



LAKEFIELD
LITERARY *Festival*

2014

YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST
WINNERS

2014 Senior Fiction Winner

The Rock

by Vanessa Kraus

Grade 12 – St. Peter Catholic Secondary School

The town I grew up in is gone. Only a few things scattered across the rocky expanse suggest that Goose Point existed: burnt timbers, broken bricks, the rusted blue-whale skeleton of the O’Learys’ van.

Once, I brought a boyfriend here, and he couldn’t see the town. I pointed out the piles that had been the store, the church, Mrs. Clevan’s, where she cut everyone’s hair. As I pointed, he kept shading his eyes, thinking it was somewhere in the distance. I thought later, though, that no-one who hadn’t grown up here could construct a town with the pitiful building blocks that remained.

There wasn’t much more when I lived here, but it had become even smaller after I had moved away. My father told me the story over the phone from my Aunt Mattie’s. Late one night, some drunks had tied a flaming branch to the tail of the Browns’ beloved mutt Lester. Poor Lester had run home looking for help. The flames engulfed him and spread until everything burned. Good thing the poor boy’s wailing had roused the whole town, my dad remarked, or the citizens of Goose Point would have burned to death in their beds. The sound poor Lester made, he said, was the most horrible thing he’d ever heard. It would come to him at the oddest moments, when he was putting on his socks or making his lunch or out fishing, and he would have to sit down with his head in his hands, so painful was the memory.

In the end, it was too expensive to rebuild, so the citizens of Goose Point simply dispersed to the homes of friends and family across the island.

But even before Lester, Goose Point was small: a handful of houses, the Tawes’ store, the church, and the post office. That, and, across the bay, our cabin.

Every year, as soon as school was out, my sister Callie and I would run, leather schoolbags slapping our thighs, braids bobbing up and down, to the boat launch. The night before, my mother wrapped cod cakes and baked potatoes and put them into the great wicker basket, and we knew what that meant. My Uncle Caleb would be waiting in his boat, the *Maggie*, named for beautiful red-haired aunt Maggie, who died before we were born. We would leap into the boat, and set off across the bay. Callie and I would rip the pages out of our scribblers full of arithmetic and geography and throw them into the ocean, watching them sink, drifting out of sight like black-veined jellyfish. On we went, leaving a trail of sinking sheets like breadcrumbs, across the bay towards the tip of Goose Point, which we just called the rock, where our cabin sat.

Although it was no more than one room, it was our castle the whole summer long. We would spring from the boat and run up the point to meet Dad and Mother, who had sailed up earlier. We

would drop our shoes and schoolbags in the corner, not to be touched again until September. All afternoon we would build castles with pebbles, searching for crabs and treasures in the tide pools. And all afternoon we'd listen, for although we watched the sky anxiously, it was Dad's shrill whistle, and not the setting sun, that determined when it was too late for games.

The cabin had few furnishings: a table, two chairs, and the wooden stand that held my grandmother's record player, an old Victrola with a big brassy bell like a bizarre tropical flower. Dad and Uncle Caleb had carried it across the bay in the boat, just after Mother and Dad were married, and Mr. Clevan had panicked, because he thought that the rowboat with the bell peeking out was a German submarine. Mother rowed him across the bay herself to prove that everything was all right: the war was over and there were no more submarines.

Callie and I would wait anxiously as we munched our supper, waiting for the moment when Dad would brush the crumbs off his mouth, slap both hands down on his knees, look to Mother and say,

"Well, Gracie, innit time we had a bit o' music?"

Uncle Caleb would rise and go to the Victrola, flicking through the records as though making a careful decision, although we all knew what he was going to pick. There were five records: two symphonies by Brahms and two by Beethoven, which the adults would listen to while we slept. But for now, there could only be one song.

*Down at an English fair, one evening I was there,
When I heard a showman shouting underneath the flair....*

We'd all sing the first time.

*"I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts
There they are, all standing in a row
Big ones, small ones, some as big as your head!
Give them a twist, a flick of the wrist,"
That's what the showman said!*

I was twenty when I finally tasted a coconut. I had been living in Toronto for a while when out of curiosity I went to the exotic grocery near my apartment and chose a fuzzy brown nut the size of a bowling ball. The kindly West African shopkeeper took a worn steel hammer and split open my coconut with a practised swing, grinning toothlessly. He grinned even wider as I slurped down the sweet milk and the tender flesh, my eyes squeezed shut in wordless delight. Nothing had ever tasted like it, nor had anything ever been so clean and white. Not fresh linen, not snowfall, not seagulls.

"It tastes like *snow!*" I squealed, childishly, although it didn't taste even remotely like it. The shopkeeper laughed and nodded. Whether or not he understood me, I'll never know.

*"I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts,
Every ball you throw will make me rich!
There stands me wife, the idol of me life,*

Singing roll a bowl a ball a penny a pitch!"

Dad would stand, bow elegantly to Mother and take her hand, leading her across the floor in a lively waltz. Dad's feet in their boots would become surprisingly light, and Mother's eyes would sparkle like a storybook angel's. Callie and I, giggling, would take hands and follow clumsily, while Uncle Caleb kept time, smiling and laughing.

I once asked my mother why Uncle Caleb never joined us. She kissed my forehead and said that Uncle Caleb never danced, not anymore, which meant not since red-haired Aunt Maggie had died. I asked why Uncle Caleb never found another wife, and she said that Uncle Caleb used up most of his love on Aunt Maggie, and what was left he kept for us. I felt horrible, knowing that I was the reason Uncle Caleb was alone; one night I told him that he could stop loving me if he wanted, and use that love to find a new wife. He picked me up, squeezed me in his giant arms, and said he'd rather love me than all the wives in the world.

*"Roll a bowl, a ball, a penny, a pitch
Roll a bowl, a ball, a penny, a pitch
Roll a bowl, a ball, roll a bowl, a ball
Singing roll a bowl a ball a penny a pitch!"*

We would dance until the record finished, and then we'd start over again until the floor trembled and the walls shook, until we collapsed, red-faced and sweaty on the floor, rocking with exhausted laughter. Callie and I would change from our soaking dresses into soft nightshirts and lie on the mats that Mother had brought over. We were lulled to sleep by the murmurs of the grown-ups talking, under the delicate strains of Brahms and Beethoven, every night until September placed her work-booted foot onto the shore of the rock and sent us trudging back until next summer.

