



LAKEFIELD
LITERARY *Festival*

2010

YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST
WINNERS

2010 Senior Fiction Winner

A Call to Embrace

by Sarah Buttle

Grade 12 – Lakefield District Secondary School

It hurt to look. The sunlight sliced through the waves and pierced her eyes in such a way that it forced her to shield them with her hand. A furrow began to deepen in her brow. She squinted. Cool water splashed onto her hands and ran between her fingers, a refreshing and startling awakening from her distraction. Regaining her focus, she cut through the water with her paddle, each stroke propelling her further into the sparkling blue and white. The sun was setting, and soon the clear-white crystals bobbing on the water transformed into dazzling jewel tones; now pinks and reds and coral-oranges floated on the deep blue depths. She should be closer to home by now, she thought, and quickened her pace. Her paddle and arms united, forming arches in the air and forcing her forward against the resistance of the water.

She paused, panting. Her efforts had moved her forward a few metres, but in the middle of a lake, distance is measured by trees and rocks. She sat in the centre of a great glass pool, surrounded by a border of conifers. The leafy green walls were blending with the navy floor; night was settling in. White diamonds returned to the water in the form of stars and shone through the black blanket that now hung over her head. She was surrounded by darkness. She needed to get home, but now the question was not how *far* was home, but where *was* home? Feeling lost and alone was no new feeling for her. It was almost natural now.

She remembered it well. Rain had pelted the bus window as she peered out at the cold grey sky. It was a day that changed her life forever. As she walked up the lane leading to her house, seeing the car in the drive was a giveaway; something was definitely not right. When she stepped in the door, he met her with a giant hug, an embrace she rarely felt from her father. He didn't have to tell her. She already knew what he was going to say. And as she willed him not to speak, for his words not to be true, they still rang through the room and pierced her ears, stinging with venom. Her heart fell. She heard his voice, but it was not as she had heard it before. His gruff tone was now softer, gentle almost; his words, although quiet, hit her with such a force that they knocked the breath from her lungs.

Now, she thought she was alone on the lake. The lack of motors rumbling under the surface, and the absence of voices wafting through the surrounding air had convinced her that she was the only soul out there that night. Yes, there were fish beneath her, raccoons on the shore around her, and birds sleeping in the trees above her. But the silence had given her the false impression that she was solitary. A chilling cry reminded her that she was not. Hauntingly, it echoed over the waves, and together they crashed softly against the hull of her kayak, sweet and sombre tones resonating through the night. As she turned her head, looking for the source of the cry, she, too, began to cry.

The next time she heard its song, it had appeared beside her boat. The white string of pearls around the neck seemed to glow in the darkness. Its red eye appeared to be boring a hole through her own eyes and into her heart, where she felt its warm amber glow. Again it tilted its head towards the sky and let out a symphony of eerie echoes. Its call sent chills through her body, causing the hairs on her arms to stand upright. Tears continued to roll down her cheeks, but she did not reach up to wipe them away. Beautiful and mournful, the loon continued calling. To what, she wondered? A mate, a child? A long-lost companion?

She knew. She felt the loon. She was the loon. She wore the black cloth on her shoulders; she became the creature crying into the night. Her tears turned into the trills of the loon. She looked up, past the moon, past the stars. She looked up until she saw that beaming face, shining down upon her. She released the call of the loon from somewhere deep inside her heart. From the emptiness into the darkness, she cried out for her. Mother, she called. I see you. I feel you.

I love you.

I miss you.

Her strokes sliced into the water, almost silently. The loon had left. With a flutter of water and wings, it had flown away. With it went her regret, her grief. Once again, she was alone on the lake, surrounded by darkness no longer. From her position in the boat she watched the rising sun creep up from behind the treeline, illuminating everything it touched with beams of warmth and rays of light. The surface around her was transformed into a glistening pool. Pinks and reds and coral-oranges shone on the surface of the lake like jewels. As the scene lit up around her, the lake came alive. Something inside her did as well.

She saw the dock to her right. The Muskoka chair sitting at the end looked inviting and comfortable, its wooden arms and sturdy back a welcome change from the plastic seat of her kayak. The water had become shallow here as she neared the dock; she stepped out and began dragging the kayak towards the shore. The silence around her was soon replaced by the sounds of the lake. The noises that accompany people preparing their boats for an early morning fishing trip blended with the sound of the waves from their vessels. She saw the figure of a man coming down the trail towards the water.

He quickened his pace when he saw her. They reached the dock simultaneously, and he bent down to touch her face with his chapped hands. Tears filled his eyes as he softly said her name. He took her hand, helping her out of the water and onto the dock. Together, they sat in the Muskoka chair and gazed out towards the lake. The warmth from their bodies seeped into her core and warmed her heart. Her father's embrace felt natural now, his presence reassuring. A cry floated across the water and touched them. Looking up, they watched the loon disappear over the treeline as it flew towards the sky.

Hamlet: The Prequel

by Beatrice Chan

Grade 12 – Lakefield College School

Standing in front of the class, Mr. Bilmurn summoned his Muse and read: “Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on; and yet within a month, / Let me not think on’t; Frailty, thy name is woman! / A little month; or ere those shoes were old / With which she follow’d my poor father’s body, / Like Niobe, all tears; why, she, even she, – / O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason, / Would have mourn’d longer, – married with mine uncle...”

A voice from the back of the class interrupted his soliloquy: “That’s not true, sir, about her marrying his uncle. I mean, it wasn’t his uncle at all.”

Mr. Bilmurn turned towards the source of the voice, astonished. “Hamlet would know, I think, if his mother had married his uncle or not. Wouldn’t he?”

“Well, maybe he hadn’t seen the prequel, sir. I mean, maybe he was ignorant of the facts.”

Mr. Bilmurn tried to remain calm. “And just what would those facts be, Beatrice?”

“It was actually like this, sir...”

Many moons ago, in a far-off place, lived a handsome prince with a gloomy face. This place was Denmark, ruled by the elder of twin brothers, King Hamlet. The gloomy-faced prince was Claudius, the younger twin brother.”

“Are you following me, Mr. Bilmurn?” Beatrice asked.

Mr. Bilmurn nodded reluctantly.

“Well, Hamlet became king only after he grew up, but before that, throughout their childhood, the twins had no playmates except each other. The games they played were not friendly, and they always seemed to end up fighting because the younger twin, Claudius, always won. The hatred between the twins grew as they grew, and so did the fierce competition between them. At first, it was about who could run farther or who could hold their breath longer, but it gradually turned to more serious contests with much higher stakes.

