: Comparing East and West

by Chen Rao

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“No homework today? That’s absolutely terrific!” If I heard these words in my hometown, Chengdu, China, I would think you were pulling my leg. Otherwise, you would be just crazy, fooling around and making fun of me. But for the Canadian-born students, flexible studying is nothing but a common daily occurrence.

Let’s compare this with the homework ordeal for students in China. The enormous size of China’s population results in a number of serious problems and social issues. One of the problems is that people are under too much pressure, especially teenagers. In the near future, they will have to be involved in public competition for a place at university.

Unemployment is also a terrible reality in modern China. Furthermore, in order to find a job, extremely high levels of training in technology and education are required. Some parents have impossible expectations for their children. Chinese people rarely use the expression “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.”

On the other hand, Canadian, western-style education is obviously dissimilar from the Chinese model. As an ESL student who has been here for six months, I have found quite a few significant points to compare in these two educational systems. Canadian students with the right qualifications can select and apply for admission to the university they choose. They don’t face the same difficulties as Chinese teenagers.

Many Caucasians are impressed by Chinese students’ performance at school. “They are incredibly omniscient! They are smart at math and achieve almost 100 %!” But essentially, western people haven’t realized that those “eggheads” are well trained. Students in China never get a chance to enjoy their childhood because they try really hard to buckle down so that they can do an excellent job on quizzes and exams. Their accomplishments are well deserved; indeed, they have paid a lot for them. In the western educational system, teachers emphasize the importance of working as a team. Therefore, Canadian students are much more talented in a variety of ways. Specifically, they have unlimited imaginations for brainstorming, problem solving, and using equipment efficiently. They are attracted to new ideas and are willing to take risks.

Eastern education pays attention primarily to the examination. Exams help develop useful skills, but these skills are not always used in real-life situations. Although students get high marks, they may not be interested in learning. Western education focuses on learning as a permanent strategy, but, because of the relaxed atmosphere, students seem lazy and easily satisfied. Because Canadian students are used to a flexible studying environment, they aren’t pushed too hard.

Fortunately, these two educational styles are interdependent. Neither of them is a perfect plan, that's for sure. (By the way, I don't think there is a perfect method in the world at all.) Each system has its particular advantages but also some disadvantages. Maybe what we should do is combine them in a uniform way. Then students will be able to experiment with both formats. That definitely will make it easier to reach success in education.

Actually, all students should remind themselves that being successful depends on plenty of other prime factors besides the operation of an education system. A positive attitude determines the future.