

Celebrating WORDS

Fill your paper with
the breathings of
your heart ...

—William Wordsworth



English Language
Arts Council
of the Alberta
Teachers' Association

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Editorial

It has been a pleasure to serve as editor for the *Celebrating Words* student writing contest this year. I have come to realize how important it is for young writers to have a place to share their work. Many young writers enjoy developing and sharing their unique and innovative prose and poetry, which has defined and shaped the 2010/11 issue of *Celebrating Words*.

The *Celebrating Words* writing contest includes students and teachers from all levels of public schooling who submit stories and poetry. Congratulations to all our writers—you impressed me with your contributions. Your participation was amazing!

The judges are teachers or writers who volunteered to review the submissions; they provided a short list of winners in each category. The judges this year were Irene Heffel, Edmonton Public Schools; Dale Wallace, Calgary Board of Education; and Dr Lana Black, University of Alberta. I sincerely appreciate your time and effort.

Entries were numerically coded and read independently by the judges. All the participants will receive a complimentary copy of *Celebrating Words*, and the winners also receive a bookstore gift certificate as a prize.

Thank you to Karen Virag and the ATA publications staff for preparing *Celebrating Words* for distribution. I would also like to thank the English Language Arts Council executive and membership for their support and encouragement for this year's publication.

Once again, I want to express my genuine gratitude to everyone who contributed to *Celebrating Words* and helped make this year as contest editor an enjoyable learning experience.

Sandra Kahn



Tod's Lucky Break

Nikolas Forest

Smack! That was the sound of the puck landing in Tod Martin's goalie glove. The Gregory Lake hometown crowd went wild. His save had ended the shootout and won the second league championship in the last three years for the Gregory Lake Eagles High School hockey team! Tod had stopped the star player for the Hillview Hounds on the final shot of a shootout. As the team was presented with the championship trophy, he remembered the path he had taken to get to this point. It would never have come to be if the events that occurred at the end of the high school hockey season two years ago had never happened.

Two years ago, Tod Martin had been a lanky teenager: average height, dull dark brown hair, blue eyes. He had lived in Gregory Lake all his life and had never really fit in with the popular crowd. He was considered a geek, seemed almost invisible from time to time and was ridiculed by many people. As a result of this, he was unconfident in his abilities, especially in school, where his grades were barely above passing, and he had very little self-esteem.

He did have one friend, though. His name was Braeden. Tod and Braeden both loved the sport of hockey. This was the one thing that Tod had confidence doing. He and Braeden would play road hockey out in front of Tod's house for hours at a time. Braeden would take shots on Tod, and Tod tried as hard as he could to improve his goaltending skills.

Tod was the backup goalie for his high school's hockey team, but had not played one game the whole year. The starting goalie had played every single game. Tod almost stopped going to practices because he was so disheartened. He didn't think he would get a chance to play. But he plugged away.



Junior High Prose—*First Prize*

Tod's team had made it to the provincial final series, and they were playing against a team called the Newport Seals. It was a best-of-five series, and the Eagles took games one and two. The Seals battled back and won the next two games, which meant it all came down to the final game. The game was tied three to three going into the third period. Right off the drop of the puck, the Seals broke into the Eagles' end and fired a shot on net. The Eagles goalie stopped it but was hammered by one of the Seals. He erupted in screams of pain and the coach scrambled out to help him. It turned out that the goalie had a torn hamstring muscle and could not play the rest of the game. The coach gave Tod the nod; it was his turn to shine.

Tod threw on his old goalie glove, blocker, and mask before he hopped off the bench onto the ice. The puck was dropped and the game resumed. Tod stood on his head. He dove right, left, up, down! Every time the puck was shot at his net, he stopped it. Now the whole crowd was screaming and going crazy. With thirty seconds left, one of the Eagles forwards raced up the ice and dropped the puck back to an Eagle defenceman who let a bullet of a shot fly from the blue line. It rocketed into the top corner of the net just as the buzzer rang. The Eagles had won the championship!

That was how it all started, Tod thought to himself as he held his second championship trophy above his head. After his first championship victory in the first game he had ever played for his team, he had not been considered a geek or a loser anymore. He had gained lots of friends and had started to do better in school. His self-esteem and confidence levels had increased dramatically since his Grade 9 year. The starting goalie position on the Eagles was now his. With that one turn of events, his life had changed for the better.

Nikolas Forest is a Grade 9 student at Vimy Ridge Academy, in Edmonton, Alberta (Olli Megley, teacher).

Proving Myself

Natalie Bartz

The cafeteria was full, so Ricki and I trotted off to the library. There we plunked ourselves down at a table and ate our lunch, hiding it carefully from the librarian.

“So, Vivi, how do you think you placed on the Provincial Arts Contest?” she asked.

“I have no clue.”

“I bet you placed first! I mean, you are an amazing artist!”

I chuckled. “I’m not that good, Ricki,” I told her. “There are tons of other better artists out there.”

“You don’t give yourself enough credit!” she replied. “So did you tell your parents that you entered the contest yet?”

“No. They would just criticize me.”

My mind slipped to my home life. Both my parents wanted me to be more like them. Dad was an engineer, and Mom was a lawyer. I tried to be more rational, but I couldn’t. My passion in art disappointed them.

“Why do you waste your time on such nonsense?” my mom would say. “Art is not going to get you a job. You should focus on your math. How are you going to into university with your marks?”

This contest was very important to me. Only the top ten students would be recognized and receive reserved spots in the country’s top art school. If I got into the top ten, my parents would see that I wasn’t a failure.

I tuned back in. We finished our lunch without being arrested by the library police and headed to our lockers, gathered up our stuff and headed to art class. After everyone was seated Ms Richard stood up. She seemed very excited.



Junior High Prose—*Second Prize*

“Now class, a lot of good students have entered the Provincial Arts Contest,” she began, “I am proud of you. But one student in particular stood out.”

She motioned me to come up. My heart was pounding like a drum and my knees felt like jelly.

“Vivian Rendt not only got into the top ten ... she placed first in the contest!”

Everyone clapped. I couldn’t believe it! I got first place! Ricki came up and hugged me hard.

“I knew you could do it!” she exclaimed.

Ms Richard threw us a party and we all celebrated.

On my way home I became fearful. What would my parents say? I tried to stay calm. My parents were already waiting for me. Mom was smiling but Dad looked concerned.

“We got the news from your principal. Vivian, we are so proud of you!” Mom said. She came over and hugged me. I was shocked. My parents, who were usually strict about anything that involved art, were proud of me. It was unbelievable.

“I know we have been very harsh on you, but we did it because we wanted only the best for you.” she continued.

Dad stayed silent.

“What do you think, Dad?” I asked him.

“Although I wanted something different for you, something that could make you a steady paycheque, I’m ok with it if that’s what you really want.” I smiled at him through the tears that were forming in my eyes, “Thanks, Dad. Knowing that you support me means everything to me.”

We all had a good laugh—and Dad even promised to buy us ice cream.

Natalie Bartz is a student at Vimy Ridge Academy, in Edmonton, Alberta (Olli Megley, teacher).

