



*The Hamilton Public Library and  
The Hamilton Spectator  
present  
The Power of the Pen*

**AWARD WINNERS**

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Hamilton Public Library and  
The Hamilton Spectator  
Power of the Pen  
2001

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## JUDGES

## SPONSORS

## FOREWORD

On behalf of the Hamilton Public Library and the Hamilton Spectator, I would like to extend my congratulations to all who participated in the 7<sup>th</sup> annual Power of the Pen Creative Writing Competition. We are proud to publish your stories and your poetry.

This year, 363 entries were submitted and the award winners were selected by talented local judges. Thank you to our final judges: Dale Behnke, Gillian Chan, Charles Cushing, Gérard Dion, Dr. John Ferns, Wade Hemsworth, Eleanore Koysdar, Chris Pannell, Marilyn Pilling, Bernadette Rule, Kerry Schooley, Gisela Sherman, Michelle Steeves, and John Terpstra.

A special thank you to our program partner and sponsor, the Hamilton Spectator for their ongoing support of this important youth initiative. Libraries, school boards, members of the business community and local community organizations have worked together to make the Power of the Pen a success story. Our program contributors include: Bryan Prince Bookseller, Canada Post Heritage Club, Hamilton Association for the Advancement of Literature, Science and Art, Little Caesars, and Starbucks Coffee Company.

This year we are proud to announce a new poetry award to complement the Maitland Banting Silver Quill Award. The Hamilton Association for the Advancement of Literature, Science and Art will be presenting a cash prize to the first recipient of the Hamilton Association Young Poet's Award.

To everyone who submitted an entry – congratulations.

A special thank you to the Power of the Pen committee: Joanne Pedicone, Vera Szabo, Usha Rangachari, Theresa McCabe, Dale Ilijow and Karen Hartog.

Helen Benoit  
Service Youth Coordinator  
Hamilton Public Library

## Fire

by Simone Deahl

The fire thrusts  
Out its paper-thin blue-veined hands,  
Grasping for air  
And sending up showers of sparks  
To burn the stars.  
Golden power roars  
As flames dance along  
Wooden bridges  
To the glowing inferno.

## The Perfect Playmate

by Velvet Eves

"I just wanna play" I sighed, as I sat on the stairs with my hands on my chin. Nobody likes playing with me. They are always too busy with things in their own lives. My older brother is always talking to girls on the telephone or playing on the computer. My mom is always doing daily chores, and my dad is always sitting behind his desk with loads of paperwork to mark. Nobody ever has time for me! I wish I could have a younger sister, then I would not be the youngest, and I would also have someone to play with me. A younger sister is the perfect idea. She could sleep in my room, we could giggle in the middle of the night, share special secrets and we could even braid each others hair. She is the answer to my boredom! I wonder what my dad would think of the idea.

My dad was easy to find. He was in his study hiding behind a stack of books and paperwork. "Daddy", I said in my sweet little voice. "Can we play?"

"I got to finish marking these tests, before I can do anything", replied my dad. "Sorry honey maybe later".

"Well if I had a younger sister, Dad, I would have someone to play with all the time," I answered.

"Any more mouths to feed and I'll be here till next Tuesday," was my father's stern reply. "I'll need to take on another job."

"Well she could wear all my hand-me-downs," I told him. He wrinkled his forehead, and asked if I had any homework to do? "They do not give homework to 8-year-olds!" I shouted, and stomped out of the room.

Maybe I asked the wrong person first. Maybe I need an ally. I bet I could get my brother to want a sibling too. "If I have to I'll even settle for a baby brother" I thought. My brother was a little harder to find. Where could he be? He's not in the kitchen filling his face. He's not on the phone talking to his girlfriend. I stopped to listen to the sounds in the house. No loud music, so he can not be in his bedroom. No buzz from the television, so he's not in the family room. Finally I recognized the muffled sounds of racing engines. I should have known, he's on the computer. I approached him from behind and called out his name!

"Oh man, you made me crash! Anyway's what do you want?" he asked.

"I think we need an additional member to the family," I replied.

"Four legged or electronic kind?" he asked.

"No, I was thinking it would be fun to have a little brother," I said hopefully.

"No! I already have to share my computer time with you!" he replied.

"But you can teach him how to play baseball when he is older!" I answered.

"Not interested" was his final reply and that ended the conversation. As I walked out of the room, I thought to myself that his opinion really doesn't matter at all!

"My mom is the one I have to convince" I thought, and I know where I can find her. She was in the garden watering the plants. My voice broke the silence in the air. "Mom, I have nothing to do," I whined.

"You can help me pull out all the weeds," she replied matter-of-factly.

"No, I mean someone to play with!" I piped.

"You have lots of toys," she replied.

"I know but I want someone human, like a baby sister." I sighed.

"Babies are a lot of work," she answered.

"I could help," I interrupted. "I know how to change diapers and I could help you feed her."

"Well that's what you said about the dog, and I'm the one walking it. Sorry honey, you're the last of the line in this house", said my mother. I sadly moped away. But my mom called me back. "Why don't you go get your box of paints and some paper and we'll paint some pictures of the flowers." Painting and flowers always brighten my day. I skipped off and found my paint box. While we painted, my mom asked me a couple of questions about why I wanted a baby sister.

That evening after supper, my mom went out and did some errands. Later she told us while she was browsing through aisles at Costco she saw the perfect solution. She picked it up and examined it, and added it to her grocery cart and hurried home. I saw her come in the driveway and went out to help her carry in the groceries. As I approached her car she shooed me back into the house. I wondered what was up. Maybe it's a surprise, but what? It's not my birthday and it's no where near Christmas! I could see her struggling with a big box. When she came in she asked me to go get the box of my old baby clothes. I wondered why? She wasn't going to give them away was she? No, not my precious baby clothes! I dragged the box all the way down from the attic, bumping each stair as I came down. As I hit the bottom step, my mom called me into the kitchen. There on the dining room table was a large box. As I moved closer my eyes lit up! I reached in the box and pulled her out. She was perfect, she looked exactly like a baby sister. Her sweet little face, her dimple nose, and her baby blue eyes stared back at me. She was the same size and weight of a new baby. I rocked her back and forth as if she was real.

"I think your baby clothes might even fit her," my mom said in the background. My mom rummaged through the box and said "Your first pyjamas are in here somewhere. You could get her ready for bed."

My father and brother joined us in the kitchen. "What's all the squealing about," my father asked. I turned around and showed him my new baby sister.

"It's just a doll," my brother said wrinkling up his nose in disgust.

"No it's my perfect playmate," I said as I hugged her closer.

## The Trailer

by Alyssa DiDomenico

The lake is a gorgeous sight,  
in the morning and at night,  
the frogs are on their lily pads, and fish are jumping in the lake,  
this happens every day when I awake

The people there are extremely nice,  
they know everything about camping so you can go to them for advice,  
if they know you or not they will still say hello,  
Everyone there is friendly and cheerful and that I know

Every Saturday you can play horseshoes at the park,  
you will love it so much you will play until dark,  
At the park you can do almost anything and just have fun,  
you can throw a frisby, play catch, play any sport or fast and free you can run

When you go to the beautiful, sandy beach,  
you can make castles, shapes, and mudpies with water at your reach,  
then you can jump in the lake and have a swim,  
and when you get out of the water you will be dripping from every limb

At the front you can purchase an ice cream sandwich, a popsicle or a chocolate bar,  
and you can either exercise your legs by walking or you can use a golf cart, bicycle or a car,  
I guarantee it will satisfy your longing desire for anything sweet,  
But be careful when you eat because you might get a cold headache and have to take a seat

Every lot has lawn ornaments and patio lights which are sensational at night,  
each individual lot has it's own unique sparkling pattern of lights that are so bright,  
the Northern lights are what they would remind you of without a doubt,  
they take you away so you can forget what everyday life is all about

At night the stars come out, the crickets cricket and the frogs ribbit,  
and there around the campfire your family, friends and you will sit,  
you can watch the purple, blue, orange, red and yellow flames,  
and roast wieners, and marshmallows as the fire tames

## A Maiden's Revenge

by Joanna Coffin

I dropped to my knees as tears silently rolled down my cheeks. I stroked my poor dragon's back as I stared at his headless neck. Anger raced through my body like bullets. I rose to my feet, now filled with hatred instead of sorrow.

"How dare you!" I commanded to the boastful knight. "How dare you be too arrogant to realize that the defenseless dragon you just killed was my dearest and most loyal friend". I pivoted to storm away.

"Fair Maiden! Don't leave me here, bemused and befuddled! I do not understand the situation you have just described to me," explained the knight who carried the name St. George. As he eased closer to me I edged away, glaring at him with a look of pure ice. He extended his arm to comfortingly touch my shoulder, but I pulled away, filled with absolute disgust.

"Don't be upset Maiden!" St. George endlessly exclaimed, now running after me as I dashed away, my cheeks flushed and once again tears running freely down my face.

"Wait!" St. George yelled again, but I wouldn't surrender. This beast of a man who had murdered my best companion was chasing after me, begging for forgiveness.

Right then and there I decided that I would not let this slide off my back and forget it had ever happened.

I forced myself to go faster, crying over my shoulder, "I will get my revenge St. George! Just you wait!" With those words I hurried off, not even looking back to see the uneasy expression on St. George's face.

When I arrived back home my body was aching and I was out of breath. I constructed a revenge plot that I would show the other dragons the next day. I smiled to myself as I reviewed the plan over in my mind.

"Revenge is sweet," I mumbled. With that, I climbed into bed and fell asleep instantly, awaiting the adventure ahead of me.

