



LAKEFIELD
LITERARY *Festival*

2008

YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST
WINNERS

2008 Senior Fiction Winner

LoveStuck

by Rachel McLean

Grade 12 – Thomas A. Steward Secondary School

She knew she shouldn't be there. She knew she was just asking for trouble by showing up at his house, but she couldn't stop herself. She needed to see him; she needed to know if they could get past this, past what his parents had said, past all the obstacles that seemed to be being thrown up in front of them; she needed to know if he loved her the way she loved him.

She wasn't really sure what she was expecting; in fact Shannon had no plan at all. She knew she couldn't just walk up and knock on the door, but she had no idea which room was Craig's, so she stood outside the Weston mansion shivering in the September chill. *I should have brought a coat*, she thought as she wrapped her arms around herself trying to stay warm.

"What am I doing here?" she said out loud. Her blue eyes locked on the house, searching for a sign that coming here had been a good idea. She knew that family was important to Craig. After all, that was one of the reasons she had fallen so in love with him. She knew he was loyal, but part of her hoped that he loved her more. She slid her cellphone out of her jeans and dialed Craig's number. There were tears pushing at the backs of her eyes; she just needed to know whether or not to give up. She had been raised to fight for what she wanted, and all she knew was that she wanted this; she wanted *him*.

Craig was lying on his bed with his cellphone resting on his chest, trying to decide what he really wanted. His parents had given him an ultimatum: break it off with Shannon or lose his trust fund. It should have been an easy choice, right? Pick the girl he loved over his family's money... but it wasn't that easy. Craig knew his parents and he knew that when they said trust fund they really meant his place in the family. His family had always been everything to him; that was true until Shannon came along and he fell head over heels in love with her.

His phone began to vibrate, the caller ID showed Shannon's name. Craig hit the ignore button. *I can't do this. I can't not be with her...but how do I give up my family?* His thoughts were racing as he tried to figure out what his heart really wanted.

Shannon hung up her phone, worried. It wasn't like Craig to not pick up. He always had his phone on him. *Maybe he really did choose his family....No, I can't believe he would give up on us.* A single tear rolled down her cheek. *I guess I need to stop doing this....* Shannon wasn't the type of girl to wait around for something that she knew wasn't going to happen. She wasn't the type of girl who needed a guy to make her happy – at least she hadn't been, but then she met Craig and that all changed. *Why did love have to be so complicated?* Taking one last look at the house, Shannon started to walk away. She wouldn't do this; she wouldn't keep putting herself out there

when she was getting nothing back....She may have been raised to fight for what she wanted, but what she wanted didn't want her back. There was no point in hanging on to something that clearly wasn't going to happen.

There was a knock on Craig's door as his little sister Anna barged in, not waiting for him to respond.

"C-RAIG!" she wailed in her seven-year-old voice. Her brown hair was a mass of curls. "Whatcha doing?" Anna crawled onto Craig's bed with him. He smiled at her. How could he give this up? He knew that if he picked Shannon, he would be turned out of his house so fast he wouldn't even have time to think. His family didn't marry girls like Shannon. They married girls who were raised to throw dinner parties and have perfect manners, not a girl who worked as a bartender to put herself through school and didn't give a damn what anyone thought about her. In his family you didn't marry a girl who didn't have a dad and whose mother was an alcoholic. It just wasn't done. Anna curled up beside him.

"Craig... what's wrong? Why are you sad?" Anna asked. Craig smiled at her weakly.

"What makes you think I'm sad, kiddo?" He grabbed her and started tickling her. Anna jumped and giggled. *I can't choose Shannon over my family. I just can't.* Craig's heart broke at the thought of never seeing her again, but how did you give up this way of life? How did you leave a seven-year-old sister and parents who would bend over backwards for you? The answer is – you don't.

2008 Senior Fiction Runner-up

The Drifter

by Jenna Gordon

Grade 11 – Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

Heat waves and mirages shimmer in the hot air just like the last glimpses of decency in this thoroughly corrupt world. A booted figure, swathed in flowing black robes, wanders at an even pace, seeming not to feel the heat or the loose sand sticking to her exposed flesh and stinging her eyes. She's like a speck of black sand in a desert full of white dust. Thinking of anything is better than letting the heat and regret drive her mad.

It's odd how silent the Badlands are, she muses with little empathy, when no one is screaming for blood or mercy. In the last thousand years, humans have gone from bombing each other into submission in the name of resources, to raiding what's now left of the villages that support the great Keeps, for no reason other than boredom and greed. Just as in ancient times, the serfs slave away and the Kings prosper. How's that for irony? We're repeating history. She smiles sardonically at that, but it is hidden behind a thick, crimson scarf. She's not sure why she wears it, especially in her line of work, but she likes the colour and the air of mystery it emits. So there it stays, knotted securely at the back of her head. Call it vanity, call it foolish, but don't say it to her face – not if you value your life. Her hands are seeped with bluer blood than yours, and she's never been one to put up with stupidity, no matter how high the cost.