Belgium Rain

Jordan Priest

There were perks to being the Organization of Assassins top hit man. You got the more complex jobs, ones that might actually need some planning; unfortunately this was not one of them. The information my contact had given me summed it up: "Terminate contract, Maurice Sihnzein, messy." That was three days ago. I had been lying on the beach when a plain-clothed, dark-skinned man sat down beside me and handed over a folder. No words were exchanged and he promptly left, sand clinging to his rear. I was now sitting in a mostly empty Brussels restaurant drowning my jet lag in bad black coffee; Miami to Brussels will do that to a person. Sihnzein was an unknown to me; the folder had provided ways to get to him, nothing else. Several people passed by the restaurant's window, gaining cover under an overhang from the downpour. A tall man stepped inside, his unadorned dark blonde hair wet from the rain. Removing his dark jacket he sat at a table across the room from me. The man was an American working for Sihnzein as his secretary.

I approached the man and pulled up a chair opposite him. "Michael Samerelli," I stated in English. "Yes," he responded, looking up from the menu. "What do you want?"

"You were easy to find. Routines, in this business, don't work." He looked at me quizzically, so I continued, "If you really know who you're working for this probably won't sound too crazy." Samerelli placed his menu on the table. "I'm going to kill your boss today. And you're gonna get blamed."

He reached for his gun, holstered under his left arm. "Uh, no," I said, tapping him in the knee with my Magnum; the table cloth draped almost to the floor so no one could see. "We can finish the discussion in a civilized fashion." He placed his arm back on the table and regarded me with his dark eyes. A waitress appeared and he ordered. I got another coffee. "Now, after you have finished eating we're going to leave and we'll go for a little drive."

"What is this about?" he asked, smartly leaving his voice calm.

"Don't know," I answered truthfully.

"Frickin' business," he said shaking his head.

We sat in silence, him brooding, me tapping his knee with my gun. His food came and he ate.

Samerelli finished and paid, his face not betraying the gun poking his spine.

"To the left, first alley," I told him after we had exited the building, "and hand over the gun." He complied with both requests. I followed a few steps behind him as we walked along the almost deserted sidewalk.

"What are you going to do with me? I know what you look like," he bartered as I marched him down the alley.

"Yeah, but no one else will identify me—you'll be the only one they see," I said as I showed him a latex mask of his face.

"No one will believe it was me. Why would I kill my boss? I have no motive," Samerelli muttered.

"Back seat or trunk?" he asked when we got to the Lincoln.



Junior High Prose—*Third Prize*

“Definitely trunk,” I said slamming his face into the back of the grey Lincoln. He crumpled to the wet pavement.

He was a bit taller and heavier than I was, but no one would notice the difference. I removed his coat and shoes then bound and gagged him, and tossed my coat into a dumpster and my shoes into a trash can across the alley. I pulled on his coat and shoes, then dumped him in the trunk, placing the spare wheel on top of him to keep him from making too much noise when he woke up. “Nothing personal, it’s just business,” I said with a smirk to his still form as I slammed the trunk shut.

I stepped out of the afternoon rain into a two-story red brick building. The lobby was small—two chairs, a table and a receptionist’s desk adorned it. The walls were stark white and the floor a greyish tile. Nodding to the receptionist I made my way down a tiled hallway. The mask I had on itched but wasn’t enough to distract me from my task. I opened the glass door and found a small room, a secretary’s desk—Samerelli’s, and three waiting chairs that sat across from it. The desk was tidy with nothing other than a computer and phone taking up space. A door stood between the desk and chairs; a plaque on it read *Maurice Sihnzein*.

I sat down at the desk and pressed the intercom button, “I’m back from lunch, sir,” I said mimicking Samerelli’s highly accented German, the only language Sihnzein would communicate in. “There’s a report here for you. Would you like to take it now or some time later?”

“Bring it in,” he said.

I got up from the desk and pulled the report from inside Samerelli’s jacket. Straightening my tie, I opened the door to Sihnzein’s office. The man was tall and bony with a wisp of greying hair on his head and dull green eyes that peered out from behind his thick glasses; he wore a grey suit and tie. I waited by the door for him to acknowledge my presence. “What is it today?” he asked reaching for the papers in my hands.

“Something from the OA,” I said as I handed him the folder. He looked down at the papers as I shut the door. I sat down opposite him and pulled my Magnum from its holster. Sihnzein slapped the report down and looked up, registering the gun.

“What is this, Michael?” he demanded his voice rising as he stood.

“Oh, if you’d give me a second,” I said, dropping the accent and switching to English, as I peeled the mask from my face. “Sit, please, I insist,” as I motioned with the gun for him to sit. “Hands on your head as well,” I requested as he began to move his hands under the desk. Dejectedly, he placed his hands on his head and sat. As he did this I removed the remaining fragments of the mask. He cursed.

“I take it you know who I am,” I said.

“What the hell is this?” he asked.

“Contract talks,” I answered.

“If the Commish has a problem with me or my operation he can talk to me himself. There’s no need to send a stupid pencil-pushing lackey to do his job for him.”

“Oh, you didn’t recognize me. Well, *sir*, I’m no pencil pusher and I’m sorry, I misspoke there. This is a simple contract *termination* and the Commish has bigger fish to deal with than you.”

Sihnzein stood again, “Get out of my office.”

“Would you like to go out the window? I personally suggest something a little more discreet,” I said in a jovial tone.

“I said get out of my office,” Sihnzein’s voice rose as he began pulling open one of his desk drawers.

I pulled the trigger of my Magnum four times. I knew that the office was soundproofed so no one would hear anything. “You know, you kind of forced my hand there,” I said, as I pulled a new mask of Samerelli’s face from within his coat and slipped it on. I pulled the gun from Sihnzein’s desk drawer and placed it inside Samerelli’s coat along with my Magnum. I shut the drawer and exited his office, leaving the door open.

Junior High Prose—*Third Prize*

I stopped at the front desk on my way out. “I’m heading out for a couple minutes,” I told the receptionist, “Sihnzein needs someone to deal with a mess in there—I was hoping you could call maintenance.”

“Sounds good,” the receptionist said as she picked up the phone.

Samerelli’s house was bluish with black trim and an attached garage. I entered the house with one of the keys I’d taken from his pocket and opened the garage. Once I’d parked the Lincoln inside his garage, I pulled Samerelli from the vehicle and half walked, half dragged him into his house. I sat him down in a chair at his table and got two glasses, which I filled with whisky from his cupboard.

“Your boss’s contract has been terminated,” I informed him, as I took a draught. “Sorry about that,” I said as I untied him. “How rude—offering you a drink when you can’t even move.”

He rubbed his forehead. “Already checked. No blood, just a nice bruise,” I said.

“You’re frickin’ crazy,” he growled, eyes burning.

“Yeah, I’ve been told that a couple times—no proof though,” I said, smiling, as I drained my glass and got up. “Thanks for the drink; I’ll see myself out.”

“That’s it? You’re leavin’?”

“Actually, some advice first. Ready?” He nodded, an incredulous look on his face. “Okay. Change your name and don’t get caught.”

I left him sitting, stunned, at his kitchen table.

Jordan Priest is a Grade 9 student at Fox Creek School, in Fox Creek, Alberta (Kelsey Wilson, teacher).

Red Rumble

James Patterson

I am not your ordinary 12-year-old boy. I have seen and heard more in my young life than many who live to be 100. My parents were murdered when I was only knee high to a grasshopper. I was raised by my older brother, Robert. Robert is the leader of our gang, the Rangers. Our territory is northern Swift Current. Our rival gang is the Chargers. They run southern Swift Current. I can't say I like my life, but this is the way it is.