I awoke the next morning with the sun shining through my small window and the lovely bluebirds singing happily. I giggled as a pair of playful squirrels chased each other around a shady oak tree. My spirits were soaring and I was getting more and more anxious by the second. An hour later I had set off into the woods to find all the large, scaly, fire-breathing chums of mine resting together in a huge mound.

"Hello," I panted, having ran for the last ten minutes. "Have you heard the dreadful news?"

"Of course we have! The whole forest's been squawking about it!" exclaimed a particularly bulky, scarlet dragon with sorrow reflecting in his eyes.

"Well, I've got a plan that just may terminate our depression," I remarked. All of their faces lit up and a smaller, yet elderly looking dragon rose and advanced closer to me.

"The news you have just presented us is a joy of course, but how are we supposed to achieve these responsibilities?" asked the ancient dragon.

"Gather 'round everyone as I tell you of my plans for St. George," I cheered gladly.

The dragons and I huddled together and I unfolded my goals for us. Besides the occasional "yes" or "okay" I was the only one speaking. We spent the rest of the day preparing for our revenge against the terrible knight. Now we had to wait for the right time for this to happen.

The next day was the time we were all hoping for. I stepped out of my house and sure enough, St. George was standing there with a beautiful bouquet of red roses in his hands.

"Maiden, I would like to apologize for whatever grieving I have caused you. Will you ever forgive me?" St. George asked with hopeful eyes.

An idea came to my mind. What if I could get him to trust me? I would be able to lure him right into our trap. A smile spread across my face as I considered this new thought.

"Yes St. George. I forgive you," I told him. "Would you mind coming for a walk with me?" I asked as innocently as I could be.

"Sure!" St. George replied. He handed me the flowers and we set out for our walk, hand-in-hand. We trekked in silence until we got to the forest's edge.

We were standing there talking about the weather, when all of a sudden a huge dragon jumped out of the forest. St. George grabbed for his sword, but found that he had not brought it with him. He helplessly turned to me, his eyes wide with fear. I flashed him a mischievous smile as the other dragons formed a tight circle around him. In a matter of seconds, the dirty deed was done.

In a way I pitied the knight that was no more, but still believed he had gotten what he deserved.

With those last and final thoughts of St. George, I walked home through the fields and down the path where my dead friend lay beneath us. I bent down upon my knees and whispered to the ground.

"We got our revenge dear friend. May you rest in peace."

## Frustration

by Sophie Hornsveld

Frustration is tangerine orange  
It sounds like heavy rock music when you're trying to sleep  
It tastes like plain boiled spinach  
It feels like a punch in the stomach  
It looks like a rainy day on Monday  
It smells like burnt spaghetti  
Frustration is a flame not catching.

## Departure

by Ling Y. Kong

I rose at dawn. The morning stars were still studded in the sky, and it was not yet light. The hens were still asleep in their nests of straw. I had not slept that well during the night, because my head was too full to sleep. As I sat up on the bed made of mud, built into the dirt floor of our hut, I saw that Mother had already gotten up. She had laid out a bowl of porridge for me, and a steamed bun. This was a treat, because I could not remember many times when I had had enough to eat.

I came to sit at the stone table in the yard, and Mother sat watching me silently. Her hair was already white, and she said not a word. I drank the porridge and gobbled down my breakfast in a moment. By now, Father had risen also, and came to sit with us. His face was grim and expressionless, as usual.

"Are your bags all packed?" Mother asked.

"Yes, they are there inside the house."

"What time will you have to leave?"

"In a while. The bus leaves town in an hour and a half, but I have to get there first."

"Tell Fan-Shen to get the cart ready now."

My Father sat wordlessly, and looked elsewhere. He was happy, no doubt, for my going to the university. Now I can earn more money in the future to send to him when he is old. But he was silent, because he had refused to let me go to high school. What was the use of going to any more school? He thought. To him, it was more useful if I had stayed at home and helped him with the cotton fields, for I was his only son. He had stormed when he heard that I wished to go—about his only son being undutiful, disrespectful, disobedient and irresponsible. I had stood in a corner, not saying a thing, for I was determined to go, because it was the only chance of going out abroad. It was after the pleadings of my relatives that he agreed, and I grasped this change to learn, to open up a new prospect, not only for my own good, but also for the good of my family.

I looked at the old man with wrinkles carved in his face, as he stared elsewhere. Was he regretting that he had been so stubborn as to whether I should go to high school or not? Was he feeling uncomfortable because now that I have proven myself able? I could not tell, for his face was so expressionless and neutral.

I went inside to grab my bags. When I came out, our neighbor had the cart ready outside our wooden, rasping door. I put my bags into the cart, and climbed into it.

Mother stood by my Father, who remained silent.

Fan-Shen let the cows go. The cart ran down the bumpy pathway, past the houses the color of dirt, past the pond at the end of the road, and past the many fields of cotton. I watched all these familiar places pass by as the cart jolted on. The sky was beginning to pale now, and the stars were dim. Soon the sun would rise, and I would be in town, aboard the bus to the city.

I sat in the cart, and gazed out to the edge of the sky. The world was enclosed by a thin grayness, and the crickets still sang among the grass blades. The fields rolled by, and I sighed, thinking of the many years I had spent in this place, which I call home.

Two months ago, I had received the news that I was accepted at the Shandong University. I trembled with emotion. All my life I have been waiting for this moment. This step would bring me out of poverty and hunger, and make me something worthier.

From the time when I was no more than six or seven, my young mind was fixed on an ambition to become more than only ordinary. It was but a far-off dream then. I spent my days fooling around outside with the other little boys—we swam in the pond, caught bugs and caterpillars, playing them with our fingers. We amused ourselves with stones and pebbles, not being able to find any other toys. We ate what we could find, and shouted in the streets.

The pond, then, was clearer, and greener. But the streets have not changed: They are the same dusty and narrow. I have walked down the pathway too many times: I know it too well, the rough surface of the dirt wall, the old paint chipping off the doors leading into the yards. When I was a boy I had poked the old sow in her dirty, smelling pigpen inside Fan-Shen's yard. She was slow and stupid, grunting and rolling in the muck.

The people who live here are my townspeople, people the closest to me in this world. Their lives were simple. Each day they go to the fields to work, from dawn until dusk, and live surrounded by poverty and ignorance as they always have been. It seemed to me so unsatisfying. I wished to see the world, I wished to break out of this circle, and be looked upon as someone who has done something to change his destiny.

I looked at the sturdy back of Fan-Shen. He would never be able to go out into the world, I thought. He would remain in the village all his life. Maybe he is satisfied with that, I thought. Maybe he doesn't like to be more than ordinary.

I dreamed of my life after university. I would be knowledgeable, and I can be a professor. I can teach all day, and read books, and eat good things. I will have respect, and I will have students who listen to me. A smile came to my face. What a life! I thought. I will have money to send to my old parents and my sisters.

The cart has jolted far from the village now. I turned my head to take a last look at the distant, tan-colored town, jumping up and down in my vision. My heart was filled with a mixed, complicated feeling. That is my home, I thought. After all I have been there all my life. There are my townspeople, they had watched me grow up, and we are each of us part of the village—we have been through many years together, through hunger, through poverty, through happiness and through dreariness.

I am not going to be the same as them anymore.

Fan-Shen dropped me off in the center of the town. "So good-bye, Xiang Heng," he said. "You won't forget about us poor, ignorant people will you?"

"No," I said. "I won't."

We shook hands. I felt unusually uneasy. This was my friend, with whom I had grown up. The days we have spent together playing and arguing seems so far away. Now, all of a sudden, we seemed like strangers. He looked at me as someone of a higher position than he. The difference made me writhe with discomfort.

The bus stop was uncommonly crowded. With my bags in my hands, I didn't exactly feel good. I was so far from the place I knew best. My life in university would be far from easy. I have not a cent in my pocket, I am a poor student, and will receive ten yuan from the university each month. I will have to ration out my food and use sparingly. These would be hard years. Yet at the bottom of my heart, there was a proud feeling, and an ambitious hope.

I boarded the bus, carrying my bags, wearing the clothes and shoes my Mother had made. It was an old bus, teeming with noisy people, and filled with a gasoline smell. I sat at the back, ready to take this first step of my long journey. I sat with my bags in my lap, in the noise of the bus. It was only a couple of hours since I left the familiar, quiet home in the poor village, yet that seemed like years ago. I began to think of the new life. No doubt I will face obstacles there, however at that moment I could not think properly. My mind was filled with all sorts of thoughts, full of the past and the future, and then with a great big jolt, the bus began to steer out of the station.

## Memories

by Stephanie Nairn

A memory...

A person, sound, feeling or smell,  
A special occasion, watching the CFL.

Playing Checkers with Grandma on a hot summer day,  
Going to work with dad, riding on the Subway.

Driving to the cottage, sleeping in the car.  
Going to the movies to see Superstar.

The strong smell of freshly baked bread,  
Sleeping on the bottom of a very old bunkbed.

The overwhelming excitement of graduation day,  
Going to California, visiting San Jose.

Shopping in the mall, buying school supplies,  
Winning a writing contest, accepting the Nobel Prize.

Watching a sunset on a tranquil beach,  
Happy you live in a country that grants everyone the freedom of speech.

Forever you have had them, and forever they will remain,  
That small spot in the back of your brain...

...memories.

## Friends Forever

by Raman Kumar

Far away a little town called Westwood was snuggled into the rich countryside. Nothing exciting ever seemed to happen in Westwood but its inhabitants were content with their simple lives. In the morning, the sky was a beautiful golden-orange and at night the moon would shine like a diamond.

Deep in the heart of Westwood, the Williams family lived, in a small but cozy bungalow. The younger son, James Williams was nicknamed "toothpick", because he was so small and skinny. But James was clever – he was only eight but could multiply numbers longer than his name.