The scarf flaps softly after the woman as she drifts, as if pushed by a strong wind, down a small hill dotted with tufts of brown grass and stunted, gnarled bushes. Smoke drifts on the not-so-distant-horizon. Smoke means a ruined village, and a ruined village means that whatever the Keepers haven't plundered for themselves will soon be in this woman's half-gloved hands. The black market pays well for the trinkets she is able to scrounge. That unseen broken-glass smirk appears on her face again as the lonely drifter picks up her pace.

* * *

It is worse than she expected, to say the least. Everything that could be burned is charred, everything that could be shattered is in a hundred pieces, and everything seems to have been ground into the parched earth by frenzied hoof beats of spooked horses and fleeing victims. The woman shakes her head and steps over a corpse, carefully skirting the pool of blood congealing around the crushed head. She mutters a quiet, "Sorry, friend," before rolling the body onto its front with her foot in order to delay the ravens from pecking at the man's clouded eyes. It's the least she can do, since the prayers for a safe passing have long since gone rusty on her tongue, the sentiments behind them ashes in the wind.

As she's wandering through the narrow alleyways of the small town, looking for something to take, she finds it to be a desolate, ruined shell – not unlike the woman passing through. Death hangs in the air like a flag at half-mast, and she believes she is the only living thing left in this ghost town, save for the ravens and the flies. After finding no valuables or trinkets, she resumes her walk, the very picture of loneliness, when she's proven wrong. She's wandering – drifting, as she's prone to doing – on the outskirts of town, near the graveyard when she hears a thin wail, a tortured howl.

Interest piqued, she walks forward cautiously, the noise getting louder and louder and more and more desperate the closer she gets.

There's a boy on his knees among the wooden markers, sobbing and screaming and grieving. There are two – no three – corpses near him, and he appears to be attempting to bury them.

The sight seems to yank at the jaded drifter's remaining heartstrings, and she stays where she is long after she should have moved on to more profitable horizons. She moves close, stops twenty paces from the lad, and leans against one of the larger grave markers. She watches and wonders. This scene is like looking into a clouded mirror, like looking into the past...then she dismisses such foolish musings. It will do her no good to get caught up in her memories.

Finally the boy looks up, tears and snot running down his face. His shoulders heave with his choppy, hysterical breathing. With eyes like a slash across his face and hair like spilled ink, he isn't a pretty sight. But he juts out his chin, narrows his puffy eyes, and asks in a tone that's wary and tired and too damned sad for someone so young.

“I'm Kale. Who're you and what do you want?”

“Nil. I was passing through, figured there'd be something of value in your ruins. Come with me, kid. You've got nothing left to lose.”

Isn't it oddly uplifting that although the walls may be smashed and shattered beyond repair, the foundations are sound? This place could be rebuilt in time. She decides to stay then, simply because the challenge of fixing something so broken appeals to her.

That's how it starts. In the ruins of a nameless city, with corpses and death all around, a drifter meets an orphan and something begins to stir in the ashes of their ruined lives. This is their new start, a replacement family for one so tragically lost and a purpose, a lifeline for someone whose ties have all been severed by Fate's hand.

Carefully, Nil unwinds the scarf from around her neck and drapes it over Kale's narrow shoulders before knotting it securely at the front, as a mother might.

Where The Wind Blows

by Rob Wade

Grade 12 – Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

The cold wind swept through the empty city. It swirled in eddies around mounds of rubble and ash. In some places there were embers, which glowed brightly when kissed by the wind. The invisible currents surged through gutted houses, into empty rooms, and over ash-covered floors. The wind continued on its way, eventually reaching the town square. There it danced over the huge pile of bones that had once been the inhabitants of the town. It played a sorrowful melody as it passed through skulls and cracked bones.

Now past the city, the wind coursed across great fields, stamped down and ruined, salted and torn asunder. Nothing would grow here ever again. The city would remain untouched, its ashes eventually blowing away or being augmented by dust.

Passing the fields, the wind came upon a vast encampment. Savage men played dangerous games around cook fires, and more than one fell, his throat slashed, as the wind passed them by. The zephyr rustled the tents and stirred up flags. On these black flags only one image was present. The head of a wolf stood out, silver and fierce. The gust quickly passed through the rest of camp, through forest and field, eventually coming to a walled town no larger than the one that had been left behind.

