

VOICES

ALBERTA

STUDENT WRITING CONTEST

Supplement to Alberta Voices

Volume 3, Number 1



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Editorial

Lana Black

Alberta Voice's 2004 edition of the *Student Writing Contest* supplement continues to highlight the ongoing interest in and need for students, student teachers and teachers throughout our province to have annual opportunities to share with others through writing.

The ELAC student writing contest invites student writers and their teachers from all levels of schooling to submit their best work. Nonfiction or fiction prose and poetry winners are named when there are sufficient entries in each category and in each division. The divisions are primary, upper-elementary, middle or junior high and senior high school, as well as student teachers and their teachers from various public education faculties, at all levels of English language arts instruction. Prize winners receive a complimentary copy of our publication and a bookstore certificate. All entries will be posted on ELAC's website: www.elac.ab.ca. Thank you to Jeff Goin, who serves as our website coordinator.

The entries this year were fewer in number than in previous years but great in quality. As in past years, the judging process was a time of celebration. Thank you to this year's judges for their time, expertise and good sense throughout the judging process. The three judges for this year's competition, at all levels, were Mr. Glen Huser, a Governor General's award winner for his young-adult fiction book *Stitches*, Dr. Margaret Iveson, a professor in the department of secondary education at the University of Alberta, and Dr. Margaret Stevenson, a former supervisor of language arts for Edmonton Public Schools.

In printing this supplement, we have corrected simple spelling and punctuation errors but have left in word choices, paragraphing, and sentence structures that indicate an author's age and development. I appreciate, and am thankful for, the conscientious work of the entrants, the judges, the publications staff of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and Dorothy Stanley, ATA's staff officer for ELAC, all of whom make this publication come into being.

Congratulations to all the writers who submitted entries. Your work is a joy to read, and you should be proud to see your work on the printed page. Sharing your writing with others takes courage and hard work. Hard work develops talents, and you might not have used those talents if you had not taken the time to write for this publication. Please write again next year for the student writing contest.

This is my second and last year as editor of the student writing contest. I have enjoyed the process and the finished products. David Slomp, a doctoral student in secondary education at the University of Alberta, and former secretary on the ELAC executive, will take over as contest editor in September 2004. I wish him well in his new position. In closing, thank you to everyone involved in this artistic endeavour, and may all your dreams come true.

Why I Never Go Sledding

Jonathan Besecker

Toque, check, scarf, check,
jacket, mittens, pants, boots,
check, check, check, check.
I'm ready for another day in the snow,
going down hills like a meteor
and crashing into the haystack.

I open the door and take the first step.
The bitter air batters my body.
It slices through my pants like a table saw
through warm butter.

The arctic air surrounds my skin,
and I feel my bladder squirming.

Swish-swash
Swish-swash.

I can't hold it anymore.

I lunge at the door,
breaking through with no resistance.
The door hits the wall
with a rattling
smash.

My house is a maze.

I see the end,
but the hallway keeps getting longer.

I hear the bathroom calling my name.
I'm getting closer.

Eternal bliss awaits me.
Off with the toque,
scarf,
jacket and more.

I'm free at last.

Oh no,
not
again...

Toque, check, scarf, check,
jacket, mittens, pants, boots,
check, check, check, check.



*Jonathan Besecker is a Grade 8 student at McKernan School in Edmonton.
(Don Garry, teacher)*

I Climbed That Tree

Elizabeth Rutledge

Look over there,
by the hill and the pond.

I
climbed that tree
yesterday
when aches and pains
were a joke, and
my teeth were still the ones

I
climbed that tree
yesterday
when my back would
support my body
without failure,

I am today.
I
climbed that tree
yesterday
when my skin wasn't so
leathery and blemished with
wrinkles as deep as the San Andreas Fault.

I
climbed that tree
yesterday
when I was as old as my grandchildren,
who now look at me
and wonder if I was born
this old.

I know this,
because I used to think that of my grandparents
when they would tell me of
exciting things
they had done in
their
lives.

And now that I am
in someone else's shoes,
somebody's old, comfortable,
moth-eaten slippers,

I can only look back
and pretend I am still able to climb that tree
like I was able to
yesterday.

Can you see the big tree
that tickles the clouds?

God had given me.



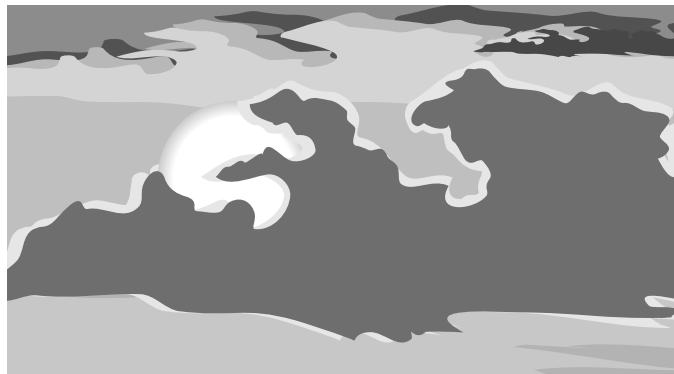
Elizabeth Rutledge is a student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)

Darkness

Kimberly Steinbring

When the words leave the person's mouth,
they creep into your ears.
You are frozen to the spot
like a slimy tongue frozen to a metal pole in -30°C weather,
then the pain swells up like a big black balloon,
which takes over all of your five senses.
The glistening teardrops blind your sight.
Your hearing is blocked by all of your whirling thoughts,
and you can feel nothing but pain, sheer pain.
You taste salt from your teardrops,
and your nose is running, so you don't smell a single thing.
The tears full of pain come,
and you can't stop them until you are in the tight embrace of a loved one,
and even then the glimmering tears run down your clammy cheeks.
You
feel
lost
in
a
world
of
pain,
but somehow, you break through the dense ice.
No matter what happens, you will always feel the haunting pain.
All of these things occur
when the person says the words,
"I'm sorry, but he's dead."