The Warlanders

by Mackenzie Green

Grade 11 – Crestwood Secondary School

When we were young, we decided it was a good idea to slice our palms with zebra mussels and make a blood pact. The three of us stood in a circle at the pebbly beach, shaded by warped evergreens, where Grandpa couldn't see us if he glanced over. Lifejacket clamped securely around her chest, Laina waded into the lake, waves carving dark patches in the edges of her shorts. Cam, her brother, trudged beside her, and I pried a mussel off the side of a rock before taking my place in the lapping water across from my cousins.

I cleared my throat. "I, Anna Holland, promise to never lose my imagination." The edge of the zebra mussel glided across my palm. As a small crimson slit appeared, I solemnly regarded my imagination as a concrete object, a cottage treasure like a slab of mica or a smooth piece of beach glass. I handed the mussel to Cam.

"Come on, Cam. Say something," I urged. He dropped his head to look down at the water, his eyes rolling as he did so. At 11, although only my elder by a year, his interest in our familiar pastimes and games of pretend had hastily subsided since the beginning of the summer. At last, Cam mumbled out the pact and sliced his skin.

Laina, the baby of our group at age six, held out her hand for the zebra mussel. Instead, I plucked a pebble from beside my foot to give to her, and Cam cast the mussel into the lake. Laina rubbed the water-smoothed stone across her hand.

"We promise to never break the bond of the cousins or disobey the laws of Warland," I chanted as the three of us stretched out our arms and touched our palms together. After a few moments of silence, my cousins and I proceeded to the dock, where we sat with our feet dipped in the water. Our eyes scanned the lake, vast and impassable, that kept us contentedly stranded on the island at our grandfather's cottage for the summer.

"I hear an army of sea monsters is making its way to Warland," I said after several minutes, motioning towards the white-capped waves charging toward us.

"Fire the cannon!" Laina hollered. Through a thicket of shrubbery I glimpsed our cannon, a fallen tree with its splintered trunk aimed at the water. Cam, finally showing interest, pulled the stub of a charred stick from his pocket and began to draw a rough sketch of the island on the planks of the dock. Carefully, he mapped out a plan of action for the upcoming battle, sketching a circle around the point of land that jutted out into the lake: Warland, we'd called it for as long as we could remember.

* * *

"Anna, Cam killed my imaginary friend!" Laina shouted. She lashed out at her brother with clenched fists.

“I had to, Laina; he was in cahoots with the sea monsters,” Cam said in his defence as he fought against his sister’s futile blows. I jogged through the branches that criss-crossed the entrance to Warland and came up beside Laina, pulling her away from her brother.

“Cam broke the pact,” Laina whined as Cam smirked and walked away from us.

“He was just kidding, Laina. I’ll talk to him,” I said, eventually sending my cousin away to fight a band of lake-gremlins swimming toward the boathouse.

I found Cam outside the entrance to Warland, firing a basketball at a makeshift hoop we’d nailed to a tree.

“Stop messing with Laina,” I told him. “She’s getting all up in arms, and Grandpa can’t deal with it since he’s sick.” Cam didn’t answer, so I tried again: “You’re supposed to be following the laws of Warland, you know.” I pointed at the scar on my hand from the previous summer as a reminder.

“Whatever, Anna,” grunted Cam, taking another shot. I watched the basketball roll around the rim before dropping in. “Your little pact isn’t gonna matter when I’m playing college ball.”

I snorted. “Seriously, Cam? You’re only twelve.”

Cam’s next shot missed; the ball ricocheted off the tree trunk and bounced toward the water. He chased after it, and I followed him down to the beach. Cam snagged the ball before it somersaulted into the lake. He took a seat at the water’s edge.

“Did you lie when you made the pact?” I asked.

Cam was silent, eyes fastened on the horizon. The sun was a white-hot orb in the centre of the sky, and the water caught its light among turbulent peaks and valleys.

“Cam, just be a kid for a couple more summers,” I said. After a moment I added, “And stop using Laina’s imaginary friends for target practice.”

Cam picked a zebra mussel off a rock and flicked it into the lake. “It’s not my problem if an invisible little kid won’t get out of my way.”

* * *

Few summers had stickier air and warmer water than the following summer, the summer Grandpa died. Our parents sat around a table inside the cottage poring over an array of official documents. They shooed us children outside to sag under the weight of the heat as fat flies buzzed in our ears. We walked side by side down the hill that led to Warland and trod across uneven ground to the tip of the island, where rock met unbridled, grey lake.

“We could fight some sea monsters, I guess,” said Laina. No one responded, and eventually she wandered away from us.

“Anna, they’re selling the cottage,” Cam said abruptly. At that moment the sounds of the island, the waves, the wind, and the occasional bird cry, became like blasts of gunfire.

“No…” I began, but Cam cut me off.

“Warland’s over, Anna. So are summers up here.” He motioned around us. “All of this is gonna be gone.” Cam stood up. “We’re too old for this anyway.” He turned and walked away, leaving me sitting on my hands, watching the water. My fingers tingled against ragged rock below me. I felt the sudden urge to aim our tree trunk cannon at the cottage and send a boulder from the beach through the front window. Facing the lake, our cannon would no longer be useful; Warland’s enemies had long since overtaken the island.

Ghosts in the Snow

by Barrett Poley

Grade 12 – Kenner Collegiate Vocational Institute

I was a Wehrmacht soldier on the Ostfront in the winter of 1941. Part of the Northern Group Battalion, I was a proud soldier. I was raised in Berlin, and when my father did not return from the Western Front in 1918, or 1919, or 1920, I knew, even as a small boy of five, that I had been chosen to take up his mantle. Even though my people were discouraged and disbanded, I was taking any risk I could to regain the honour of my father.