The gust passed over and through the walls, making use of the many small cracks and holes. It passed over frightened soldiers, some no more than boys. The wind blew around houses, their windows tightly shuttered. It passed the blacksmith, the forge glowing brightly, with a multitude of men feverishly beating metal into instruments of war. Past the training grounds it went, stopping briefly to swirl around defenders, both young and old. The wind swept even farther, past the city, to where a train of people was fleeing, taking with them their valuables and animals. In this train there were very few men, and those that were there were either too old or too sickly to fight. The wind coursed onward, up into the mountains, where it joined its stronger brothers and lost its identity.

Mark tossed and turned in a fitful sleep. The small shop that was now serving as a barracks of sorts was hot and stank of sweat – and worse things besides. He imagined he heard the sounds of marching feet pounding at the earth, hungry for blood, women, and loot. As he thought of his own inevitable death and then of what he was selling his life for, he grew more calm. Even if he could hold them off for a minute, even a second, that was a minute or a second that could be used by the women and the sickly to escape to the capital. Of the many expressions on the faces of the men inside the shop, only one held a smile. Mark was determined not to sell his life cheaply.

A booming concussion woke Mark from his slumber. Another wave of sound assaulted him, and it took a moment for him to recognize the source as the town's warning bell. Getting up in a hurry, Mark went to his pile of equipment, donning his rusty chain mail. He picked up his sword and shield. The sword was new, one of the many weapons made in the forge. The shield, on the other hand, was antique. It had been taken out of some dusty attic, a remnant of an age past when his people had possessed an identity. Mark ran outside and joined the soldiers who were already forming into their lines of defence. While the men themselves surely didn't remember combat, their blood did, and it called to them. Grim masks of determination surrounded Mark, giving him courage. Blood would be spilled this night, and Mark could well guess which side would shed more blood.

The seething wave of humanity charged across the fields, bearing in on the small town. Guttural howls of glee carried across the battlefield, strengthened by the booming sounds of drums. Mark shivered. He had never seen so many people. Nor had he ever seen such savage people. Many of those approaching wore nothing more than a loincloth, and some brandished weapons no more advanced than wooden clubs. The space between defenders and attackers soon vanished, and the only thing that saved the defenders from being cut down was the wall.

Mark drew back his bowstring yet again, bringing the cord to his cheek. He let loose an arrow, and another man fell. He repeated this action many times, and many men fell. Then there was a great shaking. The savages had sundered the wall and were pouring into the breach. Dropping his bow and drawing his sword, Mark leapt off the wall directly into the press of humanity, his blade slashing. Completely forgotten was the training, and all that mattered to Mark was that his sword was reaching flesh. Something heavy collided with the back of his skull, sending his helmet flying. He sank down to the ground, the world becoming dark.

He could see nothing. Then a figure appeared, skeletal and garbed in dark clothing. The figure beckoned, and Mark was inclined to follow. The figure led him down a long stairway and into eternal night.

The wind poured down the mountainside. It passed by cities and farms, and eventually came to the scene of a great massacre. Women, children, the old and weak, all were dead and piled up. At a small encampment, men were talking amongst themselves. The wind had passed these men before as they had set out to ensure that none survived. The wind blew even further and was greeted by a familiar scene. The city was a heap of hot ash. Riding a strong current, the wind rose back up into the sky and was lost.

Greatest Max

by Tyler Banderob

Grade 10 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School

Max may have been seated at a desk but he was speeding along, not through space, but through that morning's algebra assignment. While others groaned and cringed at finding out the ever-changing value of x in sixty-five different questions, Max grasped something that others could not. Mathematics was special. In English, History, Anthropology, and every other subject there was ambiguity, a profound lack of a clear answer. Who knew what Shakespeare meant in Sonnet 130? Who could tell what the ethical solution to overpopulation was? But anyone who knew that $3x + 7y = 41$ and that $9y - 40 = x$ could infer that x equalled two and that y equalled five...no grey area or uncertainties. That was the glory of mathematics. There was always an answer.

After discovering that the area of a certain circle was $A = \Pi(ayz)(abz)$, Max put down his pencil and looked out the window. For a school, it was a tall building, and he sat four floors above the earth. He could see his town spread out over the hills, and all of the cars running down their tracks like clockwork. He realized that he was counting the number of black vans that drove below him. His dad might have been in one of them; his mouth tightened and his nostrils flared at the thought. That was one car not spinning to the clockwork. It was headed west and would not stop for hours. Max slackened and fell back into an unsympathetic chair. Last night, Dad had waved about his last paycheck that would not be siphoned off by alimony. Also the last paycheck that he would earn in this town.

A steady scratching of chalk on slate pulled Max forwards in his chair, out of the previous night and into the start of a new math lesson.

"I should hope you've all been able to make progress on the ISU," began Mr. Bronfman, "because we start a new unit today." Bronfman had an enthusiasm about math that even Max found odd. He spoke as if every expression was an epiphany, as if every number was a great truth. Though it was – it was merely a bit exhausting to be constantly so attached. The sermon continued. "We learn today about linear equations. It is very simple. We merely try to find the intersection of two lines on a Cartesian graph."