*Kimberly Steinbring is a Grade 8 student at McKernan School in Edmonton.
(Don Garry, teacher)*



The Endless Dance

Jane Toogood

This is my world.
Always tip-toeing around the black hole that I've seen so many fall into.
They all crawl out, of course.
But they are no longer who they used to be.
The imperfections that make them human beings have been sorted out and destroyed.
They are changed forever.
I must keep going. Keep on tip-toeing.
Forever. Can't fall in.
In a way, I guess it could be a dance, the twirling of my friends and me as we step,
hoping not to be seen around the black hole. The nothingness.
Sometimes, I don't mind. It seems alright to keep dancing.
Then someone is taken,
And I hate my misfortune at having to continue. I am disgusted at its hunger.
But I can't show it.
Keep smiling, keep smiling; don't let it see. If it does, then it will know that it has won.
I will never let it have that satisfaction.
Never.
All I can do is keep going.
Keep on dancing the endless dance.

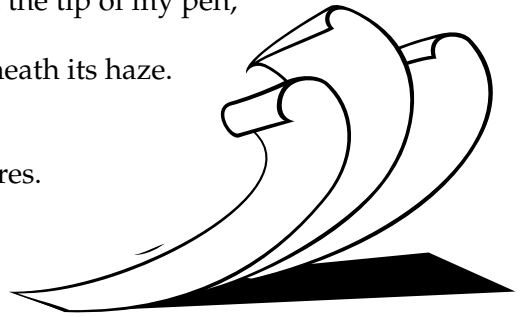
Jane Toogood is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)



Deadline

Stephanie Taylor

The deadline hovers illusively over my shoulder,
 casting a translucent shadow upon my empty page.
It traps all thoughts and ideas that frantically try to abandon the body
 that conceals them.
Acting like a membrane, the blockage allows only the thoughts, which are of no use to me,
 to permeate its casing.
Tiny ideas flit back and forth like butterflies as they circle my head.
 With slender fingers, my mind yearns to reach out and seize them
and relish their material,
 but they will easily dart out of its hopeful grasp.
 My pen is cradled between my fingers,
 concealing the inky fuel that motivates my imagination,
but the shadow begins to swell the longer I sit,
engulfing my entire form like waves swallowing up the beach.
 I sit—
 motionless, thoughtless
 as my frustration consumes me.
The butterflies flutter away in dismay, for I have not yet employed their information.
 Unfortunately, my writing time keeps ticking away,
 like the rhythmic hum of a washing machine,
 so that completing the task at hand appears unimaginable.
The due date becomes a lantern, blown out by the wind at the end of a dark tunnel.
 My troubled conscience surfaces as a ghost, up through the tip of my pen,
and, as it diffuses into each corner of the room,
 a ghoulish face emerges from beneath its haze.
Every unfinished detail is depicted from my worst nightmares.
 My future is on the death line.
The blank paper in front of me is a script of all my failures.
 This will be my extinction.
Death faces me, now, because I did not meet the
 Dead—line.



Stephanie Taylor is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)

Shards

Ryan Moss

I stand in front of a mirror,
staring at myself.
As if I willed it,
the mirror shatters into pieces on the floor.

Each piece is shaped differently,
and every shard exposes a fragment of my personality.
Each shard, with its own part of me,
reflecting off the sleek smooth glass.
The first piece that I pick up off the floor radiates heat,
and relaxation flows through my body
like a river's current.

This piece, among others, reflects my good side,
full of happiness and peace.

I pick up another shard, which also radiates heat.
This piece gives off the sound of laughter,
and it is clear to me that this piece represents friendship and humour.

Each shard nearest to the two that I have already examined
emits the same warmth that signifies
the good side of my personality.

My gaze shifts to the next group of pieces
next to the ones I have examined.

I pick up one of the shards in this group,
but this one does not radiate heat. The glass cuts into my skin
with its sharp edge.

This group is the negative side of my personality.
I ignore the pain, and I pick up more pieces of glass.
In these pieces, I see anger, hate and sorrow.

The river inside me has frozen,
and I feel happy no longer.

I turn to the final group of pieces, and I hesitantly pick one up.
No feeling flows through me.
No warmth, no pain. No images appear.

Junior High Poetry—Honourable Mention

It now occurs to me that these are unwritten pages in the book
that is my life.

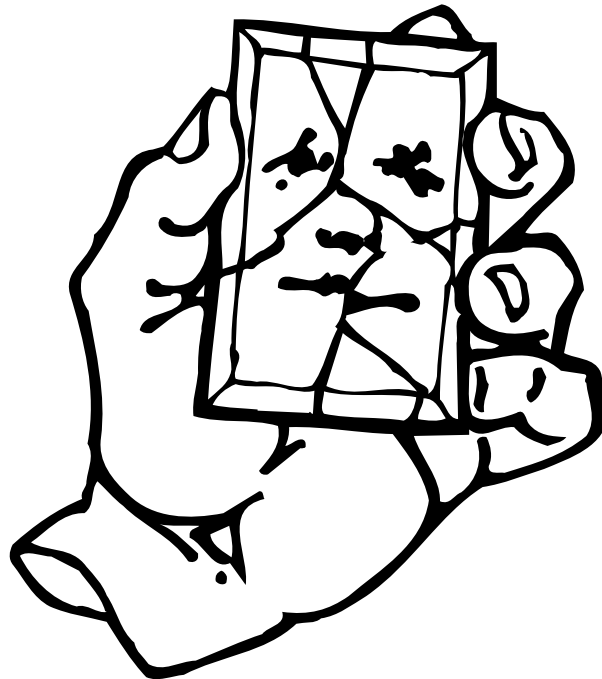
These shards will adopt their own images in the future as I change.

All the pieces start moving,
mixing themselves up.

The goods, the bads and the blanks
become one sheet of glass, and the mirror reforms.

Once again, I stand staring at myself,
marvelling at the complexity of who I am.

Ryan Moss is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)



The Cry of a Loon

Emily Lieffers

Today, I walked past a photograph
of you, Grandma.
Your brilliant smile
was forever captured,
a little faded but still grinning.
I remembered
that you died six years ago, today.