It was cold then in the late November snow. In a city near Moscow, I felt the burn of the outside world on my feet beneath my boots, soaked through and wrapped doubly with towels. Having been pinned down for an hour and having lost contact with the other platoons in the area, we waited as the twilight snow blinded us. Ghosts in the snow approached us, silhouettes with guns drawn, images too blurred to tell if they were Russians or members of the Wehrmacht.

“Halt! Wer ist da? Sie sind Freund oder Feind?!” yelled the Kommandant, his rifle raised and trained upon the phantoms. It would not make a difference, I thought to myself, for bullets know no ally.

Whispers in the wind were our response, and with the harsh breeze came a new torrent of snow. I wasn't sure if it was the wind or a response lost to the elements, and so I crouched at the ready, the metal bolt of my rifle stinging my palm where the wear of war had whittled away the wool of my gloves. German gloves, I reflected, made by German hands like my own. The Kommandant looked at us, the five of us who remained, and ordered in a hushed tone that we move inside the houses roughly a hundred metres to the front of us.

There had been a brief pause in the fighting, due presumably to the snow. Though the world seemed calmer as we crawled through makeshift trenches, we saw flares of orange, supernovas in the grey dusk, projecting shadows of men, far grander and more ghastly than I'd ever seen before. Were they friend or foe, those who fell with screams in the night? Was it a friendly bullet that struck them? It occurred to me again that no bullet was friendly, regardless of its origin.

Finally we made it to the doorstep of a building and, huddling ourselves quietly inside, we found an abode of peace for a moment in the shelled carapace of some poor Soviet's home. On the ground I noticed a picture frame, turned sideways and shattered, as if someone had meant to take it in haste; instead it had been knocked off a shelf and broken.

A voice came over us all, as if it were the call of God; in truth, it came from a Soviet loudspeaker. The words were in German, but the Russian accent was blatant and laughable.

“Achtung! Die Sowjetunion ist nicht der Feind der Wehrmacht! Gib deine kapitalistischen Führer, die nichts von dir wollen, aber der Tod! Wir sind nicht deine Feinde!”

The Kommandant grinned at this. “You hear that, gentleman?!” he boomed “These men are our friends! The Soviets are our *allies*! I couldn’t tell from the dirty bullets flying at us from all directions, but mein Gott, I have been enlightened!”

The other four grinned, I among them. The first words spoken amongst us in an hour had given us a morale boost, and so we gripped our rifles with the tightness of patriots when we realized our presence had not gone unnoticed. From another room we heard yelling in Russian, and though we could not tell if they were yells of warning or the orders of hell itself barked from the mouth of the Russian Kommisar, we knew they were yells made on our behalf.

“Hans, to the front. Jorge, you watch our sides. We clear the room ahead. We will make it through this, Gott willing.”

The whole ordeal lasted less than a minute, and as far as we could tell, there was only one survivor. He sat at a small fire in the middle of the room. Blood dripped from his mouth and from a wound in his chest. He was a handsome young boy, and I could see that there was a tear in his collar.

Grimacing at his sorry state, I cocked my rifle, the cold biting against my hands where metal met flesh, and I put a bullet to his head. Metal met flesh again at my command.

It was four or five days later that we were made to retreat, being surrounded by troops on most sides and having depleted our ammunition, as well as those rounds left in the guns of our enemies. Night was beginning to fall, and the fighting calmed, so it was then that we made our escape from the building through an urban centre and courtyard. A loud crack dulled my senses. I tripped in a snow bank. On my knees I could see the scarlet in front of me.

My rifle was nowhere to be found when I finally stood up again, but I limped to an alleyway for safety. There I was met with a warm fire. A lone soldier sat there, and like me, he was unarmed and injured, a wet bandage stuck limply to his head. He looked at me and motioned for me to sit beside him, and so I did. He had a bottle of vodka and a single cigarette.

In the dusk, we shared the alcohol and the bitter Soviet cigarette, neither warming us as much as we’d hoped. I noticed that there were more soldiers gathering around us, both Soviet and Wehrmacht.

I turned, tired and dazed, to thank the soldier beside me for the drink and the company. I looked closely at his face. He was a handsome young boy, with a tear in his collar. We were ghosts in the snow.

2014 Senior Fiction Runner-up

Norma-Jean

by Jasmine Shenandoah

Grade 12 – Lakefield College School

It was quiet now that the laughing and crying had ceased. The room was dark, the peeling wall plaster, covered up by the Clark Gable posters, reminded her of her absent father. The burn on her cheek, where her mother had struck her, was slowly starting to soften, sinking deeper into her skin until it marked her soul. She crawled to the window from the place where she had slumped onto the floor and poked her head through the curtains. The lights of Hollywood glowed against her cherubic face, reflecting the stars in her eyes. One day, she thought, I'll leave this all behind.

Norma-Jean stood and cautiously opened the door to stare down the barren hallway. Now that her mother's fit had ended, the filthy halls echoed with her faded cries. From the outside, the house seemed friendly and innocent enough, but on the inside its core rotted like a month-old apple, its decaying fuzz contaminating the joy of Norma-Jean's soul. As she tiptoed down the hall, she stopped outside her mother's door. Soft murmurs in her mother's voice comforted someone who was not there, for she was alone. Norma-Jean sighed and continued down the hall, crept down the creaking stairs, grabbed her coat, and left.

It was a long walk to the movie theatre, but she knew the way well. She fell into the trance of the happy routine, her footsteps retracing a path she had walked many times before. She passed familiar houses, lit from the inside by candlelight and smiling faces. She tried not to dwell on these happy families, the dinners at long tables, birthdays and holidays celebrated with laughter and music – a childhood she never had. She passed the police station, with its faded sign *To Protect and To Serve*, the white letters of a prouder era. The police doors opened, unleashing the laughter of the rowdy men who had been on the job for too long. They lit up their cigarettes, the ashen smoke blowing away the cares of the day. Through the fading light, a man, if he could be called that for he had scarcely graduated from boyhood, caught her eye. He was scrawny, with uncombed maple-coloured hair and a kindly but sad face. He was less rowdy than the other men, who were busy pushing one another around and letting loose raunchy jokes. Feeling her eyes on him, he looked up, catching her gaze. Norma-Jean held his stare, causing them both to smile. One of his buddies punched him in the shoulder, bringing him back into the fishnet of testosterone. When he had untangled himself from it and returned his gaze to the girl, she was already gone.