It was an average Thursday afternoon. I walked into an empty house—no one was home. There was a Broncos game at six and Robert, who worked at Safeway, was supposed to get some booze from the liquor store south of the park when his shift ended at 4:30. Jeff and Bruce came over to watch the game with us; however, by 6:30 Robert still wasn't home. At 7:00, I heard a vehicle come to a screeching halt in front of our house. I heard the doors slamming shut and then the vehicle roaring off. Jeff, Bruce and I raced to the windows, but sensing danger, peered out from the side curtains. We saw Robert crawling up the front walk. I threw open the door and raced to help.

"What the heck happened?" I shouted.

Robert, breathing heavily, could hardly talk. "It was the Rangers. It was Erik!"

Erik was the leader of the Chargers. I pictured the gigantic scar just below his left eye from a rumble against us a couple of months ago. My mind flashed to his

youngest brother, Matt, who is in my homeroom at school. Needless to say we don't get along at all, and I knew things were going to get worse.

School is really tough these days. One of my sworn enemies sits right beside me in class, which throws off my concentration. My teacher keeps telling me not to give up and that I can do anything I set my mind to. She says she believes I can be successful if I work hard. My brother couldn't care less about school. All he thinks about is the rivalry. He doesn't get why I even bring homework home at all.

The next day, Robert, Jeff, Bruce and I spotted two Rangers in the arcade.

"Let's get those creeps," he said and then gave us our strategy.

We waited until they came out and circled them. Instead of beating them up, Robert told them to deliver a message to the rest of the gang. He told them that there was going to be a rumble tomorrow at 6 PM in "the field"; everyone knew that was Foote Field, in the heart of Swift Current. Winners get the arcade and the field.

Junior High Prose—*Honourable Mention*

That night I couldn't sleep. I keep thinking about Mom and Dad's accident. I kept seeing their headlights going off the bridge into the quick-moving river. I remember the first time I heard of the accident. I was at school writing a test. I remember myself weeping in the school bathroom. I remember Mom's last words to me as they left the house for their annual trip to Jasper, "Now you be a good boy, Havier. And you know what that means. Robert might not, but I know you do."

The next day I was anxious to go to school. I was excited for the rumble but apprehensive at the same time. Fighting is the only lifestyle I knew, but I was scared to tell my brother that I wanted what my mom also wanted for me. She wanted me to be a "good boy," which meant getting a good education and a good job.

When I got home from school, the gang was already preparing for battle. Everyone had a weapon and clothes that covered as much skin as possible. Soon it was time to go. As we neared the field, my adrenalin pumped and I my stomach tightened. I had grown up hating these boys and now I was about to fight them.

We faced off across the field just waiting for something to happen. After a few long, agonizing minutes, it started. We started running toward each other. I took on Matt and Robert took on Erik. I was kicking the living daylights out of Matt. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Robert on the ground with Erik on top of him. I sprinted over and pushed Erik off of Robert. By this time Matt has already taken out his switchblade. I was too focused on Erik to notice. While Robert and I were pounding Erik, I suddenly felt a sharp pain in my right side. I felt a warm liquid on my hand when I scratched the wound. I screamed out loud, "That asshole stabbed me!" Then I passed out.

I woke up in the hospital with Robert by my side.

"They got you pretty good that time, buddy," said Robert.

"Yup, sure did," I whispered through my pain.

"How are you feeling?"

"Great," I replied. Really it hurt like hell, and I was fighting back the tears. The tears were not only for the pain but also for the realization that in spite of what my mom wanted for me and what I truly wanted for myself, Robert was my only family, and this is the way it would always be. There is no escape from life as a Ranger.

James Patterson is a Grade 9 student at Vimy Ridge Academy, in Edmonton, Alberta (Olli Megley, teacher).

Dear Morgan

Mary-Margaret Mackenzie



Dear Morgan
You're a nice guy
that's why I hope
you don't take it personally
when I crush you
in fact
you should be honoured
Because really, it was you
who inspired me
you see, if it hadn't
been for you
I probably wouldn't
have bothered
with all this
but you were so cocky
not in a rude way
yet I had to WIN
You came in
with fighting words
and I jumped
into the ring
Some people
say competition
brings out
the worst in people
I disagree, I find
it motivates me
So thanks
for the motivation
I'll mention you
in my acceptance speech
...
If I remember

Mary-Margaret Mackenzie is a Grade 9 student at William E Hay Composite High School, in Stettler, Alberta (Hayley Leschert, teacher).

Balancing Plates

Aaryn Lynham

Plates spinning on poles,
one for each limb,
and every other place,
that can balance:
plates spinning on poles

Weight is added,
by commitments,
past favours due,
everyday life:
plates spinning on poles

mass is crushing,
bringing sorrow,
anger,
frazzled nerves:
plates spinning on poles

poles sway,
plates rattle,
balancing too much,
structure breaking:
plates spinning on poles

rhythmic breathing,
spinning decelerating,
hands loosening,
RELEASE ...
plates spinning on poles



Aaryn Lynham is a Grade 9 student at William E Hay Composite High School, in Stettler, Alberta (Hayley Leschert, teacher).

Echoing Promises

Shea Heatherington

My feet slip getting no purchase on this wet ground.
Blood pounds in my ears but that fails to block out the sound of it.
Sweet.
Bitter.
Intoxicating.
I run faster but it's gaining on me.
It taunts me saying I can't escape, that I can't escape.
Ecstasy.
Terror.
Wanting.
I can feel it breathing down my neck.
Fear engulfs me.
Truth.
Lies.
Harmony.
A scream bubbles to my lips as I turn over.
It looms over me blocking the stars.
Angels.
Death.
Heaven.
Oh god no, please no.
And then it's on top of me whispering sweet seduction.
Relief.
Horror.
Fulfillment.
I scream and find myself sitting in my bed, awake. Its promises echoing in my mind.



Shea Heatherington is a Grade 9 student at William E Hay Composite High School, in Stettler, Alberta (Hayley Leschert, teacher).

It's Good to Be a Global Citizen

Sean Doherty

The thing about luncheons is that you need to get the centrepieces right. They can be flowers, or even candles, but it's imperative that they look nice. I firmly believe that if everything looks nice, and if everything is presented just right, people are more willing to buy into your goal; they're more willing to donate.

It's worked for the past two times, if I can attribute the fundraising success to the centrepieces. I don't think I even had centrepieces for the first three, anyway.

I'm running through everything that needs to be done.

Centrepieces: check. They are nice, slender glass vases, and Jamie had the great idea to fill them with water and put in a couple of drops of food colouring; that way they have an elegant blue-green appearance. Someone remarked that it looks like they are filled with Kool-Aid, but it doesn't really matter. They look nice.

Tables: check. Everything is set up. The nice African-style table cloths nicely drape all the tables. Are there twelve seats at each table? Maybe I should ask Jamie. Yes, she says there are.

Donation baskets! Where *are* they? They aren't on the tables; they should be. Wait, maybe Jamie took them to the front, over by the table at the entrance. Yep, they're over there. Good, I'll put them up in a minute.

The tech crew is getting everything set up, so I don't have to worry about that. I have to worry about *them*, though.

The paintings are all set up around the room, distanced equally from each other. They look really nice. They were painted by the children in the village with the new brushes we bought them from the last fundraiser. Some are really simple—you can tell they were painted by the younger children—but some of them are abstractions and are quite neat. There's one of a woman's figure standing beside a watering hole—like a small lake—and she's gazing at her own reflection, but her reflection is actually the image of her deceased family members. In the distance, just to the right of the woman's head and on the horizon above the lake is a small hut. I don't know if it's supposed to be the sun, but it looks like the hut is on fire.