Now when the twins turned twenty-five, their father became ill. Hamlet appeared to be upset, but actually he was excited because if his father died, he would be king. Claudius did not see it this way, of course, and became very angry with his brother. In his anger, Claudius accused his

brother, Hamlet: ‘How can you not care about our father’s life? Do you feel no pity or love toward him?’

Hamlet replied bluntly, ‘I feel no love for anyone, least of all you. You have been in the way of my success since you were born. But I am the eldest, and I will win at least one thing before I die. You watch and see. When I am King, you will be the most miserable person in this whole goshdarn country.’

‘You have no feelings or thoughts for anyone. You would steal the wife of your best friend if it gained you power,’ spat back Claudius.

‘Nah,’ replied Hamlet maliciously, ‘but I’d steal my brother’s girlfriend, his sweetheart. That I *would* do.’”

“Do you get it, Mr Bilmurn? Can you guess what really happened?”

“Ah...no, Beatrice, I can’t say that I do. You’ll have to give me a few more details.”

Beatrice rolled her eyes. Some people just had no imagination, she thought to herself. “Well, here goes,” she said as she continued her story.

“So Hamlet went about trying to steal Claudius’ girlfriend. She was a pretty thing named Gertie Kiersted, a real Danish princess (you could tell because she could feel a pea through twenty mattresses), who was head over heels in love with Claudius. Hamlet did everything that a good suitor would. He sent her roses on her birthday and Saint Valentine’s Day. At Christmas, he sent her three turtle doves, two French hens, and a partridge in a pear tree, but all in vain. What he didn’t know was that Claudius and Gertie were secretly engaged and that there was plenty of hanky-panky going on.

In fact, Gertie woke up one morning and discovered that she had a bun in the oven – the hanky had become a little too panky, if you know what I mean. Now she was in trouble. What would the neighbours think? She put on her royal thinking cap to try to save herself and her true love, Claudius, from the inevitable social disgrace. They could get married right away and no one would be the wiser, but royal law in Denmark stipulated that the elder brother had to marry first, and it looked as if Hamlet, out of spite, had no intention of marrying anyone other than his brother’s only true love. They could elope, she supposed, but that would be a life not fit for a princess. So Gertrude swallowed her pride, and to protect her only love, Claudius, and their love child, she sent a message to Hamlet. This is what it said:

Darling Hamlet,

All along I have loved only you. Let’s get married ...tomorrow.

Gertie

Hamlet was overjoyed. He’d won the battle for his brother’s girlfriend; he’d finally beaten Claudius at something. Just to make sure she didn’t change her mind, Hamlet and Gertie were

married the next day. And nine months later, Hamlet became the proud father of a bouncing baby boy.

‘We’ll call him Hamlet after me,’ he said grandly.

Gertrude could do nothing but agree, and there were never any brothers and sisters for Hamlet. He was the only one.

As you can imagine, Claudius was devastated by all these events. He never knew why Gertie had deserted him, and she, to save his honour, never told him. But she dreamed of him, and he dreamed of her for the next twenty-five years.

Little Hamlet always thought Big Hamlet was his father and that Uncle Claudius was a grump. Imagine his surprise when a month after Big Hamlet mysteriously died, Mama was marrying old Uncle Claudius without a thought for the memory of her husband or the feelings of her son. And what made it worse was that they seemed to be happy. Little Hamlet, after a ghostly midnight chat with his dead father (the skunk!), decided to do the honourable thing and take revenge on the ‘imposter.’ What he did not know was that the ‘imposter’ was his true father and that his father was his true uncle (and a scoundrel on top of that). Gertie, in her marital bliss, was so head over heels happy with her true love that she plumb forgot to tell Hamlet Junior all about it. (Oops!)

And you know the rest of the story. Little Hamlet was out to get Claudius because he didn’t know that the ghost was just his uncle, not his dad. Claudius didn’t know that Little Hamlet was in fact his very own flesh and blood, so he got really sick of his bad attitude and sent him off to England to be killed. Poor Gertie drank a cup of poisoned wine when all she was trying to do was toast her son’s achievements. I guess if she hadn’t died so quickly, she would have told Little Hamlet about his real dad and it would have been happily ever after. But it wasn’t.”

“Isn’t that so romantic, Mr. Bilmurn, and so sad?” sighed Beatrice.

“A little far-fetched I would say,” he replied, shaking his head. But not any more far-fetched than this whole play, he thought to himself, bemused.

What Grows In Between the Hedges Between

by Meghan Gagliardi

Grade 12 – St. Peter Catholic Secondary School

While I was hiding in trees and tearing cotton dresses, something was growing. While I was pirating the neighbourhood, parading the freedoms of a charmed, insatiable girl, the man next door cautiously planted poetic devices, feeding his pristine lawn with free verse and subtle texts. I don't remember him well; even now, the events I claim exist in my memories are really only repeated narrations, stories told to me before bed. What I do remember is vague; most of my imagery begins to overlap as the years pass, and soon my memory will refuse to separate the face of my dead grandfather from that of the man next door. But I recall with certainty his irritation when I would brave the hedges between us and arrive with the pageantry of a child into his backyard.

My neighbour was a quiet, contained man, and I do remember interrupting his otherwise peaceful afternoons with the seemingly unconnected marvels of youth (before I'd read Frost and before I understood the reason for a wall), when I believed the whole world was an extension of my own bedroom window. My neighbour, Mr. Stevens, was reflecting on his life, courting yesterdays and writing poetry, while I was running through an open field, promising myself to tomorrow and writing a future. Somehow, our potential met, bursting wide and enveloping our bright street, colliding somewhere between suit jacket and yellow shoes. We were living at odds, separated by the countless years between us, both surrounded by the flourish of childhood – those moments when a day grew large and hopeful in the morning, when plans were defined by what could be most delightfully explored. He had a whole world to remember and protect, whereas I had a whole world to sail across, mark down, and tack to a wall. To me, his life was set up and put away, but Mr. Stevens could only say he had yet to meet Gordon Lightfoot.

So today, when time has seemed to shift more than pass, I hear a story about the man next door, just another to add to my supposed memories. Standing in a room where he was once a teacher, I read aloud a poem about a man who was afraid – statues at an intersection, watching a life's work flit across the street and just out of sight. Mr. Stevens watched, just as he watched me from a distance, with mild interest, with a removed air. Mr. Stevens bore witness to his life; I sensed it as a child and I fear it as I age. He wrote about the moments he had not lived. Mr. Stevens did not speak to Gordon Lightfoot but wrote it in a poem instead.