Max rolled his eyes. Graphing, after all, was time-consuming, inefficient, and no more revealing than an equation.

"Now," said Bronfman, "Look at these two equations, here." He scrawled out $y = (3/4)x - 3$ and $y = -(2/9)x - 2$. "Graph these lines. Tell me what you see." Somewhere from the sea of desks came a squawk: "They intersect!" "Very good Julie, very good. And how about this?" Bronfman

erased the second equation and replaced it with $y = (-6/-8)x - 3$. After a few moments, another obscure squawk emerged: “They’re the same line!”

“That they are,” replied Mr. Bronfman coolly. “The lines you saw before had one point of intersection. With these ones, the lines are in constant contact, so they have infinite solutions.”

“Infinite solutions,” thought Max, a grin growing out of the right side of his mouth, “such a testament to the logical power of math. There was always a solution, and in this case there were unlimited solutions.” Max looked out of the window for a moment, looking for black specks that were not set into the clockwork. Mr. Bronfman paid no heed to Max’s thoughts and proceeded. He erased the second equation and replaced it with $y = (3/4)x + 2$. Bronfman paused and surveyed what was now written. He faced his class and could barely suppress a smile, like one who is about to perform a prank – cruel to its victim but funny to all others.

“What will these lines do? Is nobody going to answer? Max, you’ve been quiet. What do you think this pans out to?” Max attempted to work out the equation, but soon realized that the numbers did not match. Solid numbers claiming that they equalled zero, fractions pretentiously saying that were the same amount as greater numbers. For an eternal moment, Max scrawled and scrawled and scrawled, and the page became cluttered with failed equations and then droplets of sweat. Max looked over the edge and into his work. He faintly heard Mr. Bronfman’s voice, stripped of conviction and laced with improvised compassion.

“Max? Max?” Max, pallid like his own paper, looked up and stated three painful syllables acknowledging both defeat and ignorance. “That is the thing, class,” said Bronfman, hastily returning to his pontificating. “If you look at these lines and graph them, we see that they are parallel and will never intersect. Max couldn’t find an answer because, in this question, there isn’t one. It has no solutions.”

No solutions. Max, already the victim of a troubling day, week, life, felt a strange, internal pain, as a pillar of reality cracked, tottered, and fell with agonizing slowness. Bronfman went on to express how the two perfectly straight and parallel lines would never connect – ever. The homework assignment was copied down mechanically and completed in class, as always. Max looked out of the window by his desk and saw with sweat-soaked horror that a black van was driving on its own parallel line out of the city and into the horizon. But he saw it not as an aberration of clockwork. For the town four storeys down was a graph where all the lines had forgotten their sacred functions and ran about as it suited them; they could not be governed, and all sense of guarantee died.

A shell went through three more periods that day and a lunch break. It went home and lay in the bed that used to belong to a boy named Max. Its eyes were opened but it looked at nothing. There was a math textbook on its chest, which the shell raised up. It flipped through the pages full of false promises of certainty. It cast the book aside onto the floor. It reflected that it could never enter the fourth-floor temple again as a believer. The shell had no regrets. It turned over to face the wall and slept.

Old Mail

by Meggy Chan

Grade 9 – Lakefield College School

Mary looked out through the window of her studio in the Chateau de Beaufresne. Beside her on the table was a neat stack of old letters with American stamps. The faded postmark on each letter was the same – Philadelphia, PA. At this time of day the room was very bright with sunlight streaming in from the big French doors. The room was filled with Boston ferns, and there were many paintings. One, her own, was still on the easel, unfinished. On her desk, facing the window, in a place of honour, was a small framed photograph of a tiny Pekingese dog.

As she sat there looking through her letters, one of them in particular caught her eye. It was a letter from her father, dated April, 1890.

Dear Mary,

Your mother is so pleased to have had you home, even if it was just for a short while. She sends her fond greetings and asked me to include this clipping. She knows you would be proud to be in the social column of the Philadelphia Ledger.

Love,

Papa

The clipping dropped from the letter, and Mary bent to pick it up. She carefully spread the small piece of yellowed newsprint on the table beside her and read:

Mary Cassatt, sister of Mr. Cassatt, President of the Pennsylvania Railroad, returned from Europe yesterday. She has been studying painting in France and owns the smallest Pekingese dog in the world.

Mary laughed quietly to herself, an amused laugh with just a tinge of bitterness. Imagine. All they could say about me was that I was the sister of the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company and that I owned the smallest dog in the world – truly an accomplished woman.

“Madame Cassatt, la poste est arrivée,” announced the matronly woman who was Mary’s long-time housekeeper.