"James, you need to give your room a good dusting." said Mrs. Williams one morning. James sighed and walked off to carry out his mother's bidding. When he opened the door to his room, he was shocked to see a short man sitting calmly on his bed. In his hands was one of James' favorite comic books and he was reading it intently.

"Hello James," the man greeted him. He then waved one of his hands and the door behind James suddenly closed.

"Who are you?" James asked nervously.

"My name is Jeremy Quinton, the dragon-hunter. You, James Williams, have been chosen for a unique task," the man replied calmly.

James stared at the man curiously. His eyes were dark-brown and his skin was deeply tanned. His clothes were ragged and patched and his feet were bare.

Summoning up his courage, James asked, "What...what do you mean?"

Jeremy Quinton reached for his pocket and pulled out what seemed to be green dust. He dropped the dust in front of him and the particles exploded into smoke. The smoke completely drowned Jeremy from sight. After the smoke cleared, Jeremy was gone, but there was something else in his place...it was an egg!

James stared intensely at the egg. It was dark-blue with little white spots covering the delicate shell. Suddenly the egg started to crack. A small section on the top of the shell suddenly cracked off. Out of the crack a tiny head popped out. The minuscule creature shattered the rest of the shell from inside and waddled out. It was a baby dragon!

James ran to his phone and slammed the receiver to his ear. He punched in the number of his best friend hastily. When his friend's calm voice came on the line, James shouted, "Justin, you gotta get over here now! Don't ask questions, just run!"

Half a minute later, Justin came bursting through James's bedroom door, "What is it?" he asked breathlessly. Before James could reply, the small dragon had jumped onto Justin's shoulder and started nibbling his ear. Justin screamed and grabbed the dragon by its tail, flinging it across the room. James gasped as the poor little animal hit the wall with a thud, then fell to the ground with a long cut across its forehead.

"You killed it, Justin," James whispered.

"I don't think so. Look at the cut," Justin whispered back. The long cut on the dragon's forehead was slowly disappearing! Carefully, James slipped his hands around the dragon's tiny body and picked her up. The dragon didn't seem to mind, and leapt onto his shoulder. James started laughing because the little blue creature was nibbling *his* ear.

James's mother allowed Justin to stay for the night. The two boys entertained themselves long into the small hours of the night by watching the hilarious antics of the dragon.

Isn't she cute?" laughed Justin, watching the tiny dragon running around and around trying to catch her tail. Quite soon she became so dizzy she fell head over heels.

Justin looked at the dragon seriously, "You know, I think she's grown an inch or two since she came out of the shell."

Finally, the two boys felt exhausted, and pulling their sleeping bags over their heads, they fell into a deep sleep. The minuscule dragon purred like a cat and snuggled herself between the two friends.

"Jamesie! Time to wake up!" came the piercing voice of James's mother. James sleepily unraveled the fluffy sleeping bag from his body and sat up. He scanned his room and spotted the dragon sleeping peacefully on his bedroom's forest-green carpet. James gasped...the dragon had been tiny the night before but now she was about the size of a horse. Sharp golden talons, massive sinewy wings, dagger-sharp teeth and blue eyes deeper than the sea made up the intimidating sight. James shook Justin hard.

"Huh? James? What is it?" Justin asked sleepily.

"The dragon! It's huge!" James yelled.

Justin sat up, "Oh my gosh! You're right!"

"We have to get out of here! She'll kill us."

Justin shouted, "She's coming right for us!" The dragon was bounding towards the frightened James and Justin. Suddenly she came to a dead halt and started licking James's face.

"Hee, hee! Stop it! That's ticklish! Justin, get her off," James exclaimed. Justin tried to pry the dragon from James. He succeeded – but then the dragon began wildly licking Justin! Ten minutes later the dragon was tired of the game and James and Justin lay in a heap with their faces soaked.

"Well, at least she's friendly," chuckled Justin.

James petted the dragon's head and asked, "What do you think we should name her?"

"How about Crystal?"

"Hey, that sounds good!"

"Hello Crystal," Justin smiled.

"Jamesie! What is going on with you boys?" Mrs. Williams' voice was even more piercing this time. The boys looked at each other in panic. What would they do with the dragon? A moment later, the door burst open and in came Mrs. Williams. Crystal was standing right there between the two boys. But Mrs. Williams did not even see her! The boys wondered if perhaps Crystal could make herself invisible to adults. Or maybe because adults do not believe in dragons, they can't see them even when they are under their noses!

A day later James and Justin decided to go for a walk.

"Now you be good," James told Crystal, "You can fly about as much as you like but just stay out of trouble." Crystal replied with a friendly lick and flew out of the open bedroom window.

As the boys walked down the quiet street, they suddenly heard footsteps running towards them. "Hey kids!" came the booming voice of the town's meanest bully, Fangteeth. Justin and James looked back with fear and started running for their lives with Fangteeth at their heels. James suddenly tripped over a stone and sprawled onto the pavement.

"So you thought you could run from me, squirt," came Fangteeth's dangerous voice as he neared James.

"Please Fangteeth, don't hurt me!" James begged.

"How much money you got?" snarled Fangteeth.

"None!"

"Then I guess I'll teach you a lesson you won't forget!" Fangteeth pounced at James. When he was barely an inch away from James's face he was suddenly pulled upwards.

"What the...?" James looked up and saw Crystal holding Fangteeth by his collar in the air.

"Ahhh! A monster!" Fangteeth screamed.

James smiled, "I'll order the dragon to let you go only if you promise never to touch another kid again."

"I promise!!" pleaded Fangteeth.

James nodded, "Crystal, let him go." Fangteeth fell on the ground with a heavy thud. James smiled at Crystal and she landed beside him.

"Thanks Chrissy." Crystal suddenly swept James off her feet and onto her back.

"Crystal, what are you doing?" James gasped. Crystal spread her powerful wings and flew upwards.

Up and up Crystal went. Soon they were flying so far above Westwood that the houses were smaller than ants. Cool air roared in James's ears and he laughed happily. He loved the sensation of being able to fly like a bird...well, like a dragon actually. He reached out his arms and felt the cold, creamy clouds. He opened his mouth and to his astonishment, the clouds tasted just like ice-cream! Crystal suddenly swooped downwards and James accidentally slipped off her back! He screamed as he fell hundreds of miles a second. But just then he felt a soft body beneath him. Crystal had caught him!

This was the first of many flights Crystal and James took together. In the following months they visited many parts of the world. They went to the steamy jungles of Africa, the frozen plains of Antarctica, and saw the colossal pyramids of Egypt. But one day, Crystal and James set off on a trip that would be very different from the others.

Crystal was moving impatiently in James's bedroom, looking at his bedroom's clock and giving little grunts. She then suddenly bounded towards James and swooped him onto her back. She took a mighty leap out of the window, spreading her wings and soaring gracefully. The wind roared in James's ears and he watched the small town of Westwood disappear.

"Where are we going, Crystal?" James asked. Crystal replied with a small grunt. They were now miles away from Westwood. In a few minutes, Crystal was flying so fast that James had to lie on his stomach on top of her powerful back to keep himself from being blown off. Crystal flew over streams, lakes, rivers, even oceans. Quite soon there was no civilization was to be seen and James felt very tired. He fell into deep sleep right on top of Crystal's back.

"It's beautiful!" James cried in delight when he awoke. Crystal had flown into a lush green jungle. James looked at Crystal gratefully but her face revealed sadness.

Crystal suddenly spoke, "I have to leave you, James." Her voice was like perfume floating in a breeze; calm and sweet.

"Crystal, you can speak?" James asked.

"Over the days I was with you I heard and memorized everything you said. I soon caught on...your language is quite simple."

"Oh. You *were* joking about the leaving park, weren't you?"

"I'm sorry. This is where I belong."

"Where are we?"

"In the land of the dragons." A dragon as large as a bus walked by them and then another.

"I'm so sorry, James. I must live among my own kind!" Crystal cried tearfully.

James started to cry but he nodded, "I understand."

Crystal tried to smile, "I had so much fun."

"Me too," James was barely able to speak.

A huge red dragon walked towards them and said something to Crystal.

Crystal nodded sadly, "He says he will take you home now." Crystal hugged James so tightly he couldn't breathe. James tasted his salty tears running down his cold cheeks as he hugged back.

"Goodbye James. Thank you for the love you gave me and thanks for being there everyday since I was a dragonette."

James nodded sadly, "Goodbye Crystal. I want you to know that you will always be my best friend...no matter what!"

Crystal handed him a golden-colored box, "I want you to have this."

James reached into his pocket and pulled out a photo of himself, "Please take this. I'm sorry but it's all I've got for you to remember me by."

"This photo is the best thing in the world you could give me...this is worth more to me than a thousand bags of gold." The red dragon started bounding through the woods, then spread his wings and flew into the air.

That night James lay in his bed crying silently. He looked around his room for something to cheer him up and he saw the golden-colored box Crystal had given him. He lifted its lid. Inside was an egg!

"Why would she give me an egg?" James wondered aloud. Suddenly he realized that the egg was cracking! A top section of the egg cracked away and out popped a tiny blue head...it was a baby dragon!

James smiled and patted its small hairless head, "Hello there."

The dragon licked James's arm happily.

James scooped it up and smiled to himself, "So this is the present Crystal left me. Hmm...what should I name her? How about Jade...yes, that's perfect."

Although James did not realize it then, this was the unique task that Jeremy Quinton had spoken about. James had been chosen to raise dragonlets, teach them about the world of humans, and then return them to their own world. In the years to come, James would embark with his dragon friends on many marvelous adventures.