From nearly a block away the lights of the movie theatre enchanted her. Posters boasting films starring Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly beckoned to her with glamorous photos and emboldened titles of movie studios.

She paid the movie attendant, "One ticket to see *You Were Never Lovelier*," and handed over the precious change, the 37 cents that she had worked all week to save. She entered the movie theatre, slipping deftly past the long lineup at the concession stand, her red skirt swishing around her knees, and sank into one of the deep cushioned chairs in the theatre. As the lights were lowered, Norma-Jean

was able to let out a sigh, releasing all the stress of the day. The movie began, credits rolled before the bright-eyed actresses appeared on the screen, and she was able, slowly, to let her worries fall off her like sweaty clothes dropping to the floor after a long day. Her memories were erased by the music, the romantic plot, and the witty one-liners. She forgot it all: her mother, her empty stomach, the girls at school who made fun of her patched clothes, the way she was bounced around to foster homes when her mother grew tired of her, and the fact that she had never really felt wanted or loved by a single human being. All of that disappeared as she immersed her shadow of a soul in the show onscreen, so much so that it became a part of her, a dream she would later replay over and over again in her mind. Eventually the dream ended, and the lights came up on the dark movie house like the dawn of a new day. People slowly filed out of the theatre, but she stayed in her seat, staring at the screen, silently willing the sun to set and the dream to dance over the theatre once again. Soon the theatre was empty, and it was almost closing. One of the movie attendants asked her to leave. And so she did, but unlike the others in the theatre who had left eagerly with thoughts of warm beds and home, she had no family to return to, so she made her way slowly back to her house.

The lights of the theatre faded into the distance, along with the smell of popcorn. She walked back the same way she had come, passing the old police station, but the boy was no longer outside smoking with his friends. She sighed. She was lonely walking home by herself, but she knew she would be even lonelier once she finally made it there. Lost in the tangled mess of her thoughts, she turned the corner, unaware of her surroundings, and bumped into something. When she got her bearings she realized it was a tall man, perhaps one of the officers she had witnessed earlier on their smoke break.

“What the – ! Well, aren’t you a pretty little thing,” said the stranger, recovering and taking a step back to look her over.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I wasn’t paying attention” Norma-Jean suddenly realized how handsome this tall stranger was. “Oh, I’m all shook up now,” she moaned, lifting her hands to her face as if she was going to faint. The man quickly interjected, putting his arm around her to steady her.

“Would you like to sit down? We could go into the Old Mill.” He pointed to the bar across the street. Its windows were painted with light and bursting with the laughter of raucous drinking and merriment. In that moment she decided she would not be lonely anymore.

“Yes,” she nodded, batting her big blue eyes at the unassuming man. The two stumbled across the street and into the bar, where the man pulled out a chair for her.

“What’s your name, gorgeous?”

She racked her brain, looking for a name to give him. “Marilyn,” she decided, after the actress Marilyn Miller.

“Well, Marilyn, do girls as lovely as you drink nowadays?”

“Why, of course! It makes the world a rosier place!” she lied, having never before had a drink in her life. And so the night went on with the young man plying her with drinks, and with her lying about who she was, feigning that she was some glamorous young actress on the brink of stardom. When the bar was about to close, he walked her home. She felt tingly and warm, leaning on him as they made their way through the deserted streets. At the main intersection though, he turned right instead of left.

“Where are we going?” she slurred, “My house is *that* way!”

“I thought you might like to see my place first,” the man said, still bulldozing on. She suddenly realized, through the drunken fog consuming her, that in her attempt to banish her loneliness she had made a terrible mistake.

“No,” she murmured, “No, I want to go home!”

“Shhh, we are. We’re going to *my* home.”

“No!” she shook him off and made to leave, but he grabbed her arm smacking her body tight against his chest.

“Come on,” he cooed, “you’ve been flirting with me all night.”

“I want to go home!” she struggled, trying to break free. Suddenly a light blinded them both. It was the kind-faced boy from the police station.

“Get on out of here. I’ll walk the lady home.” The man opened his mouth to protest, then took in the smart police uniform, shook his head, and begrudgingly disappeared into the night.

“Are you all right, miss?” the young officer asked, staring sincerely into her face. She nodded, and he took her arm. “Don’t worry I’ll get you home safe, miss . . . ?”

“Norma. Norma-Jean.”

He smiled. “That’s a lovely name!”

“You think so?” she grimaced, “I’ve always hated it. I’d prefer something much more glamorous like Gene or Marilyn.”

“I think I like you fine just the way you are,” he said smiling at her shyly. She smiled back, feeling reassured by his gentle manner and presence. They had reached her house, but she wasn’t ready to go inside just yet.

“Do you ever feel lonely?” she asked, “Like you’re on this island all by yourself and you haven’t a paddle or a boat so you’ll never get out! Do you ever feel that way?” He cocked his head and studied her intently, realizing that she wasn’t just some girl who had had too much to drink, but perhaps someone whose soul was searching for something beyond this small neighbourhood of shambled dreams.

“Yes,” he said, “sometimes I dream of getting away from all of this and really living. I don’t know how, though.”

At that she ran to him and threw her arms around his neck. “I’ve never met a man like you before; you’re . . . so kind.”

He blushed and looked away.

“You can kiss me, you know . . . if you want,” her lips inches away from his.

He examined her with a startled look, and then, as if he could see something of himself reflected in her eyes, he leaned in and kissed her ever so slightly.

Norma-Jean smiled, "Will you come by tomorrow?"

"Yes," he breathed without skipping a beat. She smiled, releasing him from her arms, and made her way into the house. As he turned to head back the way he had come, she watched him through the window until he had faded into the night, the way dreams do in the morning. She went up the creaking stairs and could hear her mother's heavy breathing even from the landing. She climbed into bed, gazed at the distant stars through her window, and told them that she would never again be lonely.