When I first heard the news of your death,
that you were gone,
a flood of searing pain and disbelief
washed through my mind.
It overtook me,
and I sat down quickly,
a jolt running through me.

I didn't know how
someone like you
could be snatched away.
Like waking bolt upright from a fantastic dream,
I felt confused about everything.
It was like being thrust into a foggy underwater world,
where I was alone with my tangled thoughts
and suddenly aware of my beating heart.

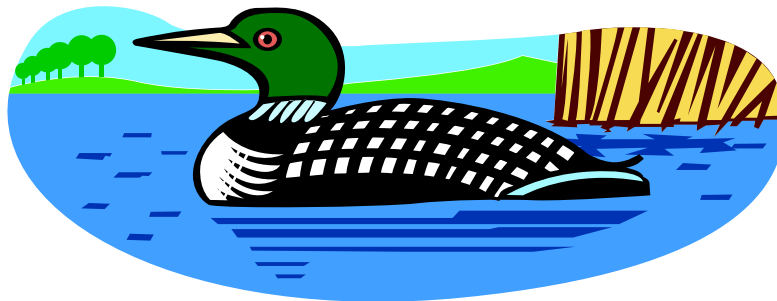
I remember
skiing with you in the gleaming snow
and sunshine beaming off your radiant face.
I recall picking flowers with you
and laughing when you fell in the dirt.
I remember the warmth and generosity and feeling of acceptance
that you unconsciously spread.
I miss that.
Those memories have turned sweet with the passing of time,
like wine ripened by age.

I used to think that you were gone forever,
but now, I realize that
you'll always be there for me,
tucked away in a special place in my mind,
a light in a sea of bittersweet loss,
your presence everlasting.

Junior High Poetry

Tonight I walked outside
and heard the cry of a loon,
soft and sweet.
I looked at the swirling sky
and saw your twinkling eyes
filled with youth and wisdom.
I smiled and whispered,
"I love you, Grandma,"
because that was all there was to say.
I know you heard me.

Emily Lieffers is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)



Penitent

Rachel Smith-Gay

Sitting quietly in the farthest corner of the cushioned couch,
I rock numbingly back and forth with legs loosely crossed.

The liquidy smooth orbs that hang from the glowing tree
reflect my swelling impatience.

I stare up toward the cheerful pine,
its deep green needles ensnaring my senses with their forest-fresh scent,
and my eyes become more and more entangled
with the sloppily strewn tinsel.

The pitter-patter of tiny dancing bells angelically jingle
as my dog weaves through the hustle and bustle of gift giving.

As hard as I silently will her not to,
her hands close over the crimson crepe-paper casing
that holds my gift.

Her long, thin fingers carefully tear through the layers of tape,
and my nose crinkles like a roly puppy dog.

I pretend to be interested in my dad's new golf calendar,
But, beyond the tees and sand dunes,
I can see the impact of my gift, hit with the release of a single gasp,
and I rub my still sleepy eyes with vexation.

I don't understand how something so small can bring such joy,
such guilt.

I twiddle the fingers that so easily slipped those crisp, thin bills,
and conceal my shame with a bashful smile.

Her tear-glazed eyes channel her dreams of hope through me,
and it's a pain I would do anything to eliminate.

Her happiness douses me with heavy burdens of conflict,
and her loving embrace washes me

in prickly, flickering flames of remorse
that sear through my soul

as it bubbles and blisters with this burning self-hatred.

My mind turns over once more
as her calls and the smells coming from the kitchen beckon me,
and I shake the loose ribbon and discarded cards from my lap
and head toward the table.

I let out a silent cry that fights to escape through grim tears,
a sound only contained by the rough scrape of my clenched teeth,
and I wish to myself
that I hadn't stolen that money from her purse.



Rachel Smith-Gay is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)

Coming

Jessica Lobe



The doorknob jerks back and forth;
the clicking scares me into the far corner of the room.
The moonlight jumps on its shiny steel
until the movement finally stops.
I hear his footsteps move down the hallway,
heavy boots pounding on the loose floorboards.
My muscles relax, but my mind is still aching,
and my heartbeat reverberates inside my head.
I can hear him yelling,
feel it shaking the walls,
but I can't understand what he's saying.
Why did he come back?
What is he doing here?
"Be strong," she said. "Stay strong for me."
"I will," I promised.
Stay Strong.
Stay Strong.
But still, her words cannot silence my fears,
those voices in my head that keep me up at night.
My legs shake, jostling my head
and loosening my clasped palms.
The room is silent, dark, still,
except for the muffled voices emanating from the next room,
as if smothered by the heavy air surrounding me.
His angry words, her shaking sobs.
Stay Strong.
I can sense the growing anger,
like a pin lurking dangerously close to the bubble.
And then it bursts.
I can hear it: knuckles on skin, fist against face.
I can picture her fall to the floor and cry out in pain.
I can feel the deep thud as her body hits the wooden boards.
Stay Strong. Stay Strong.
More footsteps, louder, louder,
then they stop.

He's Coming.

Jessica Lobe is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)

The Warmth of Winter

Kyra Klein

What's happening?
I've jumped from the sky.
Air is now rushing through me
and pushing me further,
further,
further,
even further now.

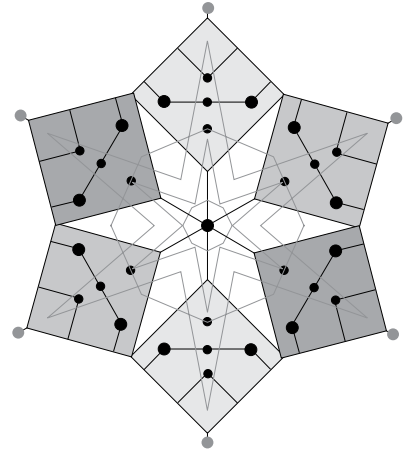
I tumble through the atmosphere in disarray,
perpetuating dizziness sending me downward.
Swimming through a deep blue sea of wind,
I float over large factories,
smoke billowing
and exuding fumes.
The scent suffocates my solidified self.
I gasp for breath.