“Thank you, Mathilde. Put it on the table, please. I’m reading other mail right now,” Mary replied uninterestedly.

“And lunch, Madame? Will you be taking it alone?”

Mary looked up from her mail. “Yes, alone. Edgar is gone and so are Charles and Jean Léon and Lydia. We had such lunches together.”

“Lunches, oui, and paintings, many paintings. I like the ballet scenes best. Forgive me, Madame, but I always was a little enamouré of Edgar Degas. Do you remember, Madame, the first time he saw your paintings? He said, ‘I never knew a woman could paint so well.’”

“He was a master. I owe him a great debt. It was he who invited me into that free impressionist world,” replied Mary.

After Mathilde left, Mary continued looking at the letters, carefully reading through each one. Here was a birthday card from Great Aunt Helen with a lavender sachet tucked inside. It still smelled faintly of lavender.

Dearest Mary,

Happy 25th Birthday! Your mama tells me that you are studying art in Paris. How lonely you must be there. Surely you could come home and study painting or drawing at the art schools here. I’m sure that your mama could find you a suitable husband, one who would speak English. Then there would be no need for us all to worry. Be a good girl and come home.

*Fondly,
Aunt Helen*

Twenty-fifth birthday! That was thirty-five years ago. She could still remember how indignant she had felt when she read that card. A husband indeed! Well, somehow she had managed rather well without the proposed husband.

The next envelope on the stack was embossed in gold leaf and lined with gold foil. She gently pulled out the contents – an invitation to her brother Alexander’s wedding with an enclosed photo of the bride-to-be, Sarah McLeod. She sighed. Alexander never could understand why she needed to leave America and come to Paris. Alexander of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the social graces. Alexander, who always did just what he needed to do to be a successful man. Sarah was a pretty girl but always a bit silly.

Mary flipped through the next few letters quickly until she found the soft pink envelope so characteristic of her sister, Lydia.

Dear Mary,

I have finally secured a ticket to come over to Paris and stay with you. Mama is in her usual tizzy preparing my wardrobe and giving endless advice. I am so excited that I am going to be with you – permanently, I hope. Alexander and Sarah take good care of Mama and Papa. I can hardly wait to see your paintings in the gallery. When I tell my friends that you are a famous painter in Paris, they are always impressed, though they have never heard of you. I will cable the details of my arrival as soon as I can.

*Lovingly,
Lydia*

Mary smiled at the thought of her hovering mother and her faithful loving sister. With her American naïveté, Lydia had cheered her and had been her subject for so many paintings. Mary's favourite was the one of Lydia working a tapestry loom. It had been so many years since Lydia was taken from her. Mary remembered the swollen limbs, the pain, and the inevitable death of her sister. She was glad to have captured her for ever on canvas.

The next envelope bore the manly script of her brother. She thought of it as "the guilt letter."

Dear Sister Mary,

This is to let you know that Papa has passed away suddenly. Mama is grieving terribly and wishes that you would come home. A short stay in Paris was a good idea to expose you to the art and follies of Europe, but surely 21 years is long enough. We have quite forgotten what you look like and have never seen the paintings Lydia was always describing in her letters. I fear you are no longer a proper American. Please consider returning home at once. I will see to the arrangements.

Sincerely,

Your brother Alexander

It didn't work, she thought. I didn't go back to Philadelphia. Not then and not later when Mama died. Perhaps I should have, but I was so busy painting. I was so alive.

Next was a quick note from Edgar Degas scrawled in his characteristic handwriting.

Chère Amie,

I send this newspaper clipping to make you smile. Critics always seem to know us artists better than we know ourselves.

Edgar

Mary unfolded the clipping and read the critics' remarks from the *Journal de Paris*:

Mary Cassatt, renowned painter, remains exclusively of her people. Her style has a puritanical simplicity and is a direct and significant expression of American character.

Mary, feeling old and frail, rubbed her eyes. She thought rather dryly, isn't it funny, that in Paris they think of me as a wonderful American painter, but in my own country, America, all they know me for is being the sister of the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company and owning the smallest dog in the world.

2008 Junior Fiction Runner-up

The Last Eight Minutes

by Beatrice Chan

Grade 10 – Lakefield College School

“There goes the last ship,” said Atticus as he watched the white streak of light shoot across the sky. “The end of an era.”

“I wonder how many people stayed to witness the end of the Sun,” replied his wife Lillian, sitting down on the porch, which was littered with scientific instruments.

Atticus, a tall, slim man with a slight stoop and white hair, crossed his legs as he gazed at the noon sky. “I don’t know, but it doesn’t really matter. What matters is that you’re here and I’m here. Together.”

Lillian smiled at her romantic poet-husband. She lovingly thought, he’s tall and slim, and I’m short and stout. He gathers feelings, whereas I gather facts.”