I worry that I am contained by this same disease. I worry that every embellishment and every sound pull me farther from intention. In every creation I worry I am slowly filtering out the glow of truth with pages of black ink. Mr. Stevens watched, and he recorded what I can only imagine are journals full of portraits of my family, pages that detail the roses climbing up the side of my house, the sharp corners of my rooftop. My quiet, forgettable neighbour now owns something that belongs to me. Those scrapped papers siphoned off the details of my life that I was too ignorant to hold on to, and despite the dedication of my reflections, I cannot recall those silent moments.

Today Gordon Lightfoot comes to town, and shuffled in between things I'd carefully place in a box and stack at the farthest corner of my closet, Mr. Stevens comes to mind. Somehow, sometime, we were sleeping two brick walls apart, and in the quiet dreams of a little girl, Mr. Stevens was sending letters and spoiled papers. Rough pen scratches in darker ink than I would choose for myself, and the ink blots and the words meld together until I've given in and written about someone I've never met. I start writing Mr. Stevens' story, about the evening he meets Gordon Lightfoot; now I own something of his. Between our brick walls we will meet, and I will extend my delicate hand and take back the memories of myself as a child, leaving at his doorstep only a small stack of papers painting the stories of his life, the truths I have created by writing them with enough passion so that somehow they are fulfilled.

2010 Senior Fiction Runner-up

Healing the Soul

by Jeremy MacMillan-Jones

Grade 11 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School

Sitting here. Just sitting. How many times in the past years have I thought about that day? The numbers fade away in the thousands. But still the question is there. Why? What made me that vicious?

Prison is hard on the body, but what people don't see is how hard it is on the mind, the soul. I have been ruined by the hard walls of prison, my mind waging war on my body and soul until all that is left are the guilt and hatred of uncounted years in this place. Betrayal by another is what most people are afraid of, but that is only the beginning. Being betrayed by someone is hard, yes, but when your own body betrays your mind and then society betrays you, every last shred of warmth and kindness is ripped unceremoniously from you. After that, nothing will ever be the same again. I cannot trust any more, for I know that the bond will, without a doubt, be shattered. That shot rings throughout the stone, concrete, and steel bars; it rips into every aspect of my life.

I get these visitors who think that they are helping. I don't care if they are lawyers, psychologists, monks, politicians; I don't even know what they are. I stare through them and wish they weren't here. What they say to me blurs into disjointed strands that always include forgiveness and love. I don't want these. I just want to fade away like my thoughts.

I think I can hear the food cart. That's weird, because it's coming at a different time today. I can hear something clicking on the floor that isn't the warden's boots. It's so unexpected that I almost get interested. They're just around the corner – wait, that's my door opening. In walks the warden, with a puppy. Is he serious? A dog? What does he think I am, some bedridden hospital patient? Goddammit!

Weeks have gone by, I guess. He left the damn dog with me. I have to feed and walk it and whatever. He thinks it is supposed to help somehow. Can't he see that I don't need his help and don't want it? It's enough for me to enjoy the hospitality of prison by myself, thanks. I can't even bear to look at the dog because, knowing what I did, I don't think that I could stand looking at that innocent, happy face.

It now seems that years have passed since I was given Buddy. Against my wishes, he's starting to grow on me. I don't really know when it was, but after a while I began to feel comforted by his presence and I started talking to him. The funny thing is that I think he understands. The warden comes by every once in a while, and when he sees us together, he gets a smile on his face. I really don't care what he's thinking, but at least he isn't yelling at me anymore. In fact, I find that I don't really care what anybody thinks about me anymore.

Something strange happened last night. I was in my bunk sleeping when suddenly I woke up. I was panting and sweating, all worked up. I used to do this a lot right after I was put in here, but this time, Buddy just looked over at me and I was calm again. I think that I'm starting to understand why the warden gave him to me. I don't even mind picking up after him now because I think that we're really starting to be friends. I look after him and he looks after me. I think I understand friendship all over again.

The warden and I talked for a while today. He's actually a very nice man, contrary to what I used to think. We even support the same hockey team. He was telling me that I have the opportunity of parole in two years if I keep up my good behaviour. Apparently I've been in here for eight years already, though I could have sworn it was twenty. Before I spent these eight years in here, I wouldn't have even wanted parole. I would have just sat and felt miserable; I would have killed myself had I ever been given the chance. Now, I feel that I could live with what I've done.

Buddy and I were let out on a guarded walk today. It was just short, but it was the first time I had been out of the prison centre in nine and a half years. My parole hearing is in five months, and I feel positively jovial about it. My time here is almost done, and I even feel that it might have been worth it. You see, before I was convicted, I hated the world and everyone in it, especially myself. I couldn't stand the things that I had done, but I couldn't see any other way out of those situations. Because of that, I betrayed every last moral in me and more. I also betrayed the whole of society because I figured that nothing was going to make it hurt more. Now, I am starting to see that the same society which condemned me to prison has forgiven me, and I've forgiven it. However, even knowing that, I do not think that I would have been ready. But, I have forgiven myself for my trespasses, and that lifted a ten-ton weight off my chest. I can live with myself now. The thing is, I also know why I was able to make these changes. It was because of the love that Buddy showed me. His unconditional love, with nothing asked in return, allowed me to see what was lacking in myself and understand it. I finally learned, through Buddy, that forgiveness is the greatest weapon available. So now I can answer my question. Why? Because I hadn't learned to love – and to forgive.

2010 Senior Fiction Runner-up

Guarding the Vermillion Soul

by Chen Rao

Grade 12 – Kenner Collegiate Vocational Institute

It was Peach, my step-mother, who had dreamt of Grandma's death. Father had been smoking since dawn, contemplating the ill omen about Grandma, who was in the emergency room in hospital after a sudden severe heart attack.

Then the phone rang.

Peach answered it with dreaded anticipation. As she replaced the receiver with a subtle nod, Father's face broke with incomprehensible sorrow. I looked to the ceiling as the last swirl of smoke rose up and shrouded the light above.

Grandma had lived a full and accomplished life of ninety years. She had been a well-respected court judge, a woman of extraordinary equanimity. Her funeral was therefore referred to as a "happy sadness." No traditional solemn funeral music was played over the heads of the gathered relatives and guests, who chatted in low voices or played mahjong during the days of *shouling* (guarding of the soul).