Fire Escapes: I Will Forget

by Sarah Williams

Grade 10 – Lakefield College School

I've read about people who have been trapped in elevators. Everything is tolerable until the steel walls with ghastly decorative panelling seem to shift closer and closer to you; the floor of the car with the bedraggled carpeting and a questionable stain moves higher and higher towards the roof with the fluorescent lighting above plastic diffuser panels, which move lower and lower towards you until the floor and the roof are holding hands, and you're stuck in between the two hoping that you do not become another questionable stain on the carpet! That's how I felt before I arrived in the city. Thankfully, the elevator I am currently on holds no resemblance to the aforementioned one. It brings me the promise of a new beginning. I will try to forget the image of the grimy white picket fences of suburbia in favour of the glimmer of the gutters that run down the walls of my new home. *Ding!* The elevator tells me I have reached my floor, and my arms protest as I carry the one box that the movers aren't allowed to bring into my new apartment.

I don't need to switch on the lights to see my new home. The neon signs that litter the street below paint my furniture red, blue, and yellow. The colours swim over my box as I set it beside me on the couch. It groans with age and the weight of my memories. Suburban life was my broken elevator. There, the world was small and filled with trivial pursuits. Did your parents ever lecture you about having a personal space bubble? Mine did. You know, the serious talk about there being "a certain area around your person that, if intruded without your permission, is not acceptable. Do not be afraid to tell him or her to move away." In the suburbs, your personal space may be respected physically, but there is no privacy. There, everybody knows everything. Here, the city's lustre will hypnotize me, and I will forget.

After a time, an obnoxious honk followed by a "Hey! Watch where you're going buddy. Come on!" stirs me from my thoughts. I rise from my seat and close the window, then turn to face the couch. My box is still sitting quietly and comfortably, almost forgotten. Where am I to hide the items inside of it? I scan my apartment. The living room will not do, as it is a place where I will make new stories – ones that will be told when my family and friends gather around a table and feast on turkey, stuffing, rice, and pudding. Stories where the plot may be tweaked, worn, and torn, but where the laughter has been passed down through generations. The kitchen will not do, as it is the heart of my home. One day, my fridge – which stands solemnly in the corner – will be littered with to-do lists, magnets, and other sorts of art. My countertops will be dusted with flour and my sinks littered with dishes. The bedroom will not do, as it is a place to rest with my thoughts. Nothing should prevent me from a peaceful slumber. Every night I will fashion a cocoon out of my covers and wake up a butterfly.

My question is yet to be answered as I kneel in front of the box. The cardboard – after being stuffed, sealed, carried, and cushioned – is soft and losing its shape. I decide to unpack, hoping a

location for the contents might come to me later. The silver tape around my box is old and stale, so I do not find it hard to remove. The flaps are easy to manoeuvre as well; I simply push them back, and they listen to me. Next, I am greeted by a strip of bubble wrap that rests on top of my belongings. It is taken aside and saved for later since one is never too old for bubble wrap. My most prized possessions wait for me inside. Their light casts a shadow on my face as I peer into the box. My dreams are neatly stacked and sturdy like fire escapes that hug the sides of apartment buildings.

I will store my dreams on the fire escape, so that I can flee if signs of peril begin to creep their way into my future. After all, an emergency exit is the best place to put the objects closest to your heart. I pick up the bubble wrap – and my dreams. They are cradled to my chest as I journey towards my chosen hiding place. With each footstep I pop a bubble. Fire escapes were once a very important aspect of safety for all new urban establishments; more recently, however, they have fallen out of use. Now they serve as playgrounds for cats and locations for secret rendezvous. *Pop!* My last bubble bursts, and I stand outside on my stairway to safety. I let go of the plastic. It's not useful anymore – not after I have squeezed all of the fun from it. It settles beside my feet on the steel grating. The grating is painted black, and there is an empty flowerbox that sits on the rail in front of me. I rest my dreams in the dirt. Hopefully, it will rain, and they will bloom when spring arrives.

Satisfied, I make my way back inside. My dreams will not be scrutinized here the way they were in the suburbs where I came from. Here is a place of new beginnings. But, just in case, I will be able to uproot myself from any inferno and find a new city to conquer. I will have the strength of the steel that climbs these buildings. I will keep my angles and my shadows. I will be littered with bits of rust and beauty. I will forget again.

2014 Senior Nonfiction Winner

The Men of My Circus

by Juliet Gardner

Grade 11 – Lakefield College School

I sit here, the fore of my head resting against the folding of my fingers. My eyes blur and crystallize the filaments of my world, I have so much power. As I look right and left, I can see so clearly that I have very little power. My toes snuggle against one another beneath my layers of sock and boot and hurt. The music, unsuitable for the moment, streams through black buds and into my ears but stops there, never reaching my heart. A breath starts deep in my stomach and moves up through my neck as it contracts, and I sigh. I spot bits of my ever-paling skin peeking out, a sliver of my wrist, my knuckles, none of my (never my) pain shows. My mouth stays closed and quietly pushed forward, a silent and never-ending kiss to the air and nothing else, nothing else.

My fingers reach for the water, and soon enough soft icicles melt into me and streams forming patterns, rattle their dance through my insides. The slope in my cheeks is exaggerated as I gulp, gulp, gulp, and I feel like a swan, like a Grace, like the smallest being.

I can remember promises of breaking long before heartbreak. I leapt into your arms when you arrived home too late (it's much too late now) and you caught me (how could you not . . . I was so young, so very tiny hearted and minded and started). But now I can see the profuseness of your apology for working was a guise . . . so many guises . . . Did I ever see you without a disguise?

I run my cleanly pink tongue along my calmly whiter-than-skin teeth, and when you saw me last, these teeth of mine were few and far between. You knew me only as your gap-toothed daughter with the dark brown bob and ever-trusting eyes. Father, the changes are disparate.

The hint of my wrist I stare at once again. I shove my sleeve higher until the fore of my arm is completely exposed and I marvel at how anyone could cut it up. My deranged men, why do you do this to yourselves? You may make sad and great stories and lead sad and great lives, but I am so far from great when you so sadly cry and die.