It's quite a powerful image. I think I'm going to buy it for myself if someone doesn't buy it tonight.

What time is it? We only have ten minutes till the people show up. The cooks seem to be fine in the kitchen. I'll go set up the donation baskets.

This is my seventh fundraiser for Ghana; they've been getting more successful each time. Many people have commented on my passion for helping people, how they think it's admirable that I dedicate myself so much to the villagers in Ghana. The truth is that it's a complete joy to do what I do. There's nothing more satisfying than seeing the smiles on the children's faces as I hand out shoes and soccer balls.

It's good to be a global citizen, someone who is accountable to the world. It really shows that you care and that you are willing to help humanity.



The people are coming in and I'm standing in the front corner, watching the procession. There are the usual people, the rich corporate people who delight in spending their money on a good cause, and there are the older women that come in groups who pool their money together and donate one huge lump sum. I am forever grateful for these people—no, the people of Ghana are forever grateful.

Jamie comes over to me and leans her back against the wall. She sighs. "This is great," she's a little tired. "There's a good turnout." We both wait against the wall until everyone sits down.

Jamie leans over to me when the last stragglers comes in. "Isn't that your sister over there?" She points to the table on the far side of the room by the buffet table. I squint to see better, but can't tell.

"I don't know. Why would she be here?" I ask. We exchange a look and I leave the wall and walk across the room.

As I approach the table, I realize that it is indeed my younger sister. She looks lost, but in a graceful way; she's digging through her purse as a means of distraction from the others at her table. I'm surprised to see her here.

I approach her from behind and place my hand lightly against her back. She looks up, surprised.

"Lanese?" I say cautiously.

"Oh god, you scared me." She gets up awkwardly and gives me a hug. "I thought I'd stop by and see what my big sis is throwing. I heard that you can throw a good fundraiser!" She scratches her forearm.

"Do you want to talk over there?" I point over to the wall because everyone at the table is looking at us.

We stop beside the painting of the woman and the water hole. Lanese fidgets with her purse.

"So how are you doing?" I ask. "How are things with Joe?"

Lanese looks down at the strap of her purse. "They're good, good. Nothing too much to say." I sense hesitation in her voice. "I finally got a job."

"Oh?"

"Yes. At a restaurant called *Tino's* down on the west end."

"That sounds *great*, Lanese! I'm so proud!" I lean forward and shrug my shoulder against hers.

"Yeah ... it's, it's great!" I can see that she's forcing a smile. "How are *you* doing?" she asks. "This thing seems so amazing. You put this together all by yourself?"

"Yes!" I exclaim, louder than I should have, "It's amazing. I absolutely love the energy, the atmosphere of charity, you know?"

Lanese exhales. "Yeah. Charity."

"Oh god. I'm so sorry, I didn't mean ..."

"No. It's all right. That was a while ago." She smiles and flicks her hair back. There's an awkward silence over the muffled sounds of the atrium.

"Can I ask how you're managing?" I am treading lightly; I try to say it as gently as possible.

"I already told you, Penelope, I got a job." She gives me a glare. I've seen it before, years ago.

I touch my hand to her shoulder and lean closer. "Listen, I really appreciate that you are here! You know that?" I hope that my cheerful voice will smooth things over. "Anyway, we'll talk afterwards."

Senior High Prose—*First Prize*

The emcees are getting up.” I gently pat her back and give her a smile. We both assume our previous positions and sense the distance in the room between us. It’s sisterly. It’s that connection. It presses us to either side of the room.

The night wraps up as a success. In total, the amount of money raised is \$6,745—one of my best fundraisers yet. I can sense Jamie’s exhausted jubilation as she counts the money.

As everyone clears out, I see Lanese standing in front of the painting of the watering hole, gazing with wonder. When I approach her, she senses me and says distantly, without turning around, “Do you think the woman in this painting will ever see her own reflection?”

I stand beside her and gaze at the painting. “What do you mean?”

She continues without having heard me, “Or will she live forever, seeing blurred visions of things she cannot have. Things she *once* had, but are now gone?”

I stop breathing for a moment. “Lanese ... do you need to talk?” That’s when I see the tear in her pants; a small tear, but enough to arouse suspicion.

Lanese turns to me and I can see that her eyes are distant and airy, or maybe they are raw and piercing—I can’t tell. “I just want you to know that I donated \$150. It’s the most I could do.” She pauses and I am too hesitant to speak. “I really hope everything goes well in that village in Ghana.” She smiles sincerely.

“Thank you,” I say cautiously.

“I have to get going, unfortunately. Joe will be wondering where I am. Listen, it was great seeing you. Congratulations on this ... spectacular evening!” She smiles and gives me a little kiss. I gently hug her in return.

“Well, it was great seeing you here!” I say. “And if you need to talk, anytime, you know where I am.”

“Yes, yes. Thank you.” She hikes her purse onto her shoulders and inhales. I watch as she walks away, through the room and out the doors. I see her walk away into the darkness of the wintry night.

When she’s gone, I stare back up at the painting. I admire the woman’s poise and grace as she stares into the water. If not for the water’s reflection, one would not find the woman in any turmoil of any sort.

I like this painting. I bite my lip gently.

I think I am going to buy this.

Sean Doherty is a Grade 12 student at Bellerose Composite High School, in St Albert, Alberta (Brian Grant, teacher).

Count to Ten

Kyle McDonald

He tilted his head back on the leather seat while the plane steadily increased altitude. What was so hard about this time? It was just like any other—nothing different. He collected his thoughts, trying to calm himself, trying to reassure himself that what he was about to do was ok. It's his job. It always has been, but why the tearing feeling inside of him this time? The burning feeling of remorse was taking him over. He closed his eyes, counted his breaths, and tried everything in his power to reduce the adrenaline flowing throughout his system. He drifted to sleep.

"Wake up, you fool. It is time," said a professional but mumbling voice inside his earpiece, masked as a hearing aid.

He opened his eyes; he was gripping the armrest of his chair. He released his hand and noticed the wrinkles he had left in the leather. He grabbed the glass of water he had sitting on the flip-down table in front of him and took it to the washroom. He splashed the water in his face, trying to wake himself up—he knew the task at hand was going to be a difficult one, and he needed to be as alert as possible. He couldn't be stumbling around while attempting to be stealthy. He exited the washroom and tossed his empty cup in the stewardess's garbage bag. He grabbed his carry-on bag from the overhead compartment and returned to his seat, his adrenaline flowing again. He was apprehensive about the outcome of this assignment. What if he was caught? What if he failed? The possibilities were endless, but he had to do it. There was no turning back now. He worked for Mubarak—he got on the plane, and he knew he had a large sum of cash waiting for him back home. It was time.

He leaned over and unzipped the large duffel bag filled with his belongings: novel, toiletries, pencil, book of crosswords, sweat pants, t-shirt, and other miscellaneous typical travel supplies. He took out the sweatpants, reached into the left leg and pulled out a thick rope. He stuffed the rope into his pocket and stood up. He zipped his duffel bag and returned it to its previous spot in the overhead compartment. Not like he would need it any more, anyway. He sat back down. The assistant pilot made his way towards the washroom. Perfect. He only had a few minutes to execute the plan. He had to move quickly and not waste any time.