## The Beauty of Nature

by Nicole Bedford

Nature

Exquisite, delicate

Depleting, changing, disappearing

Animals, air, water, earth

Creation

## The Witch Hazel Women

by Olwyn Keane

Just above the village, a grove of witch hazel surrounded a small stone house where three sisters had lived alone since their parents died. Every morning, the two eldest girls would walk through the woods to the village square. There, one sat cross-legged before a simple drum while her older sister leapt and whirled and flew with the beat. When she grew tired from dancing, the other sister would sing beautiful, haunting lullabies that delighted the townspeople, no matter how many times they heard her. With the food and coins they received, the two sisters supported the family.

When they had first begun to perform in the village, their youngest sister had asked to help. But they knew that she had no memory for music and that she couldn't dance at all.

"How can you help us?" they would ask. "No, you're too young to help. We'll take care of everything. Don't worry." So she resigned herself to staying in the cottage.

But the earth around their home was so rich, and the weather so often fine that she quickly began to spend all of her time outdoors. Weeds began to disappear, wildflowers to bloom. A vegetable patch began supplementing meals, and beautiful roses, clematis and honeysuckle climbed and blossomed amongst the witch hazel. In Spring, bluebells and violets and lilies of the valley tangled in a brilliant carpet. Long grasses and emerald mosses grew alongside a tiny stream and the youngest sister spent much of her time there, planning her garden.

After a long day, the sisters had just snuggled into their beds when a horrific shrieking filled the air. The strange voice moaned and cried, sometimes ear-piercingly high-pitched, sometimes inaudibly low, but always insistently present. White-faced, the three girls lit a lantern and moved through the forest toward the sound. They met several villagers on the way and their rapidly growing group found themselves in a grove at the outskirts of town. A huge oak towered above them and sitting in its branches a silver, soap-bubble figure sat sobbing.

"You! Ho, you there!" the mayor called officiously. "What's the meaning of this display?" The apparition quieted and abruptly leapt from his perch, his legs sinking disconcertingly into the ground before he solidified and stalked toward them. Nose to nose with him, the mayor stammered, "We . . . we . . . we cannot sleep when you moan and groan so. Go away so we can rest. . . . Please."

"Why should I go away? I like it here, even if you don't like me. Nobody likes me." The spirit sighed, silver tears brimming in silver eyes.

"And no wonder, when you keep decent, hard-working folk up with your racket!" an old woman shouted from the crowd.

"Now, no need for that." The banker bustled fearlessly forward. "Come my boy, be reasonable. What can we give you that'll persuade you to go? Hmm, what do you want?"

"What do I want?" The astonished apparition stared at him. "What could you possibly give me, you fool? No, *you* go away." Then he was up in the oak again, wailing and crying fit to wake the dead, or at least keep the living from sleep.

"What can we do?" demanded the baker, after the retreating villagers had crowded into the village hall.

"Not much we can do," commented someone.

"Nonsense," the banker asserted, "everyone has a price. We just have to find his." The youngest sister frowned as the rest made their plans, staring out the window and listening to the ghost's cries.

Days passed in silence, the exhausted villagers trying to live their lives as usual. Each night, a gift was offered and each night it was rejected. The baker offered his best loaves, the cobbler her finest shoes, the butcher his thickest steaks. Each time, the spirit asked incredulously "What do I need this junk for? Get lost."

Finally, everyone in the village had offered a gift except the witch hazel sisters. The eldest resolved that her gift would be a dance.

"After all, no one can dance as well as I. I'm sure it will be pleasing enough that the spirit will agree to leave and we'll all be able to sleep again." Her sisters wove ribbons through her hair and tied bells around her wrists and ankles. Barefoot, she set off down the path to the grove, reaching it just as the sun set and the ghost was about to commence his wailing. He glared down at her. "What now? Can't you people leave me alone?" She gazed resolutely upwards, straight and strong.

"Wailing spirit, I've come to dance for you. If my dance pleases you, will you stop bothering us?" He stared down at her.

"Dance, dance! What do I care? Go ahead and dance." So, silently she raised her arms, twisting patterns through the air, the ringing of her silver bells the only sound. She leapt forward, kicked out, spun and twisted and flew, danced faster than she ever had before. Whirled in a blaze of colours, reds and golds and greens. Sometimes dancing faster than the eyes could follow, sometimes still like the eye of a storm before leaping into action once more. Finally, she was exhausted and it was all she could do to stand and look up into the branches of that great oak. The ghost was staring at her, so she asked, "Will you go now?"

"What is your talent to me? What do I want with dances? It's all gone. I'm dead. Leave me alone." He began to cry and moan again, horrible, unearthly sounds and the eldest sister flew terrified back to her home.

The next sister was determined to try, so the next night, against her sister's protests, she set off to the grove with her drum.

"Spirit," she called confidently, "I've come to sing for you!" The silvery frame shivered into visibility and he gazed down at her hopefully.

"Sing? You're going to sing?" he asked.

"Yes. I'll sing a lullaby for you," she said, encouraged by this show of interest, "and if you like the song, you'll leave us?" His face closed, and he made no reply, gazing resentfully down from his perch.

Undeterred, she sat before her drum, tapping out a rhythm with her fingertips. A sound started low in her throat, rose up deep and smooth like melted chocolate, dark and rich. Almost words chased after drum beats, resonating soothingly between the trees. Notes flew up into the air and collapsed in tangled heaps amongst fallen leaves. Her voice swirled among the oak's branches, painting sympathetic pictures in the dusky air. The forest around her grew quiet, listened in rapturous silence to a pure lullaby sung with impure intent, and above her the spirit sat impassive, unmoved but for the silver tears that slid along his face. Her throat grew dry. She trailed off, gazing uncertainly upwards, her earlier bravado evaporating.

"You have a beautiful voice. But I'm not leaving. Why can't you people understand? I can't be bribed, you have nothing I want. What could you give me? What could you show me? I'm dead. I'm dead!" His voice dissolved into sobs, great coughing heaves of grief that frightened her in their terrible incomprehensibility. She scrambled up, her drum forgotten, and ran back along the path to the cottage. His cries echoed between the hills and the three sisters endured another sleepless night, with heads stuffed under pillows and towels shoved tightly against cracks.

In the morning, the still shaken performer shared her story with her sisters. Word for word, she repeated the spirit's impassioned speech.

"I guess we'll all just have to invest in really good earplugs," the eldest sighed.

"I still haven't tried," said the youngest sister. But her older sisters were adamant. She was too young, it was too frightening, there were far too many risks. They would not allow her to put herself in danger. She argued passionately that she too should have a chance, but her sisters refused.

"You're not going and that's final!" the eldest shouted. The youngest subsided, gazing resentfully out the window to her garden.

After her sisters had gone to bed, stuffing their ears with cloth and squeezing their eyes shut tight, the youngest sister sneaked out into her garden. She knelt by the oldest witch hazel. Beneath it, a miniature rose put out perfect pale flowers, delicate in colour, shape and scent. Reaching down, she picked a tiny bloom, not quite closed, and wrapped it in her handkerchief. Then she set off towards the grove.

When she reached the oak, the moon had just risen and she noted absently that it was full. A smile graced her lips as she approached the spirit. He sat dejectedly against the great trunk, his head in his hands. She sat silently beside him, hugging her knees to her chest, not speaking. After a time, he lifted his head and stared into her eyes.

"What do you people want now?" he asked sulkily. The youngest sister shrugged. He stared, then lowered his head to his hands again.

"I'd like to know your name," she said quietly.

"What?"

"Your name?" she repeated. "I don't know it."

He stared and almost absently said, "You know, I think I've forgotten. It's been so long. Everything's gone."

"Oh." They sat together in silence for awhile before she unwrapped her flower and held it out to him.

"What's this?" he asked. She laughed, a loud, crystal laugh and he stared at her, a bewildered smile on his face.

"It's a rose. Haven't you ever seen one?" He shook his head and muttered, "I can't remember." She stared at him, astonished.

"It's from my garden. I have hundreds of them! C'mon, I'll show you!" She grabbed his hand, ignoring its coldness, and pulled him along the path towards her home.

They walked from tree to tree, rose to rose, as she explained the different times they bloomed, told him their names, enthused over the hardiness of a particular species or the beauty and fine colour of another. She showed him lavender, and taught him to make crowns of its purple stalks. She smiled proudly when he pointed out a particular flower, laughed as he tried to pronounce the complicated names for simple flowers. Finally, they sat by the stream and he exclaimed over the softness of the moss.

"It's so strange. You don't remember anything?" she asked, absently braiding green stems together.

"Not really. I remember, there was a lady who used to tuck me in and kiss me. She was nice. But then she left, I think. It was very quiet. And then I sort of, woke up. It's all blurry." He frowned, concentrating.

"What happened after you" she hesitated, "woke up?"

"I looked for the lady. I couldn't find anyone. I got lost." She stared at him, realizing for the first time how young he looked.

"How old are you?"

"I don't know. Old, I guess. I've been lost for awhile." She nodded and tentatively put her arm around his shoulder.

"You don't have to be lost. You can stay here." He smiled and vanished as the sun came up. The youngest witch hazel sister stood alone in her garden and then went quietly to bed, catching a few moments of rest before sounds of revelry floated up from the village, waking all three sisters. When they offered to go down with her to the village, she declined, wandering out into her garden instead. Absently, she began to dig and pull out tufts of green. High in the branches of the oldest witch hazel, she thought she saw a shimmer out of the corner of her eye, and shyly she lifted her hand.

## Sir Nigel Wick

by Tyler Kennedy Brown

The Queen lay sick upon her bed.

An invalid was she.

For illness has invaded her,

Straight into treachery.

The King called for his awesome knight.

Sir Nigel Wick he'd be,

Came marching through the palace doors,

To face his destiny.

"Sir Nigel Wick!" exclaimed the King.

"Your Queen is very ill.

The only thing that will save her,

Is the egg from a Red Hornbill.