I pass children
trapped in their classrooms,
staring longingly out of windows.
Their only wish is to be released in joyous harmony,
to greet the tumbling snowflakes.
Still, I plummet further,
further,
further,
even further now.

My crystallized limbs stop twirling
and reach the rusted grass beneath.
A herd of school children rush over
and crowd around my friends and me.

One boy places me on his finger,
but I do not fear him.
Instead, I watch as his rosy red cheeks smile back,
and the glory of winter warms my heart.

I melt
with only one thought in my mind:
the wonder of winter,
the thought
that just one frozen snowflake
can send hope
and bring a smile
to thaw those with frozen hearts
on this winter day.



Kyra Klein is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)

No Comfort

Jessica Climenhaga

The farmer's footsteps were heavy:
plunk,
 plunk,
 plunk.

They left a steady pattern of prints
in the newly fallen snow.
He was in no hurry,
his Joy gone,
dead forever.

The moon was anchored in a sea of black;
it held no comfort for a lost soul.

A whimper seeped from his lips,
and he tried to hide it with a hum.

He tried but did not succeed.

Silence and Loneliness were his companions that night,
like two dark meddlers as he thudded up the battered stair.

He stripped off his muddy shirt.

His ribs were hollow,
wanting his Joy's love.

The TV provided no comfort either.

His shoulders heaved
as his memories flooded back.

They had escaped the deep vaults of his mind
to wreak havoc on his heart.

He retreated to his room
and under the blankets,

but his companions offered no love,
no soothing voices,

not a sound to take away the pain,
for Silence

and Loneliness

 give

 no

 comfort.



Jessica Climenhaga is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)

Lies

Suzanne Aronyk

When you told me
you loved me,
you lied.

When you told me
nothing would ever come between us,
you lied.

When you promised
you would never leave me,
you lied.

When you told me
you were unbreakable,
you lied.

When you told me
you were with friends
when you were really at the hospital,
you lied.

When you said to me
that everything was fine,
you lied.

When you said
we'd be together forever,
you lied.

When you said
it wasn't cancer,
you lied.

When you said
you weren't going to die
for a long, long time,
that was the biggest lie of all.



Suzanne Aronyk is a Grade 9 Student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)

Fly Free

Kelsey Stephenson

Stare at the window
Half-materialized bars fill the view
They grow clearer every day
As do the chains on my wrists
I can feel them tightening
Closing in on my soul
Curl in on myself
I hate the fetters placed on me
By expectation and status
I have no real voice
My cries go unnoticed in the dark
One more among millions I'm
Certain exist side by side
But not touching or sharing
All the worse for not knowing and
Alone in our private hells
Clutch at a book
My book,
Holding everything I need to survive
Memories, music, thoughts, pictures
More intimate than any mere diary
I have a way, after all
The inaudible voice of the pen
Shouting from the paper
I won't let them hold me down
For any barrier can be transcended
(If one has but the proper tool)
The chains circling my soul
D i s s i p a t e
They aren't there if I
Refuse to allow myself to be held
I'll soar on the pages
And leave it all behind
All the doubts and fears the
Nagging whine of critics
The whispering of despair
The inability to cry out and be heard
I've found my wings
No more prison of apathy
I've broken free to fly forever



Kelsey Stephenson is a Grade 10 student at Jasper Place School in Edmonton. (Lana Black, teacher)

Myself

Kelsey Stephenson

You ask me for myself
In one word
What am I?

All well and good

But, which word?
One to reflect the reason
The personality, what I love?
My career?
How can you describe
In a single word
(All the looping traces
Elegant streamlines of mind)
The whole of your existence?

It's practically impossible

For you don't know all my levels
Shades of meaning or
My platforms and strands of connecting thought
You can't see the shapes
Defined by lack
Or the spirals that bridge
Each and every layer
Into a single indescribable whole
You see only a few winding stairs
Only a few floors
Perhaps not by intention
But your field of view is small
Limited in scope by what I show
(Or not, like one-way glass)
How can I describe in a single sound
All the branches and twisting trains of ideas
All the interests, things I have done
Everything that is me
When I'm not sure myself?



Kelsey Stephenson is a Grade 10 Student at Jasper Place School in Edmonton. (Lana Black, teacher)

I Am

Kait Young

I am the angel from your nightmares
And the butterfly in the field
I am the monster in your closet
And at the same time your guardian angel

I'm a changing being
Morphing colour at will
Able to be the best and worst
The one you love to hate

I am a poet
And an artist
Of words
And Feelings

I'm a creative being
Changing thoughts into words
Able to show the world how I feel
The voice of the minority

I am the breath of fresh air
And the cool wind on your back
I am a watcher of the world
And a pair of ears for those who cannot hear

I'm a unique being
Changing sounds into words
Able to make you feel emotions
And question who you are

I am a musical goddess
And a lover of lyrics
Of anthems
And emotions

I'm a sound-fuelled being
Changing sounds into feelings
Able to lose myself in the beat and rhythm
And not care who hears me

I am a highway out of your world
A chance to let go and leave everything behind
I am a raindrop on your parade
A dose of reality when you need one

I'm a calming being
Changing life for the better
Able to protect you when needed
And show you the way when you're lost

I am a bird in the sky
And a hawk watching carefully
Of everyone's actions
And how they treat the world

I'm a different being
Changing the world in the way I know how
Able to be anything you need
And everything you don't think you need

Kait Young is a Grade 10 student at Jasper Place School in Edmonton. (Lana Black, teacher)



Mirror's Eye

Kelsey Stephenson

Look in the mirror
(Silver disk of bubbled glass
Does it reflect the truth or
What the oval eye sees on the surface?)

Rest my head silently
Against cool, steel silk
Trying to find
Searching inside for
That elusive glimmer of
What I believe is true
(Don't know what to believe anymore)

Gently tilt my head up
Stare into the ice-rimmed glass
Frosted panes presenting
Skin-deep double before
Slipping quietly down to
Shatter suddenly
(Metallic death cry of
Refracting silica and
Warped steel frame)

Thousands of
Twisted and broken
Sharp serrated shards
Tiny slivers of cutting intensity
Each reflecting differently
An eye or brows
Fractured faces staring back
All the same just
Different in aspect but
Which of these
Severing pieces
(Stained crimson from punctures)
Embedded in bare tender feet is
The one thing I long to find?