He made his way up the aisle towards the cockpit, trying to keep his balance in spite of the turbulence. The howling wind and unsteady flight would make everything even easier; no one would hear anything. Once he was at the door of the cockpit he quietly slid it open a crack, sneaked in, and closed it. He crouched so he would be masked by the shadows. Thank god for nighttime flights. He crawled behind the pilot's chair and slowly stood up. He knew that once he was upright the pilot would see his reflection in the window in front of him, so he had to be extremely fast. Once completely standing, he wrapped the rope around the pilot's neck; the pilot opened his mouth to scream, but it was too late.

One down.

He heard footsteps coming towards the cockpit door—he had to act fast. He propped the corpse upright in the chair, and crept back into the shadow. The cockpit door opened and closed.

"Jeff, why are we descending already?" the assistant pilot asked while returning to his seat.

No answer.

"Je ..." he gurgled.

Two down.

Senior High Prose—*Second Prize*

“Why are we descending? We must be only half way over the Atlantic. Or not—the pilots seem to have levelled the plane out,” Jack thought to himself, seconds before the lights in the interior of the plane shut off. The only illumination that remained was the emergency lights.

“Everyone sit down!” A voice boomed from the front of the plane and a shadowy figure emerged from the door leading to the cockpit, raising an object that resembled a gun—a pistol, to be more precise. The shadowy figure began to walk up and down the aisle of the plane not saying a word; the cabin was silent—only quick breaths and the pounding of nervous hearts could be heard. Minutes, which seemed like hours, passed without anyone making a noise, or asking what was going on, until a wiry man stood up and meekly asked, “What is going on? Are you going to kill all of us?”

“SIT DOWN!” the armed figure bellowed. The man sat back down in his seat and buried his head in his hands. More time passed before the thug began to speak. “Listen up and don’t move. Until I get what, or *who* I want, the trajectory of this plane is not going to change, and right now it’s on a steady decline toward the dark, cold water. Now, would someone like to tell me where Lara Logan is? Let me rephrase that question: someone tell me right now where that damn news reporter is sitting.” No one made any indication where the woman was sitting. “I’M NOT GOING TO ASK AGAIN!” the voice boomed. “WHERE IS SHE?”

Complete silence.

“If someone doesn’t tell me where this woman is, I will shoot. I have enough bullets to permanently silence every one of you. Now, where is she?”

“I must do something,” Jack thought to himself. “If I don’t act quickly, someone is going to get killed.” Jack knew exactly where Lara was sitting. Being a citizen of Nevada himself, he was completely aware of the news reporter, and he had noticed her in the airport terminal and watched her board the plane. He knew she was sitting at the opposite end of the plane from him, which allowed for a plan that could possibly save everybody, including himself. He stood up and sternly said, “She’s over there—row E.”

The armed man began heading towards the location Jack had indicated. No one moved at all except for the strange looks Jack received from the people around him. “Get up,” the terrorist said calmly. “I said get up.” The man’s face became irritated and he pointed his gun towards the woman. “Get up, or I’ll kill you, right here in front of everyone.” The woman didn’t move, so the man grabbed a handful of her hair and pulled her out of the chair.



Senior High Prose—*Second Prize*

“Let go of me!” the woman screamed. He dragged her into the middle of the aisle and ordered her to get on her knees and put her hands behind her head. Lara and the thug’s backs were turned toward him, but Jack was able to see the barrel of the man’s gun to the back of the woman’s head. Tears began streaming down her face, ruining her makeup, making her look like a very upset clown.

“Now where is it?” he demanded.

“Where is what?” she replied, sobbing.

“You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

“No, I don’t. Please, just let me go.”

“Shut up! I want the tapes! Now give them to me!”

“What tapes?”

“The tapes from Tahrir Square during the protests. No one is to see what is recorded on those tapes! Tell me where they are, right now!”

“I don’t have them, honestly, I don’t.”

“I will give you till the count of ten. One.”

“I don’t know! Please, just let me go, I don’t know where they are, I don’t have them. Please.”

“Two.”

The woman began to sob uncontrollably, her face now completely plastered with mascara. “All right. I have to act fast,” Jack thought to himself.

“Three.”

As quietly as possible, he left his seat and unlatched the overhead compartment above his seat, revealing a small suitcase made out of hard plastic. The case contained his laptop and other heavy objects, making the suitcase weigh about 25 pounds.

“Four.”

Jack carried the small suitcase in both of his hands and crept up the aisle of the plane.

“Five ... Six ... Seven ...”

The apprehension rushing through his body made the journey seem like it was never going to end. “One swift blow,” he thought to himself. By this time, the man with the gun had already counted to eight, and Jack knew he had little time left.

“Nine. Goodbye.”

Jack raised the suitcase above his head and brought the suitcase down in a swift J-shaped motion, slamming the small container into the back of the man’s head. The man dropped the gun, and landed on the floor in an unconscious heap.

After a few seconds of shock, everyone breathed a sigh of relief with gratitude that their lives were saved. That was until someone stood up and asked, “What about the plane?”

Kyle McDonald is a Grade 11 student at Bellerose Composite High School, in St Albert, Alberta (Brian Grant, teacher).

Loss

Collin Tittle

Raindrops pounded onto the pavement outside, mimicking the frantic beat of David's heart. His normally quiet morning had just been interrupted. The hospital had just called. His paternal grandfather, David I, was in critical condition. He had been in and out of the hospital for the past two years, suffering from emphysema. For the past month, he had been in the long-term care ward, waiting for a bed in a home. Grandpa David had served in the Second World War, landing on Omaha beach on D-Day with the other American troops before being wounded by friendly fire. Grandpa David was the true heart of the Winchester family. He kept the many strong personalities from tearing each other's throats out.

The impact of his ailing body and spirit was easily seen in the family. Over the past two years the family had been imploding, slowly destroying itself, members turning on those closest to them. Few of them saw each other, except if they crossed paths at the hospital or the apartment, depending upon where Grandpa David was at the time. The emotional impact was the greatest upon young David, David III. His grandfather was the only person who understood him. The lone tradesman in a family of doctors and lawyers, young David consistently suffered slights and condescending remarks from the relatives who viewed him as a failure. Even his parents, David II and Marie Anne, were disappointed in him. Both were gynecologists, helping other babies into the world, but never being proud of their son. If he scored an A on a test, his father would ask him, "What happened to the plus?" Whether his father meant it or not didn't matter. It succeeded in implanting in the young David that no matter what he did, his father would never be proud of him. The family was suffering. Everyone else in the family, except David III, had someone else to support them. The young David was feeling alone and fearful. His grandfather was the only person with whom he could share anything. Every person in the world needs someone to support them. No one can function solitarily. That is what David III had decided was the difference between humans and animals. Humans require someone to be there for them through thick and thin.

Grandpa David had always been proud of his grandson. He would say, "The world cannot function without electricians. It would be a dark place without the trades." This support was what the young grandson appreciated the most from his grandfather. His grandfather would tell him, just as he had told David II when he was young, "Always keep the things most important to you in your heart. Your heart doesn't have to stop for you to die." David III never understood this, but he simply appreciated the gesture of the advice.

Now David III rushed out the door. Leaving his coat on the hook, he pushed through the rain to his battered car. He ducked into the solace of the worn driver's seat and turned the key, praying that the car would start one more time. Peeling out of the driveway, David headed south towards the hospital. It was a half-hour drive in good conditions to the hospital. David just hoped traffic on the freeway wasn't backed up. His car made a slight grinding noise as he drove away from the house.