This bird is found in Africa.

To Mozambique he went;

Traveled twenty days, twenty nights,

Ready to circumvent.

Along his path to Mazambique,

Perilous times arose.

Slaying creatures, with mighty strength,

Brought those times to a close.

In constant quest of this scarce egg,  
The fruit of the Hornbill,  
He scoured all of Mozambique,  
With superior skill.

Alas, he saw the Red Horn's nest,  
Revealing the prized egg,  
He reached up for the antidote,  
But something bit his leg.

The Red Hornbill made Nigel bleed,  
Its' teeth transfixing his skin;  
Dread and panic crossed Sir Wick's face,  
Hearing a voice within.

From the start, he had been warned,  
Forcefully by the King:  
"Beware the bit of this Red bird,  
For it's a deadly thing."

In pain, he grabbed the Red Horn's egg,  
And hobbled on his way.  
For he had a quest to complete,  
Not to be lead astray.

The injury had left him weak,  
To England he must go,  
With egg in hand, and bleeding limb,  
Return was very slow.

The castle rose upon the hill,  
He staggered to the gate,  
Returning tired from his hunt,  
The Queen's survival awaits.

The servants brought him to the Queen,  
Her health, it was quite poor;  
The frantic King was in dismay,  
But Nigel brought the cure.

Exhausted Nigel dropped down dead.  
The egg, it did its trick.  
The very bird that saved the Queen,  
Ended Sir Nigel Wick!

## The Story the Tracks Told

by Debbie Kerkhof

One set covered almost sixty miles. Some were totally blown in with snow. At one point, the tracks stopped at a barrel and the snow inside it was trampled down. The tracks then continued along a highway, where they became far apart and long. Near a late night restaurant, one paw-print was marred with a rusty pop can. The rest of the tracks had spots of blood beside them.

Another set of footprints was repetitive, the new day's tracks following tracks from the day before over the same route.

Another set was the tires of an old jeep. They veered all over the road in a strange trail.

Three different beings, worlds apart, yet connected, all put on the earth to be a part of God's amazing plan. And this is how it started...

She was a ratty, mud-coated stray. The muddy snow on the ground showed the stray's large footprints, telling that she had some wolf-blood in her, but she was mostly a mutt. Many were scared of her appearance and assumed she had rabies. Garbage was her main course today as usual. Begging at the market with her pleading liquid brown eyes had not gained her a morsel or two of fish or even crusts from an old lady on a bench, and even a stray dog feels shame. The kind butcher across the street had not been home either. Finding a scrap of bacon and some egg shells that had not been fully scraped out, she ate her late day breakfast and started on her way to her rotten old box in the junkyard. Lifting her fine muzzle, she cast her eyes on the downcast skies that promised to burst with snow momentarily.

Halfway home, the stray stopped short. Snow finally broke through the clouds, like feathers bursting from a pillow. It began to swirl around her in a dizzying manner and from it she distinctly heard a call. "North, north..." it seemed to whisper, urging her to leave the dreary town she called home. "North!"

...

Jeremy Burr was a gruff, grizzly old man. He hated children, he hated dogs, and he hated noise. Every morning he crossed Whippoorwill Street, grumbling about the weather, the children playing in the streets, and the noise from the neighbour's stereo. He would go down Parker Street, go up the Wren's Drive hill precariously, and then he would end up on his beloved Whippoorwill Street, grumbling about everything. Every morning was the same thing in the same manner. His boot prints in the snow always followed their path from the day before.

There was a reason for his grumbling, his gruffness. Years ago, he had lost his wife and his beautiful daughter, Maggie, to a raging spring river. He had packed all he owned into his '87 Ford Mustang and drove until it felt like the sorrow had left him. Yet it had not retreated and returned in this seemingly peaceful town. The old man had never been the same again.

Today, as the ominous clouds gave way to flurries, the old man felt something strange in the air. As he set his leather boots into the light covering of snow on Whippoorwill Street, something drew him back, a lurking feeling of danger. He stood perplexed by the side of the street on the corner. After some time, he shrugged off the strange feeling and continued on his way, grumbling about everything.

...

Jamie Walters, called Butch as a nickname, was a senior student at Montane College. He had blond hair and pale grey-blue eyes. He was a favorite with the gang and was very easy-going.

After tormenting Mr. Hopskin in math class and finishing a school project, Butch was free to go home to study for his last exam before Christmas holidays. He couldn't wait for his Christmas break. As he reached for the door handle of his jeep, a strange feeling came over him, the feeling one gets when they know they have done something horribly wrong. He stood in the rapidly falling snow by his jeep, confused, racking his brains for the reason he would be feeling this way. He shrugged off the feeling and drove home, his face laced in thought.

...

She slept in a barrel that night, hungry, cold, wet, and miserable. Her feet hurt terribly from her day of walking. She had been in this town in the past, but the people had been unkind, and so she had left.

Rising from her bed in the morning, she opened her jaws in a yawn, her tongue lolling in the air. Stretching her stiff muscles, she opened her liquid brown eyes and trotted around her strange surroundings to find breakfast. The day showed promise of sun, and the sky looked like the Caribbean Sea, and it seemed that if one jumped high enough, they might plunge right in. The stray's footprints showed that she circled around and then stopped short, her feet digging in the snow. Once again she heard the call, but this time it called her to a different direction. She headed out on a highway, walking east towards her destination.

...

Butch threw his baseball cap into the cool air and gave a hoot. Exams were over! He was free! He gave another victory shout and made a run for his jeep, wishing a friend a happy holiday on the way. He threw his thick textbook onto the seat next to him and started his battered jeep. Just as he was about to leave, one of his buddies, Jeff McKlinck, or best known as Scamp, tapped noisily on the window pane. Butch rolled it down. "What's up?"

"There's a big party at my dad's house tonight, man." He grinned. "It'll be a blast. Don't miss it!"

"Okay, Scamp, I'll see you there." Butch returned the grin and revved his motor, letting the rocks fly as he sped out of the college driveway.

...

The dog began to get restless. She hadn't made it yet, and to her, time was running out. Suddenly, she began to run. She became a brown streak, rushing by the late-night restaurants, even though they were a sure food source for her hungry belly.

Unexpectedly, she stumbled, falling head over heels, her coat covered in a light dusting of snow. Drops of blood dripped off her front paw and fell over the trampled snow where she lay. She lunged to her three good feet, seeing strange black dots that seemed to appear and disappear before her eyes. The wind rushed its message at her, encouraging her, urging her on. She ran haltingly, leaving the rusty old pop can, her injured paw bleeding profusely.

Finally, through pain-blurred eyes, she saw her destination, understood the danger. She poured on the speed the last few yards and lunged...

...

Jeremy ate his ordinary toast. He dressed for the chilly weather and opened his front door, mumbling about the children in the street, and the noise from the neighbour's radio. He clutched his cane and hobbled slowly out the door, his old leather boots sinking deeply into the snow, leaving deep tracks. He stepped out into the street, oblivious of the battered jeep veering straight for him...

...

Butch blinked to keep his eyes open. He cracked a grin, thinking about the party that had just ended. He couldn't remember much, just when he began to drink. He had drunk too much, not knowing what it would cost him.

He snapped back to attention as the jeep veered sharply to the left. He drifted off again, then snapped back to attention with a jolt. He squinted his eyes, then slowly grasped what he saw. There was an old man crossing the street in front of him! He jammed his foot on the floor, but he could not seem to find the brake pedal. He wanted to turn the steering wheel, but it seemed molded in place, keeping the car straight in a path towards the old man. Everything seemed to go into slow motion from there. The old man looked up and fear showed in his eyes. He lifted up an arm, as if it would shield him from the vehicle. Suddenly, a brown streak flashed by, knocking the old man out of the way. Butch heard a small crunch as the jeep jumped back to normal speed instead of slow motion. Butch found the brake and finally the jeep shuddered to a stop. He could not believe what had just happened. As he prepared to get out of the jeep, his last thoughts were that the old man was safe.

...

Jeremy ate his normal breakfast of toast. But this morning was different, because it was the same as the mornings so long ago. Someone was there to love.

"You coming, lass?" he asked the chubby brown dog in the corner. She wagged her tail and stiffly rose to her feet, cracking her fine jaws in a huge yawn, lolling her tongue in the air. She planted her bandaged foot firmly on the floor. Jeremy snapped her leash onto her brand new royal-blue collar.

"Your foot's finally healed, eh Maggie?" The old man raised his eyebrows. "You changed my life, you know. I learned that letting a trial burden you ruins your life. You sure didn't let being a stray keep you from being a hero, did you?" Jeremy chuckled as he opened the front door, not minding the children or the neighbour's stereo. As he walked down his sidewalk, a battered jeep pulled up.

"Hey, Gramps!" Butch ran up the drive, his hands behind his back. Atoning for almost hitting the old man had resulted in friendship.

"What've you got there son?" Jeremy asked, curiously trying to see behind his friend's back.

Butch grandly pulled from behind his back a chestnut cane. "Think I owe you this much, since I drove over your other one."

Maggie gave a little whine, as if saying they should get on their way. They walked side by side, the dog who was considered nothing, but found something, the lonely man who had found friendship, and the reckless boy who had become a man. Their tracks in the snow seemed to rejoice behind them.

And that is the story the tracks told.

## Torn

by Sandra Jenkins

Nothingness.  
Seeming like death.  
The weight of mental turmoil  
Beyond belief.  
The indescribable depression confining me  
To my room with walls painted black.  
The broken mirror adding to the scars  
And the incredibly painful feelings  
Of the lost child within.