People ask about Death, wanting to know if it was a crash or a burn. Was it quick, a car accident, instantly dead, or long and drawn-out, agonizingly slow, cancer? But suicide was a crash, and ever since, the rest of us have been burning. Sometimes afterwards, I wondered if I was really the ghost, drifting from place to place but never really arriving anywhere. I would watch as people's words floated up through the air, landed in front of me, just to disappear, never having reached me at all. Everything was inanimate; no one really moved much or said much or felt much. I worried that if I poked them, they would turn out to be as light as a feather and float away in the ever changing wind until I couldn't find them or myself again. The sun was cold and the moon, black.

Memories of you take over again and again and again. So much darker than I was, your skin and eyes and mind. The day when you came to take my brothers and me out for ice cream, and there was a pain in my chest, I could not identify the reason, but now I know. You were distancing yourself. My little eyes saw your too-big, too-much, and yet such a slow, inevitable suffocation. The next day in a park, where you should have been taking my hand and showing me how to play, you took your own life.

And still I sit here, the folding of my hands resting against the fore of my head. Listening to my inner turmoil, hoping for the men still left to fight against themselves and win, and win for once. They are so covered in swords that stick into themselves and other people, and I worry, always full of such consuming worry.

There are moments when I wonder why teapots don't have two ends, and why it can't be autumn all year round, and how emotions can be so present but still invisible to someone looking from the outside. So little is fair at times that it's hard to separate the sense from the non. I have grown up in a circus; our first performance and most memorable act had all the elements of a tragedy. Now the Tragedy's family lives on, and I see the sons walk their tightropes, listening to the audience gasp in concern for their physical safety. Only a few of us know it is their minds we should be asking about. And I am in the middle of it all, only sometimes noticed, as I manipulate some things and have no power over others. Searching for my control and place but finding only anarchy with some beauty thrown in to make it all the more compelling. "Come one, come all," an inviting, grim voice chants. "Watch as the family of dangerous minds takes care of and searches for and loses one another and themselves, all the while jumping through hoops and leaping over obstacles that you daren't dream of."

You read to me during the dark nights. I huddled against the covers and thought about the words and the endless mountain you were to me. Now I read my own words and crowd into the covers all by myself, and if it seems sad, it's because it is. My father, my brothers, so obsessed by the idea of protecting me from harshness and brutality, when you are the only ones who have shown it to me. The "sorrys" are unending and the "what ifs" list infinite, but reality is what you so rarely focus on, a giant and apologetic cop-out. How many times have you abandoned me for hospitals and pills and whispers of a better future? It is always so loud around you with your constant ideas and brilliance and cruelty. Alone once again, it is so silent in comparison, and so I focus on how I sit.

The fore of my head rests against my fingers. The fore of my head, which holds a few promises of premature wrinkles, so close to my hair where I have found strands of grey since before I hit the double digits. You are the hurt that I hide under, you are the breath that's more like a gasp. You are the salty sadness that graces and slides down my skin, and you are the antagonist. You, my father, who is not here. You, my brothers, who are only here in some ways. My men, I love you just as sincerely as you confuse yourselves, so you know it is vast and unending.

My ever-paling skin you called "snow white," like the princess. You have always treated me as one. Sheltering, pampering, under- and overestimating. The princess of the house and your heart. I may be the palest of them all, but I am no longer the smallest and never was, I the weakest. You can open your minds to insanity and manic states; surely you can stretch it enough to accommodate my strength, because that is real. That is real.

This world is a circus without a shelter, full of blankets and drugs and words to hide behind. This is sad and great. We are all sorry. My wrists, your wrists, his wrists: do keep them bare. Minds are crowded and hearts are emptied post- and pre-breaking. Feel this as strongly as I mean it, know this as harshly as it is, do not look away, do not think away from it and this and me. The fore of my head rests against my fingers. I remember not enough and too much, never the right amount. When everything is full of wrongness (and when is it not?), I have grown so much so fast.

The Universal Remedy

by Celeste Noble

Grade 12 – Lakefield District Secondary School

Three years ago, my father underwent extensive brain surgery. After the ordeal, he behaved differently. His responses were slower and he spoke out of context. This caused a huge communication gulf between the two of us. We had a healthy relationship, but when his symptoms grew worse, we began to argue more frequently. Although I tried to remember that his behaviour was due to his trauma, it was difficult to avoid getting upset with him. I missed him telling me stories and us talking about my future. He was not only my dad, but one of my best friends. I became angry at him for contaminating our relationship, and every fight made me feel as if I was losing my dad more and more. I wanted him back, but I feared that the damage was permanent.

Last spring, we organized a father-daughter camping trip to Algonquin Park for the upcoming summer. However, between the time that we booked the trip and mid-July, the tension had grown to a breaking point. My father and I fought regularly; we could barely hold a conversation without conflict. As we embarked, all I could think was, “Great, a week of fighting.”

The first two days were a challenge. We portaged, we argued. We set up camp, we argued. It was tedious and miserable. Our mutual regret at going on the trip was like a stench in the air. The lush landscape and sparkling waters did little to dull our sharp words. Even the stunning sunsets, which cast this prehistoric world in a vibrant orange at the end of the day, only put our arguments on hold.

After sunset, it was mostly silent. We were physically exhausted and emotionally fatigued. The haunting cries of loons were the only answers to our unspoken problems. The trip that was supposed to bring us together had only fractured our relationship more.

On the third day, we paddled to a lake with a lookout climb. It seemed like a great excuse to take a break from the confinements of the boat. The sun-dappled waves rocked our canoe gently, like a mother soothing a child. However, for two people who were at each other’s throats, the serenity turned into a turbulent nightmare.

The blistering heat dissipated under the boughs of the pine trees, and we began the hike with hopes for a beautiful view. The trail quickly became steeper and very narrow. It seemed like a path cut by an overflowing spring rather than by a human being. The hike was much more difficult than we had expected. At first, we argued over who had the idea to go on the hike. However, as we ascended, our breathing grew heavier until we could no longer find the breath to bicker. The unstable ground demanded all of our attention. We quickly became frustrated, winded, and sweaty – a bad combination. Both of us needed to turn around, but neither wanted to be the first to

surrender to the temptation of a retreat to our canoe. Perhaps we both realized that the canoe's "sanctuary" would shield us, but only temporarily, from dealing with our fear and hostility.