Which jagged edge is
The keen blade of truth that
I desperately try to see among
Clever deceptions and shadowed distorting
Half-lost images that
Obscure the frantic
Frenzied search for
Something that mightn't even be there



Kelsey Stephenson is a Grade 10 student at Jasper Place High School in Edmonton. (Lana Black, teacher)

Oracle

Kelsey Stephenson

I see the possibilities
So many, each different
The slightest variation
Sending ever-widening ripples

Standing in reverie
Looking inside
Let the voice of prophecy
Work its way through me

Fly away the veil
Come back to the living
Peek away the darkness
Let the flaming light shine through!

Eyes burning away the shadows
That lie over fate's threads
I know each twist and turn
The oracle has all the answers

A gift to see the future?
No, 'tis a curse!
To live a predestined lie
Only going through the motions, half alive

I know each action's end
There's no escape
Every possibility is covered
I know how it all plays out

No choice, no chance
Little more than a cornered rat
I see each day till the day I die
Laid out neatly for viewing

Change, anarchy, uncertainty!
A blessing of oblivion
Already I'm insane
For who doesn't want to know?

We all wish to see beyond
Only the crazed call for chaos
Ones such as me
Do you still want my answers?



Kelsey Stephenson is a Grade 10 student at Jasper Place High School in Edmonton. (Lana Black, teacher)

[herbestfriends]

Kait Young

her heart broke in two
[twopieces]
cried so many tears
blotted so much makeup
broken shattered world
her life gone to hell

she held that razor in her hand
[shewantedtodie]
her big brothers were nothing but fake
those dreams she told them
those tears she cried for them
[withthem]
were all pointless
stupid

nothing could fix the pain
[ithurtsobad]
it crippled her soul
naïve dense teenager
innocent hopeless dreams
fantasy and reality
[blurredshadedmixed]

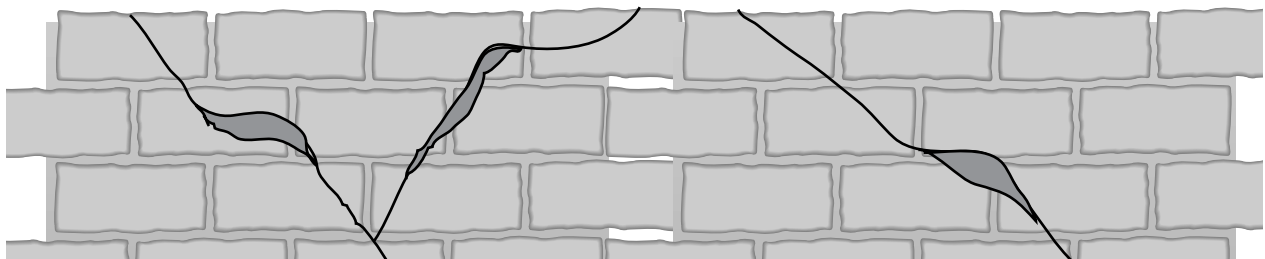
she was the one who made it stop
[madetheworldstop]
simple questions
she didnt want answered
[butknewhadtobe]
those answers killed her

a year spent on them
[twelvemonthsfiftytwoweeks]
it still hurts
even to bring it up
to think about it
[sheblocksitout]
what she doesnt think about
doesnt have to hurt
[andhurtitdoes]

she remembers it now
[onthiscoldnight]
painful hauntings of her past
of her darkest day
[darkestmoment]
she doesnt want sympathy
doesnt need tears
this is her way of talking
[herwayofventing]

staring at the cracks in the wall
[tearsslipdownhercheeks]
pearly white tears
cold and salty
falling down her skin
[myskin]
as she remembers her past
her brothers
[herbestfriends]

Kait Young is a Grade 10 student at Jasper Place High School in Edmonton. (Lana Black, teacher)



Dreams

Austin Bruce

Last night I had a dream,
Of you and I together.
Both of us were happy,
We'd stay like this forever.

We walked out on the beach
And stayed up after two.
I whispered in your ear
And said that I love you.

But little did I know
It was good to be true.
I'll always have to dream
Of holding onto you.

I thought I was in heaven
Until the morning came.
My hopes had been shattered
And went up like a flame.

After every single dream,
I wake up all alone
And feel the worst pain
That I've ever known.

The pain of being lonely,
The pain of being teased,
It's the pain I feel often,
The pain that's never eased.

My feelings are for you
And will be 'till the end.
My heart is in pieces,
But with you it will mend.

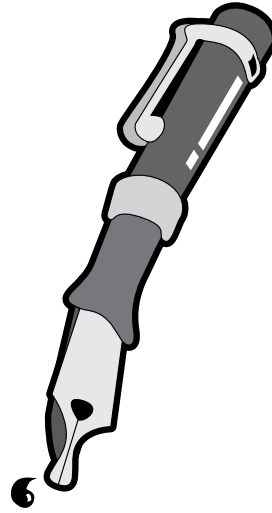
Austin Bruce is a Grade 10 student at Winston Churchill High School in Lethbridge. (Cayley King, teacher)



I am a Writer

Tracey Zucchelli

Built to perceive,
Taught to deceive.
A victim of my own device,
Yet, still, I'm forced to sacrifice.
Life lived through a pen,
Never face the world again.
Don't try to understand,
As life slips through my hands.
I never knew the world you knew,
Yet, I'll sit back and write through you.
Fixated with perfection,
Headed in the wrong direction.
My true self never sees the light,
I am a writer, and I will write.



Tracey Zucchelli is a Grade 10 student at Winston Churchill High School in Lethbridge. (Cayley King, teacher)

Temptation

Tracey Zucchelli

Things that feel so right,
Seem so very wrong.
I'm tired, confused and lost,
No will to carry on.

The beaten path obscured,
The wicked lay in wait.
I feel their fiery eyes,
Depict my very fate.