## Forgive Me

by Sarah Bihun

I lie here alone, distanced from the world, and distanced from life itself. It is all quiet around me, no noises I hear except for the peaceful drip drop of falling water. A tiny drop hits my leg, and goosebumps attack my limp and frail body. Although this water is cold, it will never reach the freezing state at which my heart lies in. My heart went cold the day that I killed my sister. There are no excuses for me to use. There is no way to deny the fact that I am responsible for her premature deathly journey. If only I had listened, like I listen now to the peaceful yet deathly water.

I remember the day like it was yesterday. There had been a wild storm that night which enabled me to receive my very much needed beauty rest and which bestowed onto me the lovely gift of a blasting headache. The headache and lack of sleep made me an absolutely horrid person to be around. Today, I wanted nothing to do with my baby sister. She was only ten years old and one of the most adorable girls in our little town of Mayfield. She had the most unique and beautiful eyes. If you looked at them from the right angle, they would appear to be the colour of glistening amethyst. She had a tiny button nose and when she smiled, you'd notice her two missing front teeth. Her hair was as dark as a raven's tail. It was silky and long and almost always tied back in either a ponytail or pigtails. Her name was Elizabeth, but I always called her Bessy. She was my baby sister and I loved her with all my heart.

I lie here still, all alone. The freezing water is about an inch from the bottom of the tub. I feel it uncomfortably tickling my back. Although the cold state of the water is painful to my body, I can bear it, not like I cannot bear the pain that I receive from what I did to my Bessy. All she wanted to do was be with me, her big sister. She looked up to me; she wanted to be just like me. How can I go on with my life knowing that I will experience things that Bessy never had the chance to experience. I remember how she and I always used to play with our dolls and she would always tell me about how she was going to have a large family of her own someday, with a wonderful husband and several children. Now she will never marry, never have children, never have a family of her own and it's all thanks to me.

The afternoon had brought along with it a warm and beautiful sun so my family and another family had decided to all go to the nearby Water Park. It had one of the biggest wave pools around and some of the largest water slides I've ever been on. The other family that we went with had four children. The oldest was a very good looking, 17 year old, blonde haired and blue eyed young man. His name was Tristan. The other three children, Michelle, Kristy and Megan, were all girls and they were all around Bessy's age. I had always had the biggest crush on Tristan and the last time I had seen him, he had shown some interest in me. I knew he was two years older than I, but I was determined to make him mine.

The water now covers half of my worthless body. My teeth clatter endlessly, and I'm shaking uncontrollably, yet the emotional anguish that I am faced with right now takes over all of the physical pain I endure. I no longer smile, nor laugh, nor have a willingness to live. At night, I usually lie awake crying, asking myself the same stupid questions. What if I hadn't told her to leave me alone, maybe she would still be here with me now? How come that had to happen to her, and not me, when I was the deserving one of death? If only I could turn back time?

At the Water Park, Tristan and I went off together while the younger girls went off to do their own thing. My mother had said that I was responsible for making sure Bessy was not going to get herself into any trouble. I of course told her I wouldn't let anything happen to Bessy and what was the chance of anything terrible happening to her anyway? There were lifeguards watching every corner, my parents were nearby, Bessy was with Michelle, Kristy and Megan, plus there were hundreds of people around. What could have possibly gone wrong? Well the worst possible thing happened.

Much of my body is now covered with the icy water. Tears stream down my face as I remember that most horrid day. I don't know how my parents could have said that her death was not my fault. I could have prevented it, I know I could have. I don't deserve to live any longer. I broke one of the 10 commandments, killed someone, my sister. It is all my fault. God will never be able to forgive me, and if he some how does, I can never forgive myself. I know nobody else blames me, but they are all blind, they are just hiding the truth. When they find my lifeless body tonight, they will all celebrate, for Bessy's killer will be dead.

Well Tristan and I had decided to go grab something to eat, so I went and sat down at a table while Tristan went to go get our food. While I was waiting for him to return, Bessy came up to me, and asked if she could stay with me for the rest of the afternoon. I of course, told her to go away. Tristan and I were finally going to get a chance to really talk and be alone and I wasn't going to let my little sister ruin that under any circumstances. Then I told her to go off and find Michelle and her sisters. She told me that she was looking for them but that she couldn't find them. The three girls swam frequently and were quite good at keeping afloat but Bessy wasn't nearly as good at swimming as her friends. I remembered seeing the three girls swimming in the wave pool just before I sat down so I told Bessy to go check there for them. It never occurred to me right then and there that maybe Bessy would actually go into the wave pool and look for them. I assumed she would just wait at the sides, since she wasn't the best swimmer.

Death has been all I've been thinking about since Bessy passed away. I wondered what it felt like for her right before she died. She probably blames me and she really should, for it was my fault. I wonder if she knows how sorry I am for doing that to her. I would have taken her place without a moment of hesitation. I wonder if she will ever forgive me? Maybe when I take my own life, she will realize that I am truly sorry and that will hopefully let her rest peacefully in heaven. I doubt she will ever forgive me though. How could anyone, especially Bessy, ever forgive me?

I now remember seeing a whole group of people gathering around in a huge group. I heard people gasping and some crying. Tristan and I got up and quickly ran over. I remember getting to the crowd and asking a lady with tears in her eyes about what had just happened. She looked at me with a heart breaking expression and told me a little girl had drowned in the wave pool. The waves were too big for her and there were so many people in the water that the lifeguards didn't see her. When the waves finally stopped, she was spotted floating under the water by a man. He took her out but it was too late, she had already died. My heart broke and all I quietly started saying to myself was the word Bessy. Tears started flowing down my face as I pushed through the crowd of people, repeating my little sister's name. I got to the edge of the crowd and looked through. There I saw my mother crying beside the lifeless body of my baby sister, Bessy.

It's my turn now Bessy, to put my head under, into my watery grave. I will now know how you felt that forsaken day. The water is covering my mouth; my nose will come next. Then I will no longer be able to breathe, and death will consume me. I know this is what I deserve. I know this is what everyone wants. I can't live any longer with knowing that I was your murderer. Satan, please come to me now, crush my soul with your power that's fed by man's hatred and pity. Let me get what I deserve. My body feels weightless

right now, and all I hear are the made up screams that were probably coming from my baby sister. I take one more breath, and my nose is covered.

Then, all of a sudden I heard a voice. It sounded like my father's voice, and he was probably talking to my mother. I started listening and it seemed like he was God, and He was speaking to me. He said "My darling, it's not your fault Elizabeth passed away. There was nothing that you could have done to prevent it. Of course, now you can think of ways that you could have prevented everything, but you had no idea that she was going to die that very day. I know it's hard, but you can't give up on life. Think of everyone else that loves you. They all need you. If Elizabeth was here right now, she would tell you to be strong, to never give up. She doesn't blame you for what happened, so don't blame yourself. Elizabeth loves you and she forgives you, so now forgive yourself. I know it's hard, but you must. Be strong. Be strong, for me, for your family, for yourself, and especially for Elizabeth!"

I pull my head up, and let the water out of the tub. I appear to be alone in this dark room but I really am not. Bessy is here with me. I can feel her. She doesn't blame me for what happened to her. She tells me it was her time and that she is happy now. Bessy also tells me that she is waiting up in Heaven for me, so that we can once more play games together. She also says that she doesn't mind waiting for me, but it disturbs her to see me so depressed. So now I lie here, taking in life with every breath. Tears fall down my face, but I now smile. I have forgiven myself, and I know Bessy is smiling too. I get out of the tub, warm myself up and go see my mother to tell her that my baby sister Bessy is still with us now, living her life through each precious breath that we take. I no longer feel distanced, for I have everyone I love here with me, in my heart, forever.

## Finally

by Jessica Quinlan

Finally it's over,  
Can't wait to get started,  
The hot sun is coming,  
Waiting for me.  
Waiting for me to come to its home.  
Its home at the beach  
Where its hot rays touch my skin,  
But the water cools it  
Where I dive into its bright shiny reflection,  
Only again to be rushed with cooling water.  
The hot sun is coming,  
Waiting for me.  
Waiting for me to come to its home.  
Its home at the park  
Where I play with my kite.  
Where its bright rays blind my eyes,  
Just for a moment,  
Then the shade of my kite.  
I sit in the cool grass and watch it sway in the wind,  
Letting them brush through my bare toes,  
Oh, these days of great enjoyment,  
Me and the sun,  
But whats this?  
As I lay in the shade of my tree at the park,  
A leaf.  
Falling from her great branches.

Disappointment fills me as I sit holding this,  
Knowing that it is coming soon,  
That I can't spend endless hours with the sun at  
Its homes of the beach and park,  
Knowing that soon,  
All her leaves will fall and won't be able to shade me  
Because the leaves fall  
And I must return.

## Nichole's Story

by Breghan Paterson

Ever have one of those days? You know, you get up late, can't find your books, and you scream at your mom as she yells at you to hurry up. Then you leave feeling guilty and only hope to catch your bus. When you finally get there you are alone because everyone else caught the early bus. I was having one of those days. I waited for about half an hour, then decided just to walk. The last thing that I remember was coming up to an intersection, looking, then stepping onto the street. That's when I heard the unmistakable sound of screeching tires as a blue van came tumbling down the road towards me. That's all I remember.

When I woke up I found tubes, monitors and needles hooked up to my arm and to my shock and dismay, when I tried to roll over onto my side, my legs did not follow. They wouldn't move. Not even a bit. A nurse rushed in then and smiled at me, though her smile was of such pity I felt a shiver run down my neck. I suppose the nurse sensed my uncomfortable state because she was soon giving me another IV. I fell asleep soon after, still feeling a bit confused.

What? What were they saying? I could hear doctors talking to my parents. I couldn't believe it. I was never going to walk? I started to cry as I heard the news. I grew angry. At the doctors for not being able to help me, at the driver that hit me, and at myself for letting everything happen. I decided to shut out the world. Maybe then it would all go away. I wouldn't talk, take my medicine or even look someone in the eye. It just hurt too much.