The number of in-laws astounded both Peach and me. When Father went out for more incense and paper money, we busied ourselves with entertaining groups of relatives, most of whom we had never met before. Peach was frustrated by the complicated family relationships, and I would be no expert even if I hadn't left China three years ago. When one relative walked in, I heard Peach's sweet voice calling him "Old Uncle," then two minutes later, "Grandpa," for she was running around with dishes of sunflower seeds and had clearly forgotten the title she had used earlier.

A handsome boy around my age stepped into the room with his father. I offered bottles of water and candy dishes as they sat down on rattan chairs. The boy had long, thick eyelashes and eyes that shone like black diamonds. Although he was articulate, I was taken aback when I noticed his half-inch-long nails: did he have no concern for personal hygiene?

Instinctively, I knew that the father was different: he remained quiet as his eyes wandered over the surroundings with fascination. Above the circle of *huaquan* (bamboo sticks supporting huge circular planes of flower-shaped white paper), which were ornamentally displayed around the room, there was a tribute couplet written in gold ink that hung vertically on both sides of Grandma's picture:

Though the face dissolves into the end of day,

The wisdom remains for those who stay.

When the boy was ready to go home, the father's relief and delight was evident, for a smile stretched across his round face as his son helped him up.

"Is the boy's father mute?" I asked my uncle after the son and his father walked out.

"Mentally challenged," my uncle whispered back. "Since the boy's mother abandoned them, the man cannot even bathe himself. Now the two are living on a disability pension. The boy does extra tailoring to help out."

So his long nails were for folding fabric! Sympathy welled up inside me, along with the guilt of misjudging the boy's character. The degree of maturity required for him to face others' mockery with dignity and openness struck me profoundly.

Turning toward the sound of approaching footsteps, I saw a young, petite girl holding hands with an old woman, whose hair had turned silver and whose forehead was creased like trenches plotted out on a war map.

Peach hurriedly brought two cups of tea to the table and asked the girl, "How did you and your grandmother get here?"

The girl shifted her feet and glanced at the ground. Her voice was barely audible: "She's my mom."

Before the conversation became a total ruin and Peach shrank from shame, I interjected, "How did you get here?"

The girl's mother answered timidly, "We got up early and walked ten miles." She added, "I've come to pay my respects." Her right hand, calloused and wrinkled, reached shakily into her half-torn black canvas bag. She fished out five one-hundred yuan bills, their vermilion colour especially harsh under the afternoon sunlight. The mother must have known that each of her siblings had contributed five hundred yuan to the funeral. Her desire for the same decency, or her urge to save face, made her hold out a hand with the crumpled bills gripped inside.

Neither Peach nor I made a move. Auntie came to our rescue: "Younger sister, you came!"

Auntie pulled her sister aside. "Why are you contributing so much?" Her voice was hushed: "It's the heart that counts. I will only accept two hundred yuan if you insist on giving money."

By then, the little girl had followed her over and clung to her mother's shoulder. Auntie noticed her presence and mumbled how tough a life her younger sister had led.

"Be good to your mom, hear me?" Auntie tugged at the girl's coat hem vigorously. When the girl smiled and nodded sheepishly, Auntie's eyes softened. She stuffed a handful of candy into the girl's pockets.

After the mother and daughter left, she shook her head at their vanishing backs: "My sister married well and worked hard to become one of status in her community. Her only son died at the age of eighteen from leukemia. The family was drained of its original wealth, as well as its spirit."

“If she’s so poor, why did she have a second child?” Peach couldn’t see the logic of how an extra mouth would help much on the farm.

Auntie shrugged. “That girl was adopted. With failing health, my sister is now in no position to hold the family together. And the father couldn’t care less about a child who has no blood relationship with him. However, my sister is still trying to support this girl.”

Suddenly, I found it a great comfort that Grandma, a reputable judge when alive, now watched the episodes of despair and hope simply evolve without the pronouncement of a final judgment: no redemption, no repayment, no resolution. The unfinished works of the deceased were seamlessly sewn into the continuum of life, passing forward the bonds of heritage and guiding the future with a humbled hand.

The three years I was away had opened a deep chasm between my past and present life. I had come back to a spinning city with extravagant projects and unspoken optimism for an even brighter future. Yet, I realized that the insecurity and agitation which lay at the deep core of society could not be conquered by the camouflage of material goods, but only by the ties of family – blood or not – for these are the laws of nature that override everyone’s fragmented memory and requests for identity.

I was pulled back into reality when Father said, “Let’s burn the new incense I bought – the fire must not go out during these seven days.”

So I held the incense and bowed three times towards Grandma’s picture, thinking of the kind way she looked into my own eyes.

2010 Junior Fiction Co-Winner

Face the Wind

by Megan Boothby

Grade 10 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School

Angie is painting the wall in the attic.

I look in the door and see her there, brushes and buckets surrounding her, and it is as if she has always been here, this woman who is really just a girl, wearing a cardigan and Birkenstocks.

It does not seem she came only the day my father left, months ago. He went to the place where everything is hot and the sand explodes beneath your feet. To my mother, Angie is invisible – a memory of life as insubstantial as thought.

However, it is also true that my mother barely sees me.

I wander into the attic room, looking at Angie and her painted wall. In the morning light, her features glow like a faded halo; the wall is golden.

Angie is beautiful in a strange way. Her face is sharp and narrow, and her hair is brown and very straight, like ironed earth. Her eyes are brown too, often downcast and shy, but I know that sometimes they smile. It is only a matter of catching them in the act.

“What is the wall going to be when you’re finished?” I ask. Angie spins around, startled by my presence. There is white paint on the tip of her nose; it is splattered on her cheeks as well, decorating her jeans and hair as though she is a living canvas.

“It’s going to be a mural of wind,” she says, relaxing. “Wind carries the souls of angels. Did you know that?”

I shake my head.

“Facing the wind is just like dying,” Angie adds quietly.

“How would you know?” I ask, pretending to scoff. “You’ve never died.”

Angie says nothing in response, so I stay quiet too and watch her paint. It is peaceful, and I am happy.

Days later I take Angie flying. As we walk along the coastal path, Angie talks on and on about things she remembers. She talks as though everything is in the past, and it makes her so sad that a few tears run down her face in rivers of memories.

“Angie,” I say as we near the Cape.

“Yes?”