Instead, we crested the hill and finally collapsed, side by side, in a small clearing of long green grass. We gulped down crisp clean air and filtered lake water. Then we went to look at the view. We were struck speechless. Our breath was lost again, but this time in amazement. A light breeze blew through my hair as an osprey cried loudly from somewhere over the lake. The horizon seemed impossibly distant, composed of rolling waves of towering green trees. The turquoise and navy of small lakes and rivers splashed across the canvas in front of us. No skyscraper, apartment complex, or superstore tarnished our vision of the uninhabited expanse of this extraordinary countryside. The awareness of being completely surrounded by wilderness consumed us.

As we gazed out over this beautiful panorama together, a comfortable silence descended, and I contemplated our relationship. You cannot change the past or choose your family members. Dad and I were going through a hard time, and we needed each other's support. I loved him though, and nothing could change that. I believe that the merit of each relationship is judged on its ability to weather hard times. I knew that the bond between father and daughter rivals the strongest connections; therefore, we could be strong enough to bridge this gulf.

Reluctant to break the spell, we gazed at the beautiful vista for a while longer before descending the hill. Our way down was easier. The terrain was no longer against us, and we no longer fought each other. As we made our way to the canoe, I could feel the tension evaporate and the slate of our relationship wiped clean.

When we finally made the trek back to the mayhem of society, the calming and sacred effect of Algonquin Park remained in our souls.

2014 Junior Nonfiction Winner

Passing Thoughts

by Clayton Wilkinson

Grade 10 – Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

The night is cool and refreshing on my body after the hot day. Beside me, my boat rests bottom up on the flat, rocky shore. The moonlight skips and dances over the waves of a settling lake; a cool wind blows through my hair, which reaches down to my chest. I close my eyes and take in the smell of the lake and the surrounding pine forest. When the wind drops off, I open my eyes to the soft light of the night and slip into the warm water, heated by a day's relentless punishment from a relentless sun. The water is smooth on my body, sore and slightly stiffened from the day of travel on the water. I float on my back, holding air deep in my lungs; my hair drifts loosely around my head, a few stray strands traced across my face. The stars are numerous; they remind me of a glowing mist made of millions of tiny water droplets glowing with an inner light of their own. I let out the air in my lungs and sink beneath the surface. I roll over and strike out for a rock partially submerged in the black waters of the lake, the dark waves lapping up against and over its small tip, barely visible above the water. I swim over and sit on the rock's mossy surface. Moon-ringed wavelets break against my chest as I sit in the natural chair shaped into the rock ... and I think about people.

Humans are strange creatures when you get right down to it. Struggling to gain power and control over each other, they squash the heads of others as they climb upwards in the struggle to reach the top and fight the world. Once they gain that lofty perch, it is only to be struck down by the next people vicious enough to claw their way to the top. And where is the top?

I think back to hell, the hell someone decided to nickname "school." I think back to how people would go out of their way to be cruel to those they believed to be beneath them. It's as if men and women are crowding onto a ladder standing straight up, leading nowhere, men and women crowding to get to the top with people beneath them, stepping on the fingers of all below them for no reason other than to hear them cry out in pain.

And then there are the people like me, standing a few feet away from the ladder. They are looking on in confusion and wondering what they hope to gain by reaching the top with a power play. What power would they really wield? After all, it is just a game, a meaningless and pointless game that leaves everyone hurt with bloody knuckles at the end of the day. You all still go home with bruised, split, and bleeding knuckles, and for what? None of this makes any sense.

Why do I bother, I ask myself? I slip down the rock until my nose is millimetres above water, blowing ringlets over the smooth surface.

The Murder House

Natalie and I turn cartwheels
and roll our bodies in the soft grass,
loose plastic bags.
Ruddy-skinned men heave boxes into the house.
Lemonade,
too-sweet, plastic cups half-full on the porch.
Mother calls.

The hardwood in our home is nicked and bruised
like tanned arms in the summer.
And in the centre, a dark patch.
Brown-red, like spilt wine.
Almost amorphous, but out of the corner of an eye,
slightly human.
“Murder House,” we whisper.

“Ghostie’s gonna get you!”
Nat’s glee edges on fear,
like a child leaning over the balcony,
cars buzzing past in the harsh fissure between skyscrapers.
At her words, a hollow presence confronts me.
Polar air, a signal of autumn’s abrupt arrival,
squirms its way through the attic floorboards.

A flashlight flickers within our makeshift tent of sheets and chairs,
a subtle phantom glow
inside a draped temple.
At times, there is a woman imprisoned in my mind,
a crumpled figure that matches the bloodstain on the floor.
Body concave,
stomach sheathing a blade.

Winter comes, and Nat and I gallop in the backyard
through piles of snow.
There is a white horse beneath me.
Dark, childlike eyes, I imagine.
The sun is the tip of a hot poker, scorching blue linen.
Natalie canters around the swing set.
Laughter bursts from deep within her chest.
A sound like teeth against glass.

I whirl around,
muscles slivers of ice,
arching around my bones.
Wide eyes find the highest window in the Murder House,
just below the peak of the roof,
crested with gingerbread.

Frost clouds the small pane,
obscures a dark image.
When I stare, she is gone.
But for a moment,
when I am a spiralling body,
the pale face of a woman
is framed in the window.

* * * * *

By Mackenzie Green
Grade 12 - Crestwood Secondary School

Gens de Voyage

It is Thursday,
the plum tree is blooming,
and the Roma are leaving.
Their ruddy children
burst with life,
cheeks streaked with dirt,
darting between caravans,
long skirts and headscarves blow,
lush with blossoms.
The trucks start up
with rusty groans of protest
and soon they will all be gone again.

Our children are inside,
politely playing,
the dogs tied up in the yard.
They must adapt,
say the well-mannered citizens,
drinking their coffee,
reading the Politics
and Household Hints
in their neatly folded newspapers.
They must make an effort to adapt,
or they will spend the rest of their days
travelling.

I salute you,
bright glass beads
rolling loose.
The blooms of my headscarf
are lost in the darkness of my hair,
the sound of my high heels
masks the whispers
of my long skirt.