It had been three weeks since the accident and already I had had seven surgeries and seen five therapists. Nobody could get through to me. Nobody until I heard about Nichole. Dr. Pallagin introduced us and I was fascinated. Nichole had a rare infection in her leg and it had to be amputated. She refused to be held back though, and still spent ten hours a week in physio therapy. I guess you can say that she inspired me because I decided I wanted to walk too. Three months of intense rehabilitation every day followed by another few years of four times a week rehab. where ahead of me.

It was painful and discouraging at first as little progress seemed to be made. I kept pushing though. After three weeks I was rewarded for my efforts with the limited movement of my toes. I knew that if I could make it this far, then I could make it all the way.

After three months I left the hospital on a sunny June morning. For the first time since the accident, I went home. By now I would move my legs slightly but only without any pressure on them. It hit me then as I settled into my room, now moved to the first floor to accommodate my wheelchair, that in two months school would be starting again and I did not want to be wheeling my way down the halls. I had two months to learn to walk all over again and learn to face the questions of my peers about my accident. I started to push harder than ever and like in the hospital, Nichole was there all the way.

With two weeks before the start of school, Nichole came over. With her strength and my determination, I took my first steps since the accident. Three small steps that meant more to me than anything I could remember. We both sat on the floor and cried. Cried for the pain we both suffered, cried for the precious time as a normal teenager that we lost, and cried for the joy of finally coming so far.

The first day of school was upon me and with Nichole in my heart and by my side, I stepped inside that building filled with old memories and new hopes. Although I had a walker to aid me, I did manage somehow to walk down the halls to my classes. Some people stared at me but most people were anxious to greet me and lend me congratulations on coming so far. I was glad to be back to my old routine and even though I hated school, I found myself enjoying the day. When I got home, I laid down on my bed feeling like I used to; a normal teenager.

With the first day gone, I received a letter from a child trauma therapist who had heard my story and I was asked to say an inspirational speech at a conference. I hated public speaking. It always made me so nervous to be up there by myself with all eyes on me. All I wanted to do lately was fade into the background and be normal. I wasn't going to do it, but Nichole convinced me and promised to be right there with me. Somehow knowing that she would be there convinced me that I really could do it and I set out to writing my speech. The day before the conference I called Nichole. Her mom answered the phone and by the tone in her voice I could tell that something was wrong. Very wrong. "Amy," she said, "The infection spread. They didn't get it all. They did all they could it just wasn't enough. She died early this morning. She wanted you to know that she was proud of you." I said thank-you and hung up the phone as hot tears streamed down my face. Nichole was my rock, the person I could count on. What could I do now that she was gone? Nichole wouldn't have wanted me to fail, so as hard as it was, I learned to stand on my own and carried Nichole, my rock, in my heart instead of at my side. I took a deep breathe and started my speech again. I couldn't let her down.

So hear I am today, telling you my story. I suppose that I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for Nichole, so maybe it's not my story at all, but Nichole's story. The story of a girl who refused to give in, and made me who I am today.

Thank-you Nichole.

## A School Mosaic

by Erin Lafferty

Each day I go to school and there do see,

Variety in students at each turn.

A lot are strangers not yet known to me,

But gathered here our purpose is to learn.

By car, by bus, by foot we come from far,

And daily gather in this learning place.

We come to figure out just who we are,

Our clothes and manner echoing our face.

Musicians, jocks, the in-crowd, all are cool,

Cheerleaders, brainers, teachers, ESL.

These different types all help to make our school,

And finding who we are just time will tell.

Don't be afraid in following that star,

Enjoy yourself in finding who you are!

## The Little Goldfish

by Allison Boyle

Once upon a time, in a place not far from here, there lived a boy. This boy lived with his family in a small town. Now, this boy was a happy boy, but he was different than all the other boys. Tom (this was the boy's name) knew when he was young that he was different. Tom liked other boys. He would wear flashy clothes, wear make-up, listen to dance music, and was very flamboyant. His family was not very happy, not with him anyway. Tom's family and friends wished he were normal, that he wasn't so flashy and flamboyant. Tom preferred to be himself, not what everybody else wanted him to be.

One day Tom and his father, much to Tom's dismay, went fishing. His parents thought that maybe it would teach him to be "manly". Once arriving at the pond, Tom went off by a big tree to be left alone. After a little while he felt something on the end of his line. Once Tom reeled it in; he found that a little goldfish was on the end of his line.

"Please spare me" cried the goldfish "I'm way too small to be eaten, not worth keeping". Tom smiled at the fish, and told him that he had no intentions on keeping such a pretty fish. He quickly helped the little fish off the hook and gently put him back in the water.

"What can I do to repay you for your kindness?" the fish asked.

"I need to thank you, live happily in your small pond" Tom replied, before picking up his fishing pole and net. Then he walked back to where his father was standing, and told him he wished to go home. Tom's father was not pleased with this and argued for a while. In the end he handed Tom the car keys and told him to drive. After arriving home, Tom had to listen to his family complain about how he is not trying to be normal. His family yelled louder than ever before when he told them about the enchanted fish.

"Did you really tell that fish that you don't want anything?" his mother yelled "you could have wished to be normal, like the rest of your friends".

"But mom" Tom cried "I am happy with the way I am, and who I am. Why can't you be happy with that?"

"You go back to that fish and you ask him to make it so you are normal, at least ask him to make you like girls...." His mother demanded. Tom finally gave in and went back to the pond. Once arriving, he called to the little fish.

"Little gold fish, I would not ask for anything for my self, but my family would like it very much, if I had a girlfriend."

"Very well, when you go home you will have a girlfriend." spoke the fish.

"Thank you little fish," replied Tom. True to his word Tom had a girlfriend. She was very pretty and she was a cheerleader at his high school.

"Are you happy now Mom and Dad?" Tom asked.

"No, you should have asked the fish to make you normal, you're still flashy" his parents spoke. "Go back and talk to the fish again". Once again, Tom went to the pond and he spoke to the little fish.

"I would not ask for anything myself, but.... my family now wishes that I was not so flashy".

"Very well, when you wake up tomorrow you will not be as flashy" spoke the fish.

"Thank you little fish. I have brought you some crumbs". Tom said "Have a good night". Tom gave the crumbs to a very pleasant and grateful goldfish and went home. The next morning, again true to his word, the little fish was right. Tom was no longer flashy. Instead of putting on his Diesel jeans, GAP t-shirt, and his Messenger bag, or his Prada shoes Tom put on a pair of jeans, a football jersey he found in his closet, and a baseball cap. He then went downstairs to eat breakfast. Later on that day, at school during lunch, Tom told his friends about the little fish. Tom's friends thought that the little fish was great. After lunch with his girlfriend on his arm he went back to his locker. Everybody seemed to be happier with his new look. Tom was puzzled at all their reactions, because he didn't feel any different. His girlfriend was quick to point this out. "Tom, maybe you should ask the little fish to make you more like the rest of us" she said " you know, no more acting like a fag". Again Tom sighed and decided to not argue this time. He said he would go back to the pond that night. Sure enough, when he saw the boy, the little fish knew he would not wish for himself.

"Your family and friends still not happy?" the little fish asked.

"No, they wish for me to not act so flamboyant" Tom confessed.

"Very well, tomorrow when you wake up you will find you are no longer flamboyant" spoke the fish.

"Thank you little fish," replied Tom. Tom left that night very unhappy, he still did not feel there was anything wrong to begin with. He was starting to resent the feelings of his family and friends.

Later that week, Tom was sitting in his room listening to his Dance Music and doing his homework when his parents walked in.

"We still don't think you are trying hard enough," his parents said.

"What more do you want from me?!?" screamed Tom as he broke down and began to cry "I don't dress the same, I don't act the same, I have a girlfriend, Geez Mom, what else do you want from me?"

"You are not trying hard enough. You still stay in your room and listen to this fag music" his mother replied "and I never see you with your girlfriend. Today when I was in here cleaning I found e-mail print-offs from you to another boy....and I can't even repeat what they say."

"I'm gay Mom, nothing I wear, do, and say, or even change about my looks is going to change the fact that I'm gay!" Tom yelled very upset. "I didn't choose to be this way."

"We want you to go back to the pond and have the fish make you straight" spoke his parents. Tom and his parents argued for a while longer until Tom grew tired and gave up. He agreed to go back to the fishpond.

Tom sat by the edge of the pond for a while before calling upon his fish friend. Tom had brought some fish food and some crumbs for the goldfish.

"You know that I wish nothing for myself but..." Tom began.

"I know" interrupted the little fish "Your family wishes something for you to become".

"Yes, but first I have something for you" Tom gave the gifts to the fish, and they talked for awhile. Before leaving, Tom asked the fish that he wished nothing else, but his parents wished that he were no longer gay. Nothing else said, Tom went home that night feeling more unhappy than he had ever been. The next morning Tom felt nothing different. Tom knew he was still gay, and for the first time since this had all started, he was happy. He got up and got ready without saying anything to his family, as he was still very angry with them. He quickly drove to the pond, stopping only once to pick up some worms for the little fish. When he arrived at the pond he called for the fish with a smile on his face.

"Hello Tom, what can I do for you today?" the goldfish asked.

"I don't feel any different: I'm still gay" Tom said.

"No, Tom you are gay, see being gay isn't *what* you are, it is *who* you are. You have always been a good person. And cared for others" spoke the fish "and being straight wouldn't change that. Soon you would realize that you are who you are not because of your sexuality, and you again one day would realize that you are and always will be gay. It won't matter what other people think. Until that day Tom I will repay you again, with the greatest wish I can ever grant you, for yourself. Now go home and be happy for who you are.