“You’ll always stay, won’t you? Even when Dad comes home?”

Angie sighs and only says, “You’ll be glad when I have gone” in her typical composed way. Her voice is light, but her tone makes my stomach hurt.

To distract myself, I pull Angie through the trees out onto a spit of rock, and we stagger in the force of the gale that hits us there. We are out on the Cape now, where the wind is fast and fierce like a dragon’s breath.

“Fly!” I shout, and Angie catches on instantly, laughing, excited. She has not laughed in a long time, I can tell. We unzip our coats and hold out the ends like wings so that we are caught, and if we close our eyes, it feels just like flying.

“Face the wind,” Angie tells me, her lips against my ear so that she might be heard. “It makes you fly way better.”

“I thought facing the wind was like dying,” I say smartly.

“What is the difference between dying and flying? They feel the same to me,” Angie says, and I do not question how she knows. We fly all afternoon, and it is so wonderful that for once I am not worried about my father. I smile.

When we arrive home, windblown and smiling, my mother is sitting at the table, crying. She takes me into her arms, not seeing Angie. She tells me things about my father I do not understand, using words like *roadside bomb* and *missing*.

It makes my heart hurt, and in confusion I go to Angie’s room.

“Will my dad be okay?” I ask her. Angie looks distraught, and although there is no paint on her nose today, she seems younger than she is, younger even than me.

But her voice is certain.

“Yes,” she says, and then I am crying. I can sense that Angie doesn’t know what to do because she never lets emotions complicate her, never lets them show on her face. She hugs me.

It is a moment I never want to end.

Angie stays all summer. One night, as the light is fading and I sit and watch her working, a car door slams in the driveway. I ignore it.

“Your mural is almost finished,” I say to Angie, who nods and strokes her brush along the yellow-red surface. I cannot say why, but when I hear my father’s voice in the main hallway, then leap up and run down to embrace him, in the back of my mind I am still thinking of Angie and all of her unexplained mysteries.

When I climb the stairs that evening and discover she has gone, I am somehow not surprised. I find that she was right, and I am glad in a bittersweet way because her leaving meant my father coming home. I look at her painted wall, now finished – the orange sky and swirling white wind, and in the centre an angel with brown hair like ironed earth.

With a sad smile on my face, I dip Angie's paintbrush into the pure black paint and write across the bottom of the wall, *Face the Wind*. No one will see the mural but me, I know, for it is only as real to others as the girl who painted it.

I do not know how real that is.

Slowly, I open the window in the attic room and think about my father and all the other fathers who are fighting. I wonder if those children have angels to watch over them, and if any are as wonderfully human as Angie.

I feel the wind on my face soothing me, and I close my eyes.

For a moment, it feels just like flying.

2010 Junior Fiction Co-Winner

Snap!

by Julia Diamandakos

Grade 9 – St. Peter Catholic Secondary School

Once upon a time, there was a magical land called High School that little girls like me dreamed about. In High School, girls and boys became “young ladies” and “young men.” They made new friends, sat with them at specific tables for lunch, grew beards, and got taller, prettier, and smarter.

But the most intriguing part of High School was that everyone paired off into couples. They went out on dates and arrived at prom in limos, kissed on the dance floor and fell in love. Real love, not silly puppy-dog love.

I remember my best friend Lucie telling me about her older sister’s experiences in High School: “... and then her friend told her that he had a crush on her, and she had had a crush on him for the whole semester! So, the next day at school, she walked up to him and said, “hi,” and he smiled at her. This was before lunch... and by lunchtime they were boyfriend and girlfriend!”

I recall my shocked reaction: “That happens in real life?!”

Up to that point in my life, I did not think it possible that the object of your affections could ever like you back. It was a strict rule in elementary school to have crushes on boys that would never give you a second glance. To have a miracle like that happen... well, that was the stuff of fairy tales and cheesy movies.

Thus, my fascination with High School – where anything is possible – began.

Years later, I am in High School. It is not like I imagined. At all.

It seems like everyone around me has found love. The girls who are shyer, dumber, uglier, meaner, they have all found love – the one thing in my life that seems unattainable. The one thing that is always just out of my grasp.

I have a competitive streak – it’s true. Everything I have ever wanted I have worked for and obtained in a snap Top grades? Snap. First place in musical competitions? Snap. M.V.P. of my rep basketball team? Snap. Perfect body? Snap. Gorgeous hair? Snap.

Snap, snap, snap.

I am conscious of the little sounds of my heart slowly breaking – snapping apart with each shared smile, each kiss blown across the room, each act of love I am foreign to. I wish that Steve, the cute brown-haired boy who sits in front of me in English, would offer to be my tour guide – show me the sights of this foreign land called High School Love.

I have always been the most mature of my peers. I know about topics otherwise considered taboo. Not only did I mature mentally, but physically I developed early as well. I grew into the “hourglass” figure before all of my friends and got my period first. I was the first one to learn about everything. I was always the first, the first, the first.

It always seemed fitting that I would receive my first kiss *first*, have a boyfriend *first*, fall in love *first*.

Now, I stand alone like a fool, as everyone surpasses me in the race of Life. I had a head start, but just as in the story of the Tortoise and the Hare, I have somehow become the unlucky rodent stuck in last place. I always dreamed I would be first, but now it seems I am last.

I quiver as I learn the hard way that you can’t work for love. There is no first-place medal, no curriculum to memorize, no formula that works every time. It just happens.

And, apparently, not to me.

I long for love (preferably Steve’s). I want to *experience*. Don’t get me wrong – I have more than enough love in my close family – but I long for the stuff of romance novels, the love that inspires! I yearn for passion, hunger and thirst for affection, desire the touch of a lover. I ache for the warmth that can only be found in the arms of the one you love.

Religion class: what a joke!

We are studying stories in the Old Testament – or rather, we are supposed to be studying stories in the Old Testament. Mostly, we are all just talking. Our teacher pretends not to notice, so he doesn’t have to assert himself against our whole class.

Right now, Lucie is doing all the talking and I’m doing all the listening. She’s talking about Pete, her boyfriend – again!

I absentmindedly pretend to be interested in her monologue while I flip through the Bible. Pbuftpbuftpbuft. That’s the sound the pages make. A story catches my eye – Noah and the Flood.

I scan over it quickly. I shiver as I think about what I would have done, coming face to face with the Ark. All the animals lined up in pairs, taking the next big move in their lives together. Would I enter the Ark alone, no callused hand gripping mine, telling me not to worry, we would be all right, just hold onto his hand?