“A penny for your thoughts, Lil.”

“I was thinking that we couldn’t be more opposite.”

“You always say we’re opposite, but we usually come to the same conclusions. Not so opposite, I think. I wonder what it feels like to fly out of this dying solar system on one of those ships to colonize another planet,” said Atticus. “The ancients from Europe had a similar experience when they sailed for the New World. It’s the stuff of poems.”

“I don’t have your imagination, but I know that I wouldn’t want to be on any of those ships. Imagine what kind of people we’d have to live with – all young, beautiful, smart, rich or connected. Yuck!

“What was the official slogan? ‘A better race for a better place?’ Something like that?” laughed Atticus.

Lillian winced. “A poet didn’t write that one. Imagine, Atticus; a thousand years ago humans couldn’t travel at the speed of light.”

“And now there won’t be much light,” said Atticus.

Holding a farewell party with just the two of them was Atticus’s idea. An octogenarian, he was too old to leave Earth on the ships. Lillian, who was twenty years younger and a member of

the International Astronomical Society, could have procured a place for herself. But she had decided that she did not want to live with the “cream of society” in a new space colony for the rest of her life. Mostly, she did not want to leave Atticus.

“I wonder how many people are doing what we’re doing at this moment,” wondered Lillian aloud. She briefly checked the monitor on the table beside her and noticed a steady decline in luminosity.

“Why wouldn’t everyone be watching the sun die?” questioned Atticus.

“Many people are afraid to face the sun’s death. They think of the sun as eternal, just like the ancient Egyptians, who worshipped the sun. Ra, they called him, but Ra was hotter then. Back then, you couldn’t see the rest of the stars during the day because the sun was so bright.”

“It’s hard to imagine no stars in daytime. A bit dull, I suspect. You’re right about people and the sun. I expect that some people are doing their daily work pretending the sun won’t die. Others are hiding with their tails between their legs, hoping to be whisked away magically,” sighed Atticus.

“And others are looking at those government-order pills and trying to decide whether to take them now or later,” said Lillian in a flat voice.

“The chill pill. It puts a chill in me to think about avoiding the future by embracing a suicidal death.”

Atticus looked over at Lillian. She was sitting quietly on the antique wicker chair listening to his remarks, but without her usual response to his dry humour.

“Lil? What’s wrong?”

“Atticus, do you have any idea what it’s going to be like? There’ll be no sun, no familiar time marker telling us when to wake or sleep. A day won’t have a definition anymore because no matter how long the Earth revolves upon itself, the light source which defines daytime will not be there.” She paused while this sank in.

She began again. “A year will be meaningless because it is simply a measurement of time for Earth’s orbit around the sun. The moon will be invisible. No Venus, no Mars, no familiar planets moving through our sky. I’m not sure I’ll be able to stand it, Atticus. I’m glad that I have the pill. Glad for a way out.”

Atticus stared at his wife. She was so factual...and so afraid of losing track of time. “You could keep track of time using your atomic clocks, Lil. They’re much more accurate than the sun, though admittedly much less inspiring.”

Lillian didn’t answer, and they sat in uneasy silence. She turned her attention to her computer and Atticus lost himself in his own thoughts.

“Four minutes until the sun dies,” muttered Lillian as she hurriedly typed notes. She looked over at Atticus. He looked up and met her eye, a poem forming on his lips:

*Ra is dead.
He has been long in dying
We can't expect to outlive God.
But paintings outlive painters
And poems outlive poets.*

“It’s over, Atticus. The sun has come to the end of itself, extinguished like a match. Yet it still has a visible diameter – 2.03 cm, to be exact, an illusion caused by the great distance between us and the sun. In less than eight minutes, even that illusion will be gone.” She reached into the bowl on the table and picked up a white pill between her thumb and forefinger. Sobbing she said, “I’m going to take it, Atticus. I can’t face this. I thought you’d be the one to crack, but instead it’s me.”

Atticus got up and took her in his arms. Then he gently sat her down and seated himself across from her. He said coaxingly, “Lil, tell me about the late great Sun. Tell me in your language. Tell me and you’ll feel better.”

Lillian had tears in her eyes. She breathed deeply to quiet her sobs and began, reciting the facts like a mantra. “It all started in a nebula of gas and dust. Gravity pulled the dust and gases together to create the star. Under temperatures of 10 million degrees, the star’s hydrogen fused to form helium. Then the star got hotter, allowing fusion of helium into carbon and oxygen. Expansion and cooling followed. Space winds started to blow away the outer layers of the star, cooling the core and leaving the black dwarf we know as our sun.” She looked at Atticus and breathed deeply again.

“There, Lil. Those are the facts. Not so terrible. Now stop talking and sit quietly with me, my love. These are the last eight minutes.”