A fallen comrade lies,
Beneath the twisted trees,
While the faint scent of temptation,
Dances atop the breeze.



Tracey Zucchelli is a Grade 10 student at Winston Churchill High School in Lethbridge. (Cayley King, teacher)

Reassurance

Don Garry

At his desk
 he marvelled
 as sunshine decorated the window
 and made flavours on the floor
 of his writing room.

Its smooth golden fingers
reawakened his emotions,
drew images from his mind
and dropped them delicately
 on the page.

The warmth of that gentle light
 filled him,
 revitalized him
 and seduced the words from his pen.

But he knew that this was tenuous,
as fleeting as butterfly dreams,
 because,
 too suddenly,

blue-black shadows descended,
 destroying the dream state,
 fluctuating moods,
 dressing things differently
 and drawing away the life force
 that made the ink flow.

The dark spaces opened
to swallow the messages
 and leave instead
 lingering doubts
 and the stark realization
 that he was trapped inside a skin cell
with fragile words
 the only way to break through.

And
 at the very moment
that these thought predators closed on him,
he glanced up
 and saw
 that the house across the street
 couldn't quite hide
 the light
 that pink-etched the edge
 of a perfect cloud.



Don Garry is a teacher at McKernan School in Edmonton.

Childhood Memories

Kurtis McNally

I have lived in La Glace, Alberta, for all of my early childhood. I remember one day, I was in the house playing games, when my brother's cat ran away. When we had to go to bed, my cat jumped up on my bed and stayed all night. If mom and the principal had let me, I would have taken my cat to school with me. His name was Peaker. My cat is one of my favourite memories.

One of my favourite memories started in the summer when I was five. I learned to ride my two-wheeled bike. Riding my bike was the beginning of lots of new opportunities for me. I practised riding until I felt comfortable going around town. I could go up and down the roads as much as I wanted. Riding my bike gave me freedom from my house and time to be alone.

Sometimes I would keep up with other friends, but usually I liked to go fast and get it over with and go at my own speed so I did not have to stay in the group. I liked to get my bike really muddy, so I could go to the car wash and clean it and then go out to find some more mud. We also rode to the library every week to choose the books we wanted to read.

There were at least three or four different playgrounds in La Glace. We rode our bikes to the playground to play on the new equipment. Mom, Brandon and I liked to go to the bottle depot too. Brandon and I carried lots of bottles on the handlebars, and mom walked with us. I liked to help sort bottles and take them in to the bottle depot. We exchanged them for money so that we could spend it on candy at the store. We would ride straight there. The store was called the Co-op, and I went to the store and helped shop for food every week with mom.

When it was September, I had to go to Grade 1, where I met new friends. Some of them were Sam, Timon, Max and Nathan. We biked a lot and played games. We did not get a lot of homework on Mondays or Tuesdays, but the rest of the days, I had a lot of language arts, math, social studies and science homework. The homework made me mad, and I could not stand it any more, so when school was over, I had a good summer. I did cool stuff like biked around town, went to the car wash and the parks, and played games with my friend Nathan on all days of the week. When next September came, my brother and I were home-schooled. We got up at 7:00 a.m. and we started at 7:10 a.m. We did language arts, math, social studies and science, and we were done by 12:00 every day. Some days, my brother and I went to the school at 10:05 a.m. Later, we moved to Grande Prairie and went to Crystal Park. I went there for Grade 3 and 4. My teachers were very fun, and they did not give a lot of homework. My brother's teachers were fun, but they gave a lot of homework.



Kurtis McNally is a Grade 8 student at I. V. Macklin Public School in Grande Prairie. (Heather McIlroy, teacher)

Escape!

Camille Ensminger

A scream pierced the cold air. She raced through the dense trees, her pursuers close behind. Blinded by branches and leaves, she ran faster and faster in fear of her life. The pursuers were closing in on her, and, without a moment to lose, she dropped to the ground behind a bush, hoping that they would pass her. But luck was not on her side. They spotted her, and, once again, her life was in danger. Fleeing, she could hear the thud of steps behind her like the words pounding in her head: *I must live! I must get there in time! I must be safe!*

The cold wind was howling, and the full moon shone brightly as she narrowly escaped one of her pursuers. Despite the darkness, she knew the way well. Zigzagging this way and that, panicking as they came ever closer, she frantically tried to lose them, but, like hounds on a chase, they stayed right behind, closing the distance between them. Suddenly, there was an eerie silence, and she realized with relief that they were no longer following her. Luckily for her, they had stopped to drink, but not for long. She was exhausted, and beads of sweat ran down her face. She knew that she had to get a head start, but fatigue won her over. She rested, her senses attuned to the slightest sound or movement. Then, she heard a twig crack and ducked behind a bush to avoid being seen. When she thought that it was safe, she cautiously emerged from her hideaway, but it was too soon. They saw her and changed their course through the trees to reach her. Only a miracle could save her now.

Desperate to escape from them, she ran wildly ahead. As she dodged through trees and underbrush, she suddenly became aware that she didn't recognize where she was. Somehow, she had veered off the path she knew. *The wrong way! It's the wrong way! I must find the trail!* If she didn't find her way back quickly, she would miss it. An owl hooted close by, startling her. She felt watching eyes upon her, bright eyes following her, whichever way she turned, and the back of her neck prickled. Tangled, crooked branches reached out for her as she ran, grasping and tearing at her. Gnarled trees were transformed into hideous shapes, awful beasts joining the pursuit and blocking her way. Twisting and turning, stumbling over roots and falling, she made her way through the tangled maze and veered to her left. Then, hope rose as she again found the trail.

Just a little longer now. Her breath came in gasps. She looked behind her, seeking them among the trees. Their shadows moved closer, imposing over hers like fearsome, looming giants, blocking out the moonlight. She fled, panting for air. She could hear their rough breathing behind her. Could they smell her fear? Horrible thoughts raced through her head, thoughts of what would happen to her if she did not escape. *Help*, she prayed. *Please help me!* She didn't know how much longer she could last. Her legs were aching, and each step was painful. Her lungs were exploding as she breathed deeply, gasping for air, when she saw it. *Yes! At last! Only a few more steps*, she thought, *and I'll be safe. Almost there! So close, so close!*

But it was too late. Struck between her shoulder blades, she cried out and crumpled to the ground, mere footsteps from her refuge.