In anger and dismay, I slam the book shut. I don’t want to think about that right now.

An annoyed Lucie asks me, “Were you even listening?”

I scoff. “As *if* I wasn’t listening!” I tell her, emphasizing my words in such a way that she won’t question me further on the subject.

I sigh and go back to ignoring her. I focus on the pair of girls in front of me, eavesdropping on their tête-à-tête.

One of the bubbly girls excitedly whispers to her friend, “Hey, did you hear about Jeff and Sara? They’re going out now!”

What is the world coming to?

Time for my next class: French.

I purposefully fumble around in my locker, awarding myself a few more seconds of non-French time. Shutting my locker and twirling my lock into position, I head off to French.

“Natalieeeee!”

I turn at the sound of Lucie calling my name, finding it odd that she is up in the science hallway, where my locker is, instead of in the gym hallway, where her locker is, at the opposite end of school.

“What?” I ask, half worried. She doesn’t come to me between classes unless it’s an emergency.

“Did you get my texts?” Immediately I feel pulsating vibrations from my pocket.

“Just now. I –”

“Whatever! It doesn’t matter!” she yells excitedly, interrupting me. “Billy told me that Steve has a crush on you! Steve told Billy himself!”

“What?! No way!”

“Yes, way! Look, there he is right behind you!”

I turn around, composing myself. I take a step towards him.

He comes right up to me, and says, “hi.”

He smiles.

It was just before lunch!

Failure is Not an Option

by Emily Frost

Grade 9 – St. Peter Catholic Secondary School

“Mackenzie, Alice!” The art teacher, Mrs. McCormick, reads my name aloud as her gaze sweeps the orderly rows of desks. I raise my hand, and she settles her narrow blue-eyed gaze on my face, committing it to memory. She has fly-away gray hair, the kind that looks wispy and thin, sort of like a half-hearted attempt at order. I begin to doubt she’ll have the passion for the arts necessary to teach us properly.

On second thought, most of the kids here don’t really want to be taught. Or more specifically, they can’t be taught. They won’t try, and I’ll end up looking like the keener again, that girl who tries too hard for everything. Even though art is the one thing I don’t really try at, it’ll still end up that way, and once again, I’ll be at the laughing end of their jokes.

Sometimes it’s difficult being an overachiever. Most people don’t appreciate that. Most people assume that because of my good grades, my life is also easy, as if I didn’t work hard to get them. Most people assume intelligence comes naturally, and I guess sometimes it does. But I’ve always had to work hard to get those marks – always doing the extra bit, going a little further than strictly necessary.

The teacher finishes taking attendance and places the folder neatly on her orderly desk before turning to face us. It’s only first period and everyone’s still half asleep. You can almost taste the weariness in the air, the tangible scent of sleep lingering over us all like some formidable sheen of despair. Our rest has been disrupted, and we’ve been dragged into this classroom, somewhat against our will. It does not make us happy campers.

Mrs. McCormick begins to talk, but her voice is like the whining of a broken stereo - annoying and unwelcome. I don’t particularly feel like listening, but because it’s not an option, I force myself to blink a few times and concentrate. Her words slowly begin to make sense, and I listen as she tries to convey her desire to teach, her love of the arts, her struggle for self-fulfillment. She makes it sound like being at this school is a dream come true, like she’s actually happy to be here at 8:30 in the morning, talking to a bunch of unresponsive, half-asleep teenagers. And for a few minutes, she almost makes me believe her. Then reality snaps like a whip. I wake up and realize just how empty and hollow her words are, how this class is going to plummet in a steady downfall until it’s unrecognizable as an optional course that we, of our own volition, chose to take.

With that, she sends us off into our creative zones, encouraging us to pick up our painting utensils and paint pretty pictures. I do so willingly and face my empty canvas like a soldier preparing for the coming onslaught. Armed with only my brush, I begin to attack the white expanse, intent on making something out of nothing, on bringing the canvas to life with colour and

explosive designs. Slowly but faithfully, the rest of the world fades from my mental radar, and it's just me and the painting and my brush, making steady, rhythmic strokes, with desperate determination to change the world. Before I know it, the little cooking timer has chimed, and Mrs. McCormick strides around the room, her critical eyes surveying the paintings displayed.

“Add more depth here. It's lacking heart,” she advises, and I see the boy's shoulders slump, even as he smiles brightly at his friends like it's just a big joke. Who really cares? Art shouldn't be judged, I think. It's all about expression, and no one can express what you think better than you can. I stand slightly back and look at my painting. I've drawn a disaster – there's no other way to say it. And what is more apt to describe the explosion inside of me? A jumble of colours, just like emotions, litter the canvas, entwining and encircling like an endless mess of hurts and loves, desires and hates. Other students have drawn trees, harmless flowers, and pretty meadows. I've filled the entire canvas with an outburst of hot, raw feeling. I look at my painting again. It's really quite violent – the beauty is lost in the brutal, almost crude slashes of dark, angry colours. Perhaps it was once lovely, but now it is an ugly portrayal of destruction – bitter and hideous in its cruelty like some tame creature turned unexpectedly dangerous.

Mrs. McCormick wanders to my art easel with a tilted head, and I feel as if I've just handed her my diary. It's confusing but undeniably frightening – why do I care what this woman thinks of my painting? Only a few minutes before, I'd been insulting her career choice, her superior attitude, even her hair. And now I am nervous to hear what she thinks of my art? It's really very hypocritical of me.

It seems like the longest ten seconds of my life while she gazes at my painting. Her face is absolutely expressionless, with only a slight glitter in her eyes as she turns to face me.

I see her mouth move, and I can almost hear the words, but they're strained somehow, as if I'm hearing them from a great distance. It's only when she's walked away to inspect the next piece of art that I hear what she's said, like an echo. It reverberates inside my skull until it hits home and clicks into place.

“You tried too hard.”

2010 Junior Fiction Runner-up

Paper Sky

by Mirka Loiselle

Grade 9 – Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School

“Ready-or-not-here-I-come!”

James gasped with delight as the cold water of the creek splashed across his bare legs, the water droplets shattering in the air like tiny crystals. Behind him, he could hear his sister Taylor chasing him, laughing and calling. The day was mild, with an occasional breath of cool air that gently swayed the leaves above.

Leaping over a tall boulder, James left the creek and began tearing through the forest. Taylor was yelling something behind him, and so he slowed down a notch, letting her catch up. She barreled into his legs, and they both fell to the ground, tumbling down the gentle slope.