Eight minutes went by slowly. Holding hands, they chanted softly, “... five, four, three, two, one,” as they counted down the last seconds of the sun’s light.

“Do you want to hear my final poem, Lil?”

“Yes,” she said firmly.

“It’s not really mine. It’s an old song my great-grandmother used to sing. I want to sing it to you.”

Looking into his wife’s eyes, Atticus sang, “You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are grey. You’ll never know, Lil, how much I love you. Please don’t take my sunshine away.”

Lillian smiled softly and threw the little white pill off the porch to be lost in the shrubbery.

2008 Junior Fiction Runner-up

The Treehouse

by Hannah Mills

Grade 9 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School

The summer I was nine, Walter and I built the tree house. We knew how it would look – not too fancy, kind of old – and that we’d use it for an observatory to spy on the neighbours. We also knew we’d build it in the apple tree. It was easy to climb and, most importantly, easy to fall out of, giving our hideout that feeling of danger all good forts have.

It would be perfect.

We got some old boards from a construction site and, mismatched though they were, a thrill came over me at the thought of putting them together.

Walter climbed up and began a wall in the crook of the tree.

“Pass up the nails, Kate,” he called.

I weighed the box in my hand, estimating how hard to throw it. But I also thought about the tree. It was alive. Tall and beautiful, this tree brought me shade on hot days and adventure on dull ones. When I thought of those sharp nails digging into it, I felt faint.

So I put the box down.

“Do we have to use nails?” I asked.

My brother crossed his arms.

“Kate,” he began, with the authority of one who has seen the world, or who has at least been on a ferry by himself. “Kate, my naive sister, have you taken industrial arts?”

“No.”

“Well, then, I don’t think you know about building tree houses. You can’t build one without nails.”

“But Walter,” I whined. “The tree hasn’t done anything wrong!”

“The tree?” he asked, incredulous. But when he saw our mother watching out the kitchen window, he changed his tune.

“Fine, Fine! We don’t have to use nails. Please, Kate, don’t get all mad.” He sighed and sat on a branch.

I’d won.

We attached the boards with thick ropes rather than nails. The result was a very unsteady little house, held delicately in the arms of the tree. Inside, the dappled sunlight was warm and the shade cool and deep. It had no roof, so when you lay down you could see flecks of sky through the green of the tree. The smell was heavenly, perfumed with leaves and silence; if there was a smell to silence, that was it.

I’d never liked a place better.

Walter and I spent most of the summer there, napping and reading. From the topmost branches I could see down to the harbour, over the rows of houses to the sea beyond. On some days when there was a breeze from the harbour and the smell of the sea blew in, I dreamt of the world, vast and grand.

That fall Walter grew busy with Biology, Algebra, and other things I couldn’t pronounce. Soon it was just me in the tree house, and I took to writing a journal there. I also had a survival kit, including a kettle, some cards, and a spyglass (should our house ever be invaded by burglars). And I began to think more about the tree.

I pictured its roots going deeper and deeper. How far could they go, what cool places did they cut through, what secret rooms of the earth were there, dark and still? It was impossible to explain this to anyone. The only person who might have understood was Walter, and he’d changed. Whereas he’d once been a daring and laughing companion, now he sulked and seemed to despise the house we’d made together. Mum said he was growing up. I thought he was losing his soul.

One day when I was in the tree, Walter called to me from below. “Hey! Kate! Get down from there!”

“Why should I? You can’t boss me around.”

“Kate!” He looked up at me. It was funny how small he looked.

“Jesus, Kate. It’s embarrassing.”

He’d never said that word before.

“I’ve got friends coming over. Get down.”

He was getting mad, and so was I. Little sparks of anger blazed in my chest.

“You think you’re so big, Walter,” I yelled, “but you aren’t. If you were so tough you’d come and get me instead of waiting down there.”

As a final flourish, I spat on him, watching in slow motion as the spit hit him in the forehead. Now I’d done it.

Growling with anger, he began to climb. It didn’t seem to matter how insecure the ladder was, he was mad and nothing would stop him.

“Come on,” he snapped as he emerged into the tree house. “Wow,” he added, looking around, “it’s got smaller in here.”

“No, you’ve just grown.”

He turned as if to grab me, but I was too quick. I would not leave my tree! Walter was wrong, he didn’t understand.

He lost his balance for a split second, teetering on his heels near the edge of the platform. I moved before I could think and gave him a hard shove to the chest. We were both frozen for a second, each realizing what I’d done, his eyes growing wider and wider...

And then he was gone.

I heard a thud and looked to where Walter lay, spread-eagled on the ground. I had a wild fantasy of his funeral – images of black dresses and the smell of church – before I rushed to him.