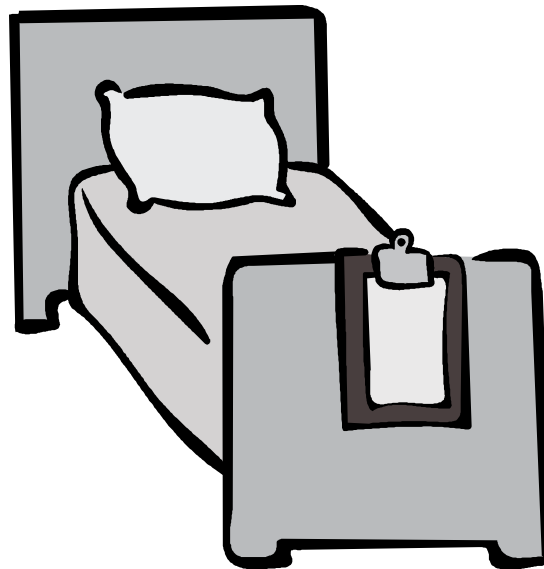
The drive gave David time to contemplate the circumstances. The rain had finally stopped and the sun was pushing through the clouds, creating a rainbow. As he sped down the street, he reflected on the past two years. Emphysema, which now plagued his grandfather, was the result of fifty years of smoking. It had been killing his grandfather a little bit every day for the past two years. Every day, a little more of his lungs was destroyed, resulting in a two-year battle for oxygen.

Senior High Prose—*Third Prize*

The traffic on the freeway was running smoothly and David weaved through the few cars, pushing the limits of his car. When he reached his exit he turned off and drove towards the hospital. It was situated at the top of a high hill, watching over the city, with the whole city looking up at it. Just as David pulled onto the road that would lead him directly up to the hospital, the grinding noise returned to his car. "Please don't die," David thought, "I need you now." However, just as he reached the bottom of the hill his car died. Focused solely on reaching the hospital, David III abandoned his car on the side of the road and began the long trek up the hill. The road was shaded in ancient oaks, giving it the appearance of a black tunnel with solitary beams of light poking through, and at the end of the road, there was intense light. Emerging at the top, David ran quickly toward the emergency ward of the hospital and then toward the critical care ward.

He rounded the final corner to see his mother exiting a room. Her face was veined with mascara. His father was holding her hand, leading towards the exit. He didn't even look at his son as he passed. David approached the room and summoned the courage to look inside. It was empty. All that was left was an overturned chair in the corner. David righted the chair and sat down. Shock began to set in. The only person who understood him was gone. David sat paralyzed in the chair. Paralyzed by the emptiness of the room and the feeling of disappointment that was overtaking his body. It crawled from the outer reaches of his appendages towards his chest until it settled in his heart. That feeling finally allowed David to realize what his grandfather had meant. According to the records, David III wasn't going to die for another forty years; however, that day was when he really died.

Collin Tittle is a Grade 12 student at Bellerose Composite High School, in St Albert, Alberta (Brian Grant, teacher).



Macchiato

Daya Montakhebi

They were the softest lips she'd ever felt, gentle against her own, together in perfect harmony. Separation was the last idea on her mind. She hoped she could stay in her love's sweet-smelling embrace for the remainder of the night; however, something always tore them away from each other.

The autumn breeze was calm in the morning of the day they met. Colours drifted onto the concrete below; scents of fresh rain and roses surrounded the city as the sun gradually peeked out from behind the grey clouds. The line was long, like every other day at the coffee shop; orders flew around in the back and tables were tended to as quickly as possible. She walked with grace through the door, moved her long wavy brown hair elegantly away from her eyes and behind her ear. Slowly she made her way to the cashier to make her usual order, a tall caramel macchiato. She searched the bulky black Louis Vuitton on her shoulder and paid with a brand-new five-dollar bill, received her drink shortly after and thanked the clerk unhurriedly.

In no rush to leave, she gazed about the café for a place to sit. Luck was with her and she made her way towards what seemed to be an empty table in the warmth of the sun's rays with a half-empty cup of coffee on it. With her back against the sun, she noisily pulled one of the chairs out from under the wooden table but suddenly saw a shadow coming closer from behind, followed by a deep sensual voice. Jumping slightly from the fright, she turned bit by bit to find out where this unfamiliar voice was coming from. What she saw was beautiful: short wavy black hair and a slender yet well-built figure with the most amazing hazel eyes. Struggling to find the right words to apologize for stealing his seat, she was surprised when the young man calmly interrupted her, saying "There may only be one table but there are two chairs," and asked her to sit with him. Accepting his gesture the young woman continued to pull the chair back once more and with grace took her seat, watching as he took the seat across from her and faced the sun. She noticed how his beauty became more striking in the sunlight; his eyes glowed fierce against the vivid orange rays and his skin brightened with colour and life. He held a book; carefully, he placed it on top of the table directly beside his dark bold coffee. He looked up at the shy girl and gave her a charming smile; his eyes gradually filled with joy as the smile grew, revealing perfectly straight white teeth. With burning cheeks and an anxious stomach she thanked him for the seat and finally tasted her drink, eyes closed, fighting her beaming smile.

She went back to the coffee shop every day and sat in the same spot, as if waiting for him to show up and sit with her once more. Days passed with no sight of the young man, but there was a feeling within her, something telling her not to lose hope and that she would, in time, see him once more. The seventh day after the two met turned out to be chillier than usual, so she ordered an extra-warm macchiato to start her morning. As she rushed to leave, her phone rang. As she answered it, the door opened and she was once again struck by the lost beauty she had met one week ago. She heard a sudden crack from below, which distracted her—a Blackberry broken into three pieces. Embarrassed, she bent down to the floor to pick up the pieces and noticed he was already doing so. By the time she realized what was going on he had put the phone back together and was handing it to her with the same charming smile she was introduced to on the first day. The young man asked if she would be willing to waste ten minutes of her time with him, and with no hesitation she accepted.

The rain was falling gently from the sky when the pair left the coffee shop together and walked to the young woman's car, but quickly enough it became heavier, soaking them as they started laughing

Senior High Prose—*Honourable Mention*



and running. She quickly unlocked her doors with her back towards him and advised him to set out for his own car before he was drenched in water. As she turned around to say goodbye she felt one hand on her waist and the other on her face; his lips pressed against hers, soft and wet in the rain.

Months passed. They saw each other on a daily basis at the coffee shop or at a restaurant for a pleasant dinner together, spending as much time with one another as they were able to. It was a calm drive home from dinner one night when she announced her love for him for the first time, genuinely explaining all she thought was important for him to know. They arrived at her home shortly and, like every other time, he parked the car and walked her to the door. Yet this instance was different than any other. She asked him to spend

the rest of the night with her, knowing he loved her as well; he kissed her with passion and care and they walked in, hand in hand.

The next morning the young woman awoke to sunshine with a note on the fluffed white pillows beside hers, stating that her lover had gone to work and he would be looking forward to seeing her beautiful face later on in the evening. She decided to call him but there was no answer. She called again. Finally, he picked up, his voice stern and angry. Their first fight occurred at long last, and for the first time she feared him and how he was able to make her feel. Days went by steadily, which felt like weeks to the young woman, without seeing her love, let alone talking to him, waiting endlessly for him to come back to her. She missed the way her fingers would brush carelessly through his hair and the way he made her pillow smell so lovely, and she longed for the way he embraced her face with his hands ever so tenderly when he kissed her.