“Geez, Taylor,” James said when they came to a halt. “You’ve got to warn me before you do that.”

“You run too fast,” she whined. Scrambling to her feet, she began tugging at his sleeve impatiently. “Come on, I wanna keep playing.”

“Nah. I’m tired. Let’s take a break.”

Taylor shrugged and sat down cross-legged beside him. James lay in the sun, breathing in the sweet air of the forest and staring up at the yellowy-stained sky. “Can you believe it?” he whispered to his sister. “The sky used to be blue.”

Taylor looked up, squinting. Her small face wrinkled in disbelief. Suddenly, she looked away and pointed to a bush a few feet away. “What’s that?” she asked.

James sat up. Something red and pointy was sticking out from underneath the bush. Crawling over, he pulled out a hard rectangular box with neat gold lettering printed on the top. As he picked it up, he realized it wasn’t a box at all: the top flipped back to reveal the delicate yellow pages inside. He felt the pages cautiously. Paper. Real paper.

Taylor had joined him. “What is it?” she asked.

“I think...” James flipped through the pages, some falling away in his hand. A strange smell wafted up towards him, a mixture of old wooden furniture and after-dinner mints. “I think it’s a book.”

“That?” Taylor laughed. “That’s not a book, James. Books are made of metal. They’re electronic. You listen to the story; you don’t *read* it.”

“No, but look.” James turned to the very first page:

To Alison Cooper

December 25th 2012

Love, Dad

“2012,” breathed James. “This thing is *old*, Taylor.”

“Hey, James, look.” Taylor pointed to the date. “She got the book for Christmas.”

“Yeah, she did.” James smiled. “Isn’t that funny. Hundreds of years later, we still have Christmas.”

Taylor frowned. “People were kind of stupid back then, weren’t they? I mean, look how thick the book is! That would take *ages* to finish! What’s the point?”

James wasn’t sure. “I guess for fun?” He looked down at the ancient object in his hands. He’d seen a few books in museums, locked up in glass cases. To him they were just artifacts, puzzle pieces from an old alien world. And yet there was something strangely majestic about this book, almost powerful, as if it was daring him to open it up and discover the mysteries inside. He held it up to his face and breathed in the strange smell. Did you buy the smell with the book, already sprayed onto the pages? Or was it something that gathered there over time, like dust on forgotten boxes or the tea stains on his mother’s desk?

“If they’re so fun, why did they stop making them?” asked Taylor, still skeptical.

This, James could answer. “Because they’re made of paper, and paper comes from trees. In the olden days, lots of things were made out of trees, and so they started running out of them, just like they started running out of oil and water and all that stuff. This was before space travel, before we were able to use the resources on other planets. Books took up a lot of room, too, since they could hold only one story each. So paper books were replaced by electronic books with a screen, and then the Story-Tellers most people use today.”

Taylor nodded. “I think listening to stories is a much better idea. I don’t even like reading.”

“Reading isn’t that bad, Taylor.”

“It’s just words on a page. No pictures even.”

“That’s not true. Some old books had drawings.”

“Yeah, but they didn’t move. Like I said, stupid.” Taylor crossed her arms and jutted out her chin, which she always did when she knew a fight had been won.

James stared at the book and frowned. “No, you’re wrong. It’s not just words on a page. And there *are* pictures; you just make them with your mind. It’s like...” James struggled to explain. “It’s like a film, only better, because you can decide what the places and characters look like in your head, and if you don’t understand something, you can stop and read it again. It might take a while, sure, but it doesn’t matter because as you read, you don’t even notice time going by. You’re sort of inside the world of the book.” James stopped and looked at his sister. She was staring up at the sky.

“James,” she said softly, “was the sky blue in 2012?”

“Yeah.”

“So Alison Cooper saw a blue sky?”

“Yeah, I guess she did.”

They sat in silence for a second, watching the toxic clouds above them. A crafter, no doubt heading for the stars, passed overhead, humming faintly.

Taylor looked back down at the book. She reached over and ran her fingers across the golden letters. “If I read the book...would I see a blue sky in my head?”

James smiled. “Wanna find out?”

Taylor nodded, but when he offered her the book, she shook her head. “Read it with me,” she said. “So I can stop you if I don’t understand the old words.”

And so James opened the book, and together the two siblings sat silently under the cloudy sky, and read.

The Man Across the Street

by Katie Maranduik

Grade 9 – Kenner Collegiate Vocational Institute

The man who lives across the street from me wouldn't typically appear to be the kind of guy who would raise the hair on the back of your neck and send goosebumps up your arms. But he is. He's all that and more. Trust me.

He's in his late forties, early fifties. With his size, some might say it would be easier to jump over him than walk around him. His hair is the colour of cardboard, his teeth slightly offset. He lives with his mother, or at least I assume this is their relationship as he is constantly yelling, "Ma, where's my shirt?" just like a seven-year-old. Periodically, he is visited by his five children, a nasty bunch always sporting last night's dinner on their rumpled shirts, and although the fact that they are his kids is again just an assumption, it has much careful thought placed behind it. You see, the little hooligans share my neighbour's gross cardboard hair and horrible country slang, and thus I conclude that those youngsters are his, a fate I wouldn't wish upon anybody. These squealing kids are over almost every weekend, along with every other family member my neighbour manages to squeeze into his unkempt yard. Apparently the constant watching of my house takes priority over gardening.

His yellow moldy lawn chair faces my house from his garage, which he has turned into a small kitchenette, complete with a refrigerator and a microwave. Quite frankly, I await the day when I will look into my neighbour's garage and see not a normal one-car storage space, but a fully equipped Dunkin Doughnuts with NASA-level surveillance equipment. This man chooses to sit for hours, observing my house relentlessly. Why? Nobody knows for sure, but we have our theories, my friends and I.

My friend Hannah, who strongly believes the best in everybody, says that he must be bird watching. We have a cedar hedge in our front yard, where a particularly stubborn red cardinal seems to have nested. The cardinal is a brilliant shade of red and, vain as he is, often admires his reflection in our car window between the hours of seven to ten in the morning. It is interesting that my neighbour would be so intrigued by this conceited cardinal as to watch him all day, everyday, for the past five years. Without bird-watching binoculars, I might add.