By the time I got to the bottom of the ladder, I was crying, and Walter, not dead, was sitting up. He seemed embarrassed when I threw my arms around him.

“It’s only a little fall. Stop it.” He did his best to push me away, but he was still shaking and I could tell he was sore.

“Walter, I don’t know why I did it, I’m, I’m – ” It was a shock when Walter stood up and pulled me to my feet.

“Sorry,” said Walter, and I felt he was apologizing for both of us. As we began to walk inside, I looked back at the tree. Strange: looking from the top rather than from down here, it had seemed much farther for someone to fall.

2008 Senior Nonfiction Winner

Harry Potter as Means of Crushing a Naïve Youth

by Morgan Preston

Grade 12 – Holy Cross Secondary School

Over the course of one's life, one enters into relationships that change one's life. Such relationships can be deeply moving or overwhelmingly hurtful. They strike us deep in the soul, and the world is never quite the same again. There's just something about that person or thing that touches us and allows us to identify with it. I had such a relationship once, an intense, rocky relationship that left me cynical and jaded, but wiser in the ways of the world.

My tempestuous relationship with the *Harry Potter* series began when I was in grade three. I was eight years old and very impressionable when Mrs. Morrison started reading the first book in the series to the class. I just *had* to have every single one that followed, as did the rest of my class, but that was hardly uncommon at the time. The next few years of my life were heavily influenced by the boy wizard and his spells. I suffered the first great disappointment of my life because of it (having left my bedroom window open on my eleventh birthday and receiving no owl informing me that I was a witch). To make matters worse, my Nannie was discussing with my mother an article she'd seen in the paper about a woman who was trying to have the books banned from schools. "That's ridiculous!" she said, puffing on yet another cigarette. "Kids aren't stupid; they know it isn't real. You do, don't you, Morgan?"

Also, the first crush I ever had began because of Harry Potter. A boy at my bus stop had taken my copy of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and held it above my head. Being unable to reach it, I was worried that he would drop it in a puddle and ruin my book. That was when, seeing my distress, another boy from my class stepped in as a mediator. "Give her back her book," he said. "They're expensive." Oh, the chivalry! I was smitten! Most of the significant events in my childhood seem somehow connected to the series. And, as Harry and I were roughly the same age each time a new book was published, it was almost as if we were growing up together.

My life was rather mundane, completely unremarkable for quite a few of the years after I was introduced to the series. I reread the books, rewatched the movies, bonded with certain characters (a particular werewolf teacher to be precise), and developed theories as to how I thought the series would end. I was just like any other fan.

But then, in late 2006, I was making the usual rounds on the internet when I saw it: Book Seven had a title! A few months later, there was a release date: July 21st, 2007. Now, there were theories that they might have picked a date significant to the series to release the final book: July 7th (or 07.07.07), July 31st (Harry's birthday), or October 31st (the anniversary of Harry's parents' death). But by some twist or blessing of fate, they picked July 21st, my seventeenth birthday!

Surely this was a sign. How could such a coincidence end in disaster? All my theories would prove true, and all the characters I cared about would be spared from the alleged “bloodbath” that Book Seven was supposed to be. I was one of the few, special, anointed fans. It was all ending on my birthday.

I felt so special that I wasn’t even worried when I read reports of leaked copies of the book, whose plot differed from the one I had planned in my head. I saw a version of this leaked book, pictures of every individual page someone had taken. I laughed it off! This couldn’t be the work of J.K. Rowling; everything in it seemed contrived, cheesy, and rushed. Therefore, I reached a conclusion: it was all an elaborate hoax put on by some fans with too much time on their hands. And what a joke! I loved the idea that it was a fake because it meant that I could still be right, but have the fun of being worried before getting the book.

My birthday rolled around eventually, after an agonizingly long wait. I was seventeen and had the copy of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in my hands. My heart was racing, wondering if what I had read on the internet was true (Surely it couldn’t be? With the characters that had been killed in *that* version? Impossible!). With a trembling hand, I turned to the back of the book to read the last few pages (a bad habit I admit I have).

And to my horror, what did I see? That godawful epilogue that everyone had laughed at on the internet! How could such a cheesy thing be at the end of something that had been a huge part of my childhood??? I was dumbstruck, horrified, appalled. “Don’t panic yet,” I told myself. “Maybe they just got ahold of the crappy epilogue.” But, as I flipped through the book, everything was there as it had been on the computer. My theories and hopes were being shot to oblivion. How could it end like this? How could the author have done such a thing to the *one* character I wanted to get out of the series unharmed? I was angered and refused to touch the book for weeks. To this day, I have never finished the tangible version of the book. It sits on my bookshelf, collecting dust.

That’s two birthdays you’ve ruined, J.K. Rowling. I’d better be getting something *really* nice for my eighteenth.