The sun hid behind the trees, travelling closer down to the horizon, painting the sky with colours of pink and purple, promptly turning a dark navy blue gleaming with stars. It was peaceful and hushed as she sat outside on her deck, listening to the crickets chirp and the birds singing to their children. Before long the peace was interrupted by a familiar sound—the doorbell. Walking towards the door holding a glass of chardonnay, she took a deep breath and unlocked it little by little, opened it cautiously, and with joy and relief saw a very familiar face. Without speaking, they embraced each other for what seemed like hours. She took his hand and led him to the deck, poured him a glass of wine and sat down on the loveseat beside him, and the talk began.

He feared his emotions for her and described his life, the unmentioned; explained the times his father would beat him, the year he moved into foster care, his experiments with drugs and the way she had been changing his life for the better. From that moment, the young woman realized the love she had for him was truly unconditional and genuine. Placing her wine glass on the table on the deck, she took his hand and reminded him she wouldn't be going anywhere. He placed his own glass beside hers and embraced her as if he were never to let go. She lifted her head and ran her fingers through his hair, cupped her hand around his face and pressed her lips against his. Her mind went blank, silence surrounded her and she felt her heart pounding, pounding like drums, through her ribs, through her skin. They were the softest lips she'd ever felt, gentle against her own, together in perfect harmony. Separation was the last idea on her mind. She hoped she could stay in her love's sweet-smelling embrace for the rest of the night. Although something always tore them away from each other she knew they would have the strength to fight it. She knew they were in love.

Daya Montakhebi is a Grade 11 student at Bellerose Composite High School, in St Albert, Alberta (Brian Grant, teacher).

And Then There Was High School

L Schmidt

We all entered with slick-backed manes, and summer-glow skin, and smirks just a shade above a grimace,
Emerald-green, the wetness behind our ears made us double check our schedules (twice),
But we were tied together with Killed Mockingbirds, and Moles, and studies of Neoconservatism,
And crossed wires, and missed signals, and dreams

(mostly dreams)

We were restless, striving, shrewd, worldly, weary, and gullible.
We pumped irony, reset calculators and trends
Scribbling voluptuous essays, and trying to ignore the clicking of our classmates' pencils,
Against industry-grade fibreboard desks,
As we quest to find: How dark, how original could you get.
Could we find an epiphany in a forty-five-minute timed session,
and exactly three single-spaced pages?
Some of us were rebels: we scribbled over
The neat blue lines defining the margins on our lined paper.
A few wrote sideways.

Beneath the heavy eyeliner,
Our eyes were wide and clear.
We were surgically inarticulate,
Our laziness, our carelessness; it was all a precise art.
And while our brows were heavy, our brains were fire
Questing to find romance amid dimpled industry-steel lockers,

The taste of the sun-sweet Maple Lobsters Jennifer brings back from an east-coast vacation,
And our Chiclet teeth stick together with syrup while we lounge at the back of Chem,
Trying to tune the volume of our laughter to the precise decibel between *look-at-us* and *actual-mirth*.
Vocab Tests: Tried to nullify our incommensurable abasement at our reprehensible examination rankings.

Social Studies: Hoping that the spell checker can correct Russian,
Or that your teacher somehow forgot the name of a specific Soviet leader,
And won't call your bluff.
And when the buzzing bell calls out always a few seconds too early,
We swim through the air of endless corridors,
and skid around blind corners

Senior High Poetry—*First Prize*

Of the cracked linoleum that lined the halls; a tawny sheen where misplaced quiz papers show up in silhouette,
Trying to reach the door before the teacher conveniently remembers that
 "lateness was not excusable"
You curse the couple holding hands
And blocking the entire thoroughfare.

In between the glossy flirtations, show-offs, between skipping class and spilled Slushies, there was:
 Faust.
How can a universe be made of exams, broken pens, and archaic textbooks, who shed their binding
 with a kind of twisted joy
At how much you will have to pay to have it replaced.
Yet there was drama, and passion, and hatred,
That somehow seemed less real,
Than the cramming for a last-minute quiz.
Out of our minds, lost in the music, buried in mutually hated studies, we had found chaos and glory.
We left it all with defiant sniggers, and glitter in our eyes, and ink in our hearts.
Abandoning the undying staid school halls,
To their continual role:
 Of quiet watchers.

If only the walls could talk ...
Would we have listened?
 The world seemed so big without,
Their calm prominence defining boundaries.
It's easy to miss their quiet protection,
 when you've left them behind.

L Schmidt is a Grade 12 student at Sir Winston Churchill School, in Calgary, Alberta (J McAllister, teacher).



Ode to a Snowflake

Adrian Battiston

A journey from the heavens, immediately falling from a cloud,
A snowflake is born, neither sad nor proud
Through the unending sky.

This delicate specimen must fly,
As it descends upon the most beautiful earth,
It becomes aware that its journey is worth
The trouble.
To be thrown and thrashed around like rubble,
Through the unending sky.

And although such an ice crystal cannot live or die,
Every snowflake shall be unique,
From each intricate design to every defined peak.
Just like brothers and sisters are the same from a distance,
With a keen eye and persistence,
One can identify the characteristics which make it stand out
And learn what it is all about
To be a snowflake, falling
Through the unending sky.

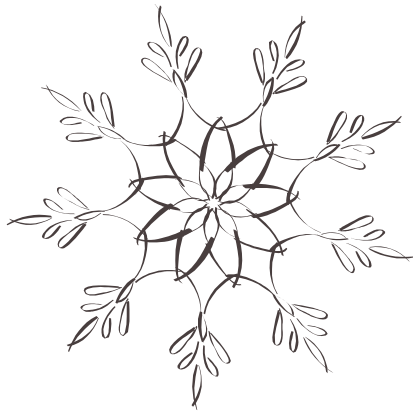
Like the twinkle in a child's eye
Who plays in the snow for the first time.
Or the reflection of the sun, off the tail side of a dime.
But like the composition of each snowflake,
The shimmer each flake will make,
Is different in its own special way
And no snowflake will stay
Or last
As its memory moves into the past
Falling
Through the unending sky.

As the wonderful journey commences its termination,
The snowflake's determination
Does not dwindle
Nor does its desire kindle
Competition among other flakes,
As it falls
Through the unending sky.

Senior High Poetry—*Second Prize*

Thus the landing of a snowflake is always sly,
And it never can crash and burn,
But only softly land on the leaf of a fern,
Or in a soft cushion of its friends,
That can be found around any bend.
Near or far,
Shimmering like a star, the snowflake lands,
And ends
Its journey, falling
Through the unending sky.

*Adrian Battiston is a Grade 11 student at Bellerose Composite High School, in St Albert, Alberta
(Brian Grant, teacher).*



My Last Day

Olivia Clutterbuck

i sit next to my mother.
she doesn't move, her eyes ajar,
her breath no more.

I cannot stay here.
There is no one left to take care of me.

There has to be someone
In the outside world,
Which I know not of,
Who would care for a child not yet five.

I grab what used to be Mommy's coat,
And struggle to put it on.
It is so heavy and big.
It has a yellow star on the left side of the chest.
I open the huge door to the outside world
And step out into the unknown.

I walk along a road, taking everything in.
A man in a green uniform comes up to me,
Asking my name, how old I am.

I told him about Mommy,
how she never let me go outside,
about how she died,
how I am on my own,
And how I'd walked through a field,
Before finding the road.