"Cut!" the director called. "It's a keeper!"



Camille Ensminger is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)

The Bus

Ben Hayward

The boy did not look up. He remained stretched out, feet up, nose buried in a comic book, lounging on the seat behind the bus driver. He seemed oblivious to everything and everyone around him. Sarah sucked air between clenched teeth. Didn't this kid care about anyone? Could he not see her struggling under the weight of her Christmas shopping?

She cleared her throat loudly. "Excuse me, young man, but I have several parcels, not to mention a baby to manage. Would you mind moving to the back of the bus?" Her voice was as sticky as a cinnamon bun. "You might just think of it as your Christmas present to me."

The boy looked up from his comic book, shrugged and shuffled to the back of the bus.

"Don't mind him," the bus driver consoled. "Let me help you with those parcels. You just mind the little one."

Even after Sarah had settled in with baby Mathew on her lap and her packages were arranged neatly on the seat behind her, it took her a while to regain her composure.

"My car died on me in that last intersection," she said at last to the bus driver. "It's a total white out. You can't see a thing out there. This day has been an absolute nightmare," she continued, wrapping Mathew more tightly in his sheep-covered blanket. "I don't normally take the bus. Where is its last stop?"

"I suppose it depends where you need to go," the driver replied.

"I need to get to 31 Belvedere Road. It's up in Kensington Estates," Sarah explained.

"Oh, I think I know where that is," the driver continued, squinting through the wind-whipped whiteness, "but I am afraid I can't take you there. Why don't you just get yourself and the baby warm and come along for the ride?"

"What?" Sarah scoffed. "No, I want to get off."

"I'm afraid that would be quite impossible," said the bus driver, slowly and evenly, as though the windshield wipers were metronomes marking his rhythm.

"Let me out!" Sarah hollered. She got up from her seat and started to pry the door open.

The door swung open. Sarah was faced with complete blackness—complete emptiness—outside. She looked back in shock at the bus driver. He was still squinting at the road ahead, intent on finding his way.



Sarah stepped back from the threshold, and the door closed. Through its window, she could again see familiar houses and buildings flash by.

"That's impossible," she said with a trembling voice.

"Yes," said the bus driver, "quite impossible to get out."

"No," gasped Sarah.

The driver laughed, "You see, the correct answer would be *yes*. *Yes, I am stuck on a bus going somewhere, and I need to find a way to get off it.*"

"This isn't real," said Sarah.

"What is real?" replied the bus driver, still not looking away from the road. "All beings sleep, Sarah,

Junior High Prose—Grade 9 Winner

and, within this sleep, they dream. Both the dream world and the waking world are always with us. Who is to say which of them is real? Sometimes people dream of things that they live in the conscious mind, and sometimes they live things in the conscious mind that are mere shadows of their dreams. Right now, you are living in both worlds.”

“I am dead.”

“Ah, you are quicker than many of the others, Sarah. Yes, in the intersection of 104th and 8th, on Christmas Day, you were in an accident with a drunk driver named Luke Abram, and you died—you and your son Mathew.”

“You are God,” Sarah said.

“Well, no actually. You see, I am just the bus driver. I work for God.” The bus driver laughed and added, “Well, I guess you could say I am more like Peter. I have the keys to that door over there. For some, I think it leads into heaven. I really don’t know. I have never gone through it.”

“But it leads nowhere. Didn’t you see?”

“Well, I hear that the door leads to where and who you are—only more so. Before you go through it, I suggest you get close to God. He is in the back there, reading his comic book.”

Sarah moved to the back of the bus and sat down beside the small boy. The boy looked up from his comic book and smiled.

After some time, Sarah spoke, “Is there any way I can save my baby—my son, Mathew?”

God paused for a moment. Then he said, “Why, yes, you can leave him here with me. He reminds me very much of my own son who went through that door two thousand years ago. We will take good care of each other.”

“But I don’t want to leave him. I can’t,” Sarah pleaded.

“Well, I suppose we could use a new bus driver. I think Joe’s ready to move on, and it sounds like you might just be able to help us find our way.”

“Yes,” said Sarah. “Yes, I think I can.”

Ben Hayward is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)

Neko Love

Victoria Robinson

I open the door. My cat's already scratching at the carpet as I take off my shoes, feet exhausted from a day's work. My Neko then rolls over, exposing her full belly, a daily routine. I rub the exposed fur with my foot, too tired to bend down. I sigh and pad down the hall, leaving her lying there looking for more. When she realizes there is none, she gets up and follows me. I run the water, feeling the temperature with my finger. I then stick the silver kettle under the flowing stream. I plug my kettle in and then go to the living room.

I now turn my attention to my cat and her full, brilliant green eyes, silent and ancient, wise and mystical. She seems to smile at me, as though to say, "You can rest now; it's been a long day," then she winks at me and rubs up against my leg, her purring vibrating through my bones. As I bend down to pat her, my kettle hisses for attention. I gather her in my arms as I return to the kitchen. I pour myself a cup of warm tea and add milk and sugar. I give my cat some milk too, just for being her. I sip my tea as she laps up the milk with relish. Finished, she looks at me, and we both return to the living room, where she lies in the afternoon sun. I sigh; she's not really a sit-in-your-lap type of cat, more an around cat. I dangle a piece of string in front of her sleeping form, and the gentle brush upon her whiskers wakes her up. In a flash, she is fighting with the string. Once she's killed it, and it's lying in a heap of red strands, she looks up at me, asking if she did a good job. I, of course, reward her by giving her a few pats.

Now that I think about it, I wish I had given her a hug. I shake my head and step inside the house. There is no jingling of a cat collar to greet me; no grey, tiger-striped cat either. It's just me and my old silver kettle. I leave the tea sitting as I go to the living room and seat myself in my favourite chair. I think about my God, and I can almost see my Neko lying in the flitting sunrays that dance upon the carpet that she loved so.