* * * * *

by Vanessa Kraus

Grade 12 - St. Peter Catholic Secondary School

The Quick Brown Fox Jumps over the Lazy Dog

Aerial dancer, she was called, she of gleaming hide and dreaming eyes. Born a riddle to the world and hunted to the point of extinction, she is the last. Children know of her; over and over, they beg for the tales, the fables, the lore. Down from the mountains and across the lands, she races ever onward, unto the ending of the world. Elegant, ethereal, an enigma, she keeps a weathered eye upon the horizon. From the depths of the valley a call rings out, to each unencumbered nook and crevice. Golden and ringing, it is a voice, calling to them. "Hunters...Hunters...to horse and to hound." In an instant the peace of the day is shattered. Just as in ages past, the hunters are upon her trail once more. Kill her...catch her, see her dead. Long and silver, the coveted prize, the horn upon her head. Means, cunning and unfair, are employed to lay her low. Nearer to the gorge, to the precipice, she races. Over the edge stones tumble and fall, but her cloven hooves hold tight to the wall. Pounding, bounding, pressing tight upon her trail, the hunters come. Quiet and still, she huddles in the deep shadows of a briar thicket. Rowan leaves rustle, drift down in a scarlet cascade, drawing the hunters' line of sight. She springs out and away, into the heart of the forest. Trees, massive and ancient, cluster close about her, a phalanx of guardians serving the Last. Unicorn, she is, but is she the Last? Veering away into the deepest reaches of the wood, she plunges. Webs of gossamer moss hang from the trees, bearded and old they appear. Xenocrysts shine and glimmer in the fragmented light, as she spies a shape, seeming eerily familiar. Young and wandering, an innocent, a foal with a horn of silver upon its brow... Zenith is the name of this orphan wayfarer, who is no longer alone.

* * * * *

By Ashley Leahy

Grade 11 - Adam Scott Collegiate Vocational Institute

Happiness is Bliss...

Happiness is bliss... or so they say.
I say happiness is temporary.
But then again,
all emotions are.

Anger
is the hardest emotion to maintain,

Sadness,
however,
can last a long, long time.

When sadness endures, we call it depression.
When happiness endures, we call it euphoria

or mania.

Usually we flip-flop between these core emotions,
with others woven in between.
It's ok to change how we feel,

until it's not,

until it becomes

random,

uncontrollable,

until it becomes **extreme**,
until it hurts you,
until it hurts somebody else.

This inability to control
drastic changes in emotion
can affect not only your mood
but your actions...
your perception.
The term used to coin this phenomenon is
manic depression,

bipolar disorder.

It is a very misunderstood illness,

and by that, I do not mean it is not as bad as it seems...

it is worse.

I used to have the *best* dad.

I don't remember much of that man anymore,

he has been gone for so long,

he is nothing now,

nothing but a dying memory,

he has become a prisoner of his own mind,

unable to escape,

not that he ever tries...

From what I do remember

he was a good man,

a great dad.

I remember our Saturday afternoons at the biggest hill in the world,

our walks in the woods,

our rock collecting,

our grocery shopping,

our model building,

our car rides,

our beach days,

our talking,

our laughing,

our ability to *be* without the feeling of

concentrated hate.

I was Daddy's little girl

then.

That all seems so distant now

almost as if

I imagined it.

I hate him

or at least

I hate his illness.

But his illness is him;

it's who he's become,

it is all he is now.

He has let it define him,
he has succumbed to it

and now... I am left to pick up the pieces,

the pieces of his broken brain,
his broken life

I am now a prisoner
of his broken brain,
his broken life.

Happiness.

Is it bliss?

Or is it just an illusion?

In my family... it is an illusion.
In my life... it is an illusion.
In my reality... it is an illusion.

I try to avoid it,

him

at all costs.

I try to not let it affect me.
I try to be strong,
to be brave,
to be blithe,
to simply
be.

I put on the illusion of happiness
for him,
for me,
for us.

But really...

if I seem happy

or

free

it is merely
a temporary
illusion.

* * * * *

By Jill Sanderson

Grade 12 - Norwood District High School

Silence

Sometimes the noise
Is better
Than the silence.

When the silence falls,
Death looms over
Forever barring us
From sanctuary.

The voices scream
Like gun shots,
But at least we know
Who's been hit.

There may be bloodshed
And wounds
That seem too deep to heal.

For our sanity
These gashes tell us
Who caused the agony.

When the silence drops,
It pierces through,
Spearing hope.

This,
This plague
Brings no warning.

It moves
As a shadow
Chasing light away
Back into the brittle battle.

Silence may sound better
But,
Without the gun shots
You'll never know
If the war is over.

* * * * *

By Geetanjali Narine

Grade 9 - Lakefield College School

The River

How many days have I spent here?

How many hours have I sat with you?

Your presence washes over me like the river you are.

Refreshing.

Peaceful.

Serene.

You are my sister, my brother, my friend.

The sibling I never had.

You have raised me so well.

Where did I go wrong?

How could you let it happen?

Why did you not build a dam to stop me from going down the wrong fork of life's river?

How many days have I spent here?

How many hours have I sat with you?

Your presence washes over me like the river you are.

Loud.

Boisterous.

Disturbed.

You are my sister, my brother, my friend.

The sibling I never had.

So many hours I have spent beside you.

Poisoning your atmosphere with my depression.

My struggles of growing up.

My choices of wrong along the river of life.

The smoke I have smoked.

The cigarettes I have tossed on your bank.

Poisoning it all.

The freshness.

The peace.

The serenity.

Yet I continued staining you.

My sins ever flowing.

The cigarettes.

The alcohol.

The drugs.

Molesting your riverbanks with my evil.

My faults.

My wrongdoings.

How many lovers have I brought to you?

Asking for your help so they would fall for me.

My lust and my longing being put before you.

Corrupting your shores.

Killing your peace.

Destroying your tranquility.

The many days I have spent here.

The many hours I have sat with you.

Your presence washes over me like the river you are.

Such guilt.

Such regret.

Such sorrow.

You are my sister, my brother, my friend.

The sibling I never had.

I ask for your forgiveness.

Though I know our relationship will never be quite the same.

* * * * *

By Megan McShane

Grade 9 - Lakefield College School