As Reilly so over-imaginatively puts it, it is quite apparent that my mysterious neighbour is a knight here on orders from the Queen of England. On orders here because, unannounced to me, I was secretly adopted and am actually a princess due to inherit the throne and, therefore, in need of protection from the royal guard (to this I immediately respond with a look that questions the sanity of my best friend of seven years).

Jett thinks he's a hit man hired by this girl at school who's "detested" me since I moved in. Sam thinks he's a zombie who hasn't the ability to turn his head, so he is stuck staring at my house for ever. Cassidy thinks he's a government agent who will at some point kidnap my entire family for top-secret genetic testing. Austin thinks he's a Predator, like in the movie *Alien Vs Predator*, and that he's planning to kill the entire human race – beginning with me.

In my personal opinion, he's a serial killer. You know, the real hard-core psychopath type. The kind who picks his victims, stakes out their neighbourhood for years, watching them – what they eat, what sports they play, when they wake up in the morning, when they go to sleep at night, what birds nest in their hedges – then suddenly, springs out of the blue, killing his victims slowly, making them watch as he slices their veins and severs their arteries, placing pieces of their liver into their own bare hands. The kind who makes them feel the deep cut of the knife into their bare skin, cold, sharp and precise; the kind who makes them taste the metallic blood in their mouths and smell the thick scent of their own fear on their breath. The twisted, deranged kind of murderer who finds pleasure in finally letting his victims die only after they have formed pleas for death out of jaws that conceal no tongues.

Yes, this is why I live in perpetual fear of the man across the street. Why I am constantly afraid that he will either shoot me, eat me, kidnap me, annihilate me with his advanced alien technology, torture me or maybe all of the above. Why my knees constantly quiver, my skin always crawling whenever I see my neighbour's rotten eyes looking at my house from the comfort of his moldy yellow lawn chair. Whenever I catch a glimpse of him, I begin to squirm. The way he looks right into my house, so intrigued, so fascinated, deprives me of sleep every night.

Even if I don't know his story, what I do know is that my neighbour still sends jitters up my spine. My neighbour, the man who has successfully eliminated the meaning of the phrase "peace of mind," the man who sets off every possible alarm, who raises all the red flags which warn me that hit men, zombies, secret agents, extra-terrestrials, or serial killers may be lurking close by. The man who creeps me to the core. The man who, as I so embarrassingly just found out, has a TV installed in his garage which, when being viewed from his lawn chair, makes it look as though he is watching my house. The man who is actually watching a rerun of *The Simpsons*.

2010 Senior Nonfiction Winner

Ephemeral Ties

by Victoria Windrem

Grade 12 – Kenner Collegiate Vocational Institute

I am aware of a growing anxiety that is building within the confines of the car. It grows more pronounced as the trees become sharper and the rock more exposed. This trip feels like the last, although I tell myself it is not.

Every year, for my entire life, we have made this journey. “The long drive,” my mother used to say. Each stop was familiar: breakfast in Gravenhurst, coffee in Parry Sound, ice cream at French River. If it wasn’t too late, we had dinner in Sudbury at the ageless restaurant with the white house on the rock behind it, a house that appeared to balance on the face of a small cliff. The expedition into the big mining city would barely be accomplished before we backtracked to that long dirt road to our destination.

We only ever called it “camp.” I can remember having to explain to my friends that this did not mean counsellors, swimming lessons, and hundreds of kids singing choruses of Kumbaya. It was where my great-grandparents and great uncles lived, an isolated piece of land in the bush on which they had built a house. It wasn’t much, but my memories of the place all centre on the camphouse and the lake that lies on its shores. It is even more important to my mother, for she spent whole summers there as a child. The water was a playground, the land an anchor. For her, the North Country is like a distant homeland. It is so disconnected from her present, yet the foundations of her childhood will be forever rooted in that place. The camp.

In past years, I’ve watched my mother’s anticipation build with every rest stop. She would take a breath of relief with the sight of Shield country and pine. As we turned onto the camp road, she became alert, taking in every familiar detail, her history playing out like a film framed by the car window, though dust and scratches on the glass contaminated the image.

I, too, would smile broadly at the sight of the tall pines standing in long, straight rows – the pine flats. I’ve been told that this place used to be a prisoner-of-war camp. I couldn’t tell you which war, but the knowledge sent my well-used imagination spinning. Even now I picture long lines of men with foreign accents planting those trees. It was said that, although they were prisoners, the life and the work suited them better than the battlefields at their backs. As we would drive by, I could see them in my mind’s eye as they marvelled at the remoteness of this place and the unlikely prospect of their returning home. The idea of a new life glittered in their eyes, despite the loss of what was once familiar.

So much is different now. The changes that one death seems to cause are almost incomprehensible.

Logically I know that the absence of one old man, “Poppy,” as my mother innocently and affectionately dubbed him, did not bring about all the changes. Perhaps our grandfather’s “going away” did create the gaping chasm that now separates our family, but it couldn’t have caused the other shifts in my world.

Unfortunately logic has never been my master.

This trip seems not so much like a journey, but a goodbye. Many of the evergreens that make the northern soil foreign to the massive farms of the south are now a lifeless congregation of stumps. The mighty Shield, once constant and strong, has now, in places, been reduced to cold rubble for the passage of roads. The little house behind the restaurant is gone. Its exciting ambiguity is lost to dying memory.

My dear pine flats, which used to make my imagination burst at the seams, now look like a graveyard. They tell me their original destiny was to become clean, white paper. Perhaps it was never my right to think of them as my own. Nevertheless, I do, and their sudden absence feels like a great injustice.

Even the tired, old camphouse has mutated, the result of someone’s half-baked attempt to imitate the outside world; the additions and partitions look unnatural. The shores of the lake have slowly receded. The water creeps further up the bank each year – some distant CEO’s idea of preserving an industry in a faraway corner of the lake. The beach that both my mother and I (and even my grandmother) played on is all but gone. The lake, once clear and beautiful to me, is now ominous. Its former beauty is tainted by spectres of so-called progress.

Instead of excitement in my mother’s eyes, there is tension. Her beloved homeland has changed, with only an evasive shadow left as evidence of its former beauty. Even though my memories of that place do not go back as far as hers, the sting is still sharp. I now feel alien and uncomfortable here. The people have changed with the landscape. It is a fracture I fear can never be repaired.

Even if this is not the last time we make this trip, I think this is the last time I will be able to catch a glimpse of the landscape’s former magnificence. The changes began to creep up around us several years ago, but it is only now that we truly feel the loss. The goodbye that we came to make has been stolen. The past is already gone.