The man asks me where I got my coat.
i told him it had been Mommy's.

a sad look falls across the man's face.
He bends down and picks me up.
He walks us down a long road, to a gate.
He tells me to go through the gate
and that someone will tell me where to go.
whispering softly in my ear, he says,
i am sorry.
his voice cracks.



he puts me down and walks away.
I walk inside the gate.

Another man comes up to me.
He tells me to follow a group of people.
I do as he says with a smile across my face.
we enter a heartless building.
a woman dressed in green comes up to me.
she puts me on a chair,
she then takes the last thing I care about.
my hair.

i begin to cry.

Now my scalp is bare of its chocolate locks,
i am led to a different room.
there are only women in the room
and they, too, have exposed heads.

a man comes in and yells,
ordering us to remove our clothes,
telling us we were having a shower

i do as he says,
drying my tears,
i am trying to be brave.

the man leads us to another room,
it is even colder than the first.
the door to the room is closed shut
with a bang an angry bang.
i can hear the door being locked.

all of a sudden,
the woman next to me falls to the ground.
then another woman.
and then another.

i'm next.
i fall to the floor like a rag doll.

Never again to see the light of day.

Olivia Clutterbuck is a Grade 12 student at William E Hay Composite High School, in Stettler, Alberta (Andra Lotosk, teacher).

Hero

Jane Sūnderwald

Growing up next door,
He was Peter Pan,
He was Lancelot
And he was Black Beard the Pirate,
Fighting villains in the three backyard weeping willows
That made up Neverland,
Camelot, and the Seven Seas.
He saved my life daily,
Rescuing me from aliens, monsters, and neighborhood mongrels—
Until we went off to school,
Where he became Wild Bill Pecos, Napoleon, and a Green Beret,
Defending his home base of a playground
With dodge balls, water guns, or a “Tag—you’re out,”
And coming to my aid
When I was taken hostage inside for recess
Or prisoner in the little space between the slide and the sandbox.
When the missile of high school was thrown our way,
We walked onto the battlefield side by side,
And watched as he turned into
Gretzky, Robin Hood, Bono, and Prince Charming
Handling his hockey stick or guitar
With as much magic
As the wooden swords he used to wield,
And shooting arrows of charm
Sharp enough to penetrate the heart of a girl.
But he never forgot to rob the rich to feed the poor,
And he wasn’t afraid to stand between me
And a corrupt army of pom-pom waving villainesses
Or a legion of sneering and advancing ogres
Who’d had too much to drink.
All my life, I’ve been the damsel in distress,
The Rapunzel in his window,
The faithful, admiring partner in crime—
The one who’s always been on his side,
Because it’d be better to die with him than live without.
And he’s been the indestructible superman,
The knight in shining armour,
The awe-inspiring champion.
My hero.
He will always be.
And I don’t even think he knows it.



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When City Meets Country

Hayley Leschert

When people ask me where I'm from, I usually hesitate. I don't exactly have an answer for that question any more. I have lived the majority of my life in Edmonton, though I spent the first ten years of my life living halfway around the world, in South Africa, where my husband grew up. After considering their question a moment, I shoot back my reply, "Stettler." I usually receive blank stares and a puzzled "Where's that?" response, to which I have learned how to respond, "About an hour east of Red Deer." Often, that satisfies their "Where" question, only to be followed up with "How do you like small-town life?" Again I have to think, because honestly, it has its days.

I knew two years before I moved to Stettler that I would one day live here. My then boyfriend, now husband, informed me very early in our relationship: "I plan on moving back to Stettler when I graduate—so if you don't want to live there, let me know soon." Having only recently learned that there was a small town in Alberta called Stettler, and an even smaller village called Erskine, which is still another ten minutes away from where he grew up, I decided that I needed to see what Stettler was like for myself. In my subsequent visits, his family introduced me to the local bakery and its delicious doughnuts, the "Night Before the Night Before" at Christmas time—a wonderful evening of shopping, sales and food, as well as the most important aspect of country life: family and friends. This all seemed wonderful, but what I didn't realize at the time was that not all of those conveniences I loved in the city would be there when I moved to Stettler.

Having grown up in the city, it was suddenly a shock for me to discover that the majority of stores close before 6 PM on weekdays. I missed my favourite coffee shop, and as an avid book reader I missed my local bookstores. I missed cruising the mall, checking out the latest sales. And I found it strange, and even a little embarrassing at times, to walk down the sidewalk and to recognize others or to be recognized. I was used to being anonymous—one of the blur.

An even greater shock was learning about things like snow days, hunting season, Christmas trees that block off part of Main Street, or the fair that sets up on Main Street during the summer and actually shuts the street down for a few days! All of these require time to get used to, and sometimes an explanation or two. I had to get used to impassible range roads when the snowdrifts made it impossible to get through, getting stuck on the driveway to my in-laws' acreage, and the reality of where my dinner actually comes from—I affectionately nicknamed our steer "Beef."

Small-town life definitely has its days, and I'm learning to adapt for the others. When I first moved here, I craved my regular big-city coffee shop (not for the coffee, but for the atmosphere and other specialty drinks). Since then I've discovered where I can find my Chai Tea Latte or indulge in a London Fog, or better yet, one of their specialties, London Smog, made with chocolate milk instead—small-town shops are ingenious! And the atmosphere is there too—along with delectable crepes or rhubarb cake for dessert. I even discovered one store, a short drive north of here, that serves hot chocolate with *real* chocolate shavings on it. I've also learned through some trial and error what is known as the "cheater method" for making a few of those extra special drinks.

I have discovered that the local frame store sells funky purses—a tip from a colleague after I drooled over her new purse, thinking she had been to the city to shop. Meanwhile, if I'm in the mood for fudge or cinnamon buns, the next town south sells the most delicious I have ever tasted, and possibly some of the biggest I have ever eaten, too. I quickly discovered that the local pizza shop sells

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to-die-for pina colada milkshakes. And while I miss curling up in a comfy chair, sipping coffee and perusing new books, I have turned to our fabulous local library, which will bring books in from all over the province for me to read.

Along with these amenities, I have also discovered the joys of online shopping—I can't think of anything I would rather receive in the mail than new books. When I open my Superbox mailbox, another thing I had to become used to, my heart races slightly when I see the key for one of the special over-sized boxes resting in my mailbox. We also have some fantastic clothing stores, which, if I catch the right time, can offer fantastic deals. I have, however, on more than one occasion, walked past a student in the hallway wearing the same shirt or sweater as I was—one of the minor problems of having to shop at the same store. But maybe that makes me trendy? I even learned the hard way to carry a pair of snow boots in the trunk of my car just in case the snow is too high. And I have now attended the auction where we buy "Beef" before he spends the summer grazing.

All of my discoveries aside, I am learning that my favourite part of small town living is the feeling of being known rather than anonymous. While it is inconvenient some days—especially when I'm having a bad-hair-no-make-up-sweat-pants sort of day—more days than not, I like being greeted by name at the pharmacy or the grocery store. I like that the dry cleaner can tell me stories about my grandparents-in-law, whom I was never fortunate enough to meet. I like knowing that I can find someone somewhere who knows me and can help me. It is almost like a giant family. Growing up as a kid without roots, it sure feels nice to be grafted onto a set of small-town roots.

So when people ask me where I'm from in the future, I will likely continue to hesitate, but I think that will become less and less apparent, as my roots strengthen and Stettler becomes home.

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