Victoria Robinson is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Don Garry, teacher)



Remember When

Kait Young

I remember when. Your hair was set above your head, and you wore pure white. When you walked down that aisle, I could barely breathe. It was like a fairy tale, you walking down the aisle to me. That smile you gave me when your dad placed your hand in mine made me feel so much less nervous. The words floated out of your mouth, not stumbling on a line or a word. And mine. My vows were shaky; could you tell I was nervous? I was. So nervous. I was worried you were going to think you had made the wrong choice. And when the minister finally told me to kiss you, I was so happy. So happy that we were finally together.

I remember when. Our first year together. You and me, trying to live together like one. We'd have stupid fights over stupid things, and I slept on the couch so many nights. And it killed me to hear you cry yourself to sleep. And then we finally achieved that balance of life. And every morning I thanked God that I woke up with you beside me, my sleeping angel. And then you woke. You'd smile at me, and I'd press my lips to yours, and I'd be two hours late to work. But I wouldn't have it any other way.

I remember when. When I found that pair of baby shoes on my pillow. And you just looked at me from the doorway, your eyes filled with tears. I don't know how you could ever think I wouldn't be happy. I was ecstatic. I was more than ecstatic. And we dealt with those awful mornings, and the stupid checkup and the moodiness together. And you'd apologize for snapping at me every night, and I'd just smile. I held your hand in that white room, and I was ready to faint. But you were so strong, and you gave me my son that day. I was a father for the first time.

I remember when. That first day of school. You cried on my shoulder as he walked into that classroom. He was growing up, and you hated it. Even though you wouldn't tell me, I knew you did. And that night, when you cried yourself to sleep, I held you close and tried to calm you. Because I hurt just as much. Our baby was growing up. And that scared me. Scared me so much. But I knew I'd always have you by my side no matter what happened.

I remember when. You tried to be strong for the kids, but inside you were breaking. And as I watched that casket lower into the ground, I couldn't understand why I never told my parents how much they meant to me before they died. We did that three other times; each time was as hard as the last. And when your mom died, I couldn't do anything but hold you while you cried. And God did it kill me to see you in this much pain, in so much agony. But you were never alone. Never.

I remember when. You held my hand as we watched our little girl go out on her first date. They walked down that brick path and drove off in that car, and a little piece of my heart drove off too. I stayed up until she came home, until I heard her footsteps on the stairs. And as much as I pleaded with you to let me go check on her, you wouldn't. You knew that she needed her independence. So we fell asleep that night, you wrapped in my arms so if I went and checked on her, you'd wake up. You were always a smart woman.

I remember when. When our eldest graduated. And you clapped proudly as he walked across that stage and accepted his diploma. That picture still hangs in my office, the three of us on that night. And when my baby daughter stood on that stage and addressed her graduating class two years later, I was the one who cried, and you were the one who handed me tissues. The picture of the four of us, our family, is tucked into the dresser mirror, and every morning as I comb my hair, I look into the smiling faces.

I remember when. You straightened his tie and kissed him on the cheek. I shook his hand and sat down beside you as he took his place at the front of the church. And we stood as the march was played,

and our future daughter-in-law walked down that aisle. I saw myself in our son that day. The same nervousness, the same stuttering. But I also felt hope. Hope for the future. And that night he asked to dance with his mom, and you cried through the whole song. That night was the loneliest I've ever felt, even though you slept beside me. Our baby was all grown up. He was married and having his own family, his whole life ahead of him. We raised him right.

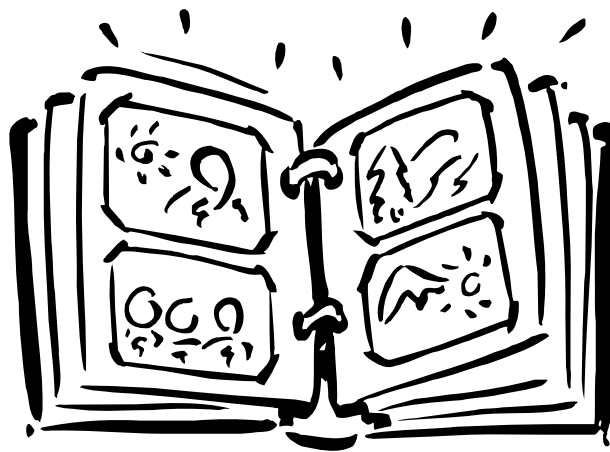
I remember when. I walked our baby girl down the aisle. And she looked so much like you, the same nervous smile. I wanted to cry. You held nothing back. Sitting in the front row, you couldn't stop the tears. You cried enough for both of us. And when I danced with her that night, her face lit up when I told her she looked like her mom on our wedding night. Her husband danced with her next. And that's when I realized that everyone was grown up, and we were back where we started. Just the two of us.

I remember when. You held our first grandchild. And you handed her to me. I was so scared I'd drop her. But you nodded, and I took her, and a small pink hand clamped around my pinkie. Our little girl sat on the couch, head on her husband's shoulder as she watched us. She didn't need to tell me, but I could see that she knew this was the life. This was the best life anyone could have hoped for.

I remember when. We babysat the grandchildren, all four of them. You'd bake them cookies all day, and I'd play outside in the snow with them. And at night, we'd sit by the fire with two on each our laps and tell them stories about their parents growing up or us growing up. And you'd just laugh when I told them about our first date. And when it came to tucking them in at night, you'd kiss each of them, and then, when you thought I was asleep, you'd check on them once more just to be sure.

I remember when. That last night, you were lying in the hospital. And you looked so tired and worn out, but you refused to falter your smile. And I sat there beside you, stroking your hair while we reminisced about all the good times. Never once did you regret anything. And that final breath you took, I watched as your eyes slowly closed, the same smile on your face. And the last words I heard were "I love you." The tears flowed down my face, and I realized that we lived it well. We really did. And as I write this, I know I'll see you soon. I know you'll be waiting for me. And I can't wait much longer.

Kait Young is a Grade 10 student at Jasper Place School in Edmonton. (Lana Black, teacher)



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