"Thank you little fish" spoke Tom "I will come back and visit soon". Tom went home to find things the way before, with him anyway. His parents greeted him outside with a big hug, something they had not done in a long time. Tom was confused.

"Mom, Dad?!? are you okay?" Tom asked.

"Yes of course" his mother answered, "put the car away and hurry up and get inside. Adam is waiting in the kitchen, and he has been helping me cook dinner.

Adam had been a boy that they had forbid him to see, because they were caught holding hands.

"Adam is cute; you two would make a great couple. Do you know that?" Spoke his mom. Tom just stood there shocked by his mother's comments.

"Don't you two be out late" added his father "we have that P.F.L.A.G(Parents + Friends of Lesbians And Gays) meeting in the morning.

The goldfish had given Tom the greatest wish possible. His parents accepted him and his lifestyle. He couldn't be happier. As time went on Tom found that little by little his friends, family, future co-workers, and finally the world accepted him and others for *who* they are and not *what* they are. And the entire world lived happily and peacefully ever after.

## Occultus Terrenus

by Christine Forshner

Occultus Terrenus, Hidden Earth,  
A place of Death, a place of Birth,  
A place where Nature holds Her sway,  
As Time passes on, Night through Day.

Creation, Destruction, lend hand to each other,  
Nature is all, Reapers, Mother and Lover.  
So worship the One, for your life She sustains,  
For without Her help all that's left are remains.

## The Peach Tree

by Heather Olaveson

The girl sat for a moment on a low branch of the tree, feeling the familiar texture of the bark and breathing in the heady scent of peaches. Her muscles tensed as she grabbed hold of the branch above her and swung her body up and over with the ease of one who has had years of practice. Careful not to jostle any of the ripe fruit, she worked her way to the top and settled herself on a branch which looked to the west. She tilted her face to catch the last warm rays of the sun as it sank beneath the treetops, a melody tumbling about in her head. It was an odd tune, both joyous and sorrowful, and it longed to be heard. So the girl opened her mouth and let the music take flight. Wordless but beautiful, its clear tones were carried along by the winds. When she was finished, she leaned back contentedly against the trunk.

"Daughter," said a gentle voice from the cottage door, "you have the voice of beauty itself. Why, even the birds have stopped their singing to listen to your own." And it was true, for many had alighted on the outer branches of the peach tree in order to better hear her song.

"But it is evening, and you'll be wanting a full belly and a warm fire. Have you finished the picking?"

"Nearly," the girl replied as she broke off a few more pieces of fruit and tied them into her apron. She quietly slipped out of the tree, placed the rest of the fruit into a waiting basket, and followed her mother inside the house.

The cottage sat in the middle of a thick forest of oak and evergreen, beech and maple. Not very far away, in another part of the forest, a man lay face down in the pine needles that carpeted the floor of a ravine. He was tired and dirty, his fine hunting clothes in tatters and his steed nowhere to be found. He rolled over onto his back, groaning. Suddenly, he drew in a sharp breath and listened closely. Twigs snapped in the underbrush. He did not move. And then, the howl of a wolf rose into the coming darkness. Another voice joined the first, higher in pitch. The man shuddered. He knew he had only a short time before the light faded completely and the wolves began their hunt. But which way to go? The sound of someone singing interrupted his thoughts. Although wordless, the melody skipped and flowed through the air, making him want to both laugh and cry. He thought it the most beautiful voice he had ever heard, and imagined that it belonged to a young woman. He would follow the voice, for surely the girl lived nearby and might grant him food and shelter for the night. He gritted his teeth and began to drag himself up the steep slope, slowly but methodically.

After the mother and daughter had finished their supper, and when the few dishes had been washed and lain by the fire to dry, they sat near the hearth together. The girl began to wash each peach from the basket in a little wooden bowl. Meanwhile, her mother's nimble fingers fashioned a row of tiny stitches on the hem of a skirt. Their conversation was peppered with soft laughter now and again.

They suddenly grew quiet as a feeble knocking was heard at the door. "Hardly anyone has come by for many years, Mother. Might it be a lost traveler?"

The mother didn't answer, but rose from her seat and strode to the door. Hesitating only slightly,

she tugged on the handle and the door swung open.

The next day, in the late afternoon, the girl came into the cottage, her crown of daisies askew. She cradled a bundle of greens in her apron.

"I've brought the herbs you wanted, Mother," she called. "And some mint for the tea --" She glanced at the bed in the corner, where a young man sat propped up with pillows. "Why, you're awake, now. Are you feeling any better?"

"Quite," he answered, looking a little embarrassed. "I'm terribly sorry to cause you any trouble --"

"Trouble?!" the girl's mother exclaimed, coming into the room. "You are a welcome visitor."

The girl handed him a peach. "My name is Janelle," the girl offered, her eyes questioning.

"And mine is Rowan. It is lucky for me that I found your house last evening. I was out hunting, and became separated from my companions," he explained. "Something spooked my horse -- a wild animal, perhaps -- and he threw me into a ravine." He shook his head ruefully. "My leg broke during the fall. But then the most beautiful voice I have ever heard began to sing, and I followed it to your door." His eyes caught Janelle's and she blushed.

The girl's mother smiled knowingly. She turned to Rowan and told him, "You cannot venture back out into the world until you have rested and healed. Please stay with us, as long as need be."

"Thank you for your kindness," he answered softly, turning the peach around in his hands. They looked on as he tasted the strange fruit, wonderment changing to delight on his face.

Rowan stayed at the cottage all winter long, performing small tasks during the day and telling stories and listening to Janelle's songs in the evening. By spring, their friendship had blossomed into love.

On the day they decided to marry, Rowan told her, "I am a prince by birth. My mother and father have promised me a castle of my own on my wedding day. This is where we shall live."

At this, tears came to Janelle's eyes. "What of my mother? Where shall she live?"

"Why, she may live with us," he replied.

But Janelle's mother held up her hand. "I am an old woman, and have lived all my life in this house with my garden and peach tree. I cannot leave now." She smiled at the two young lovers. "Go with my blessing, and be happy."

The girl hugged her tight, whispering, "I will miss you so. We will visit as often as we can."

Her mother drew a peach pit out of the folds of her skirt and pressed it into her daughter's palm. "They say the first peach has great magic. This is the pit of the first from my tree, and the seed to grow your own." She kissed them both and watched them walk into the forest.

Rowan and Janelle's first year together was filled with joy. With her husband's help, Janelle came

to know the castle as her own and the names of everyone who lived there. She was loved and admired by all for her kind heart, intelligence, and heavenly voice; by all except for one.

Rowan's elder sister was terribly jealous of her brother's young wife, who had just given birth to a beautiful baby boy. She longed to hold a newborn of her own in her arms, but she could not bear children. Even if she could, no man would wed her, for she was as ugly as a crow and mean-spirited, as well.

She began to spread lies about Janelle, whispering them into her brother's ear. But Rowan refused to listen, so she took to watching the girl's every move, waiting for an opportunity.

One day, when Rowan went hunting, his sister disguised herself as a servant and went to Janelle's bedchambers.

Janelle stood by the window, watching her husband ride off with his men. She held a strong woven basket in one hand, its contents covered with a soft cloth. The young mother gently rocked the basket as she sang in a clear, sweet voice,

*Where is my lover,  
My loved one, my only?  
Where is my lover?  
O come back to me.*

Then, still humming, she walked to the door.

Rowan's sister, who had been peering through the crack in the door, stepped back in surprise as it was pulled open. Recovering quickly, she bobbed her head, saying with a servant's speech, "Beg pardon, Princess. I've come t' scrub the grate." She quickly slipped around Janelle and hurried to the fireplace in the chamber.

"My thanks," replied the young woman, and she continued on her way out.

Rowan's sister watched Janelle from the window as she stopped to speak to a stable boy for a moment and then walked on towards the orchards. Anxiously awaiting the return of her brother, her mind whirled with wicked thoughts.

"Rowan!" his sister hissed fiercely. "She does not love you! I heard her singing."

"Janelle sings many songs, Sister," he answered calmly.

"Ah, but not this one. She only sings it when you have gone hunting. She stands by the window and looks out longingly, wishing for her lover to be here while you are gone away."

"I cannot believe that your words are true. I know you dislike my wife."

"I only fear for your safety, and that of your son. She takes a basket with her to the orchards, but first asks a servant to come and tell her when you get back. And where does she keep the baby? She doesn't take him with her, nor is he in the care of another. And," she added slyly, "I've heard tell that peasants beat their children."

"Leave me in peace," Rowan said wearily.

"As you wish, Brother." But her poison had already begun to seep into his mind.

It soon became a habit for Janelle to go down to the orchards while he husband was away. Every time she did, Rowan heard about it later on from his sister, who worked to turn him against Janelle. He finally agreed to see for himself what Janelle was doing, and to find out the truth.

"We will hide you in the wardrobe after you make her believe you are going hunting," Rowan's sister decided, and so that morning, their plan was carried out.

Rowan felt guilty and ashamed as he crouched in the wardrobe, the door left open a crack. He soon forgot all his misgivings as he heard his wife begin to sing,

*Where is my lover,  
My loved one, my only?  
Where is my lover?  
O come back to me.*

Looking through the opening, he saw that his wife did indeed carry a basket. After she had left, he stood at the window, dreading the moment when he would see Janelle walk to the stables, and then on into the orchards.

"It's true. It's all true," he wept bitterly, his sister coming in from the corridor to comfort him.

"I knew that girl would break your heart," she said softly. "She has betrayed you, Rowan." Her words were hypnotic. "And the punishment for betrayal to the Prince, heir to the throne, is death."

Rowan blanched. "I could not. She is my wife--"

"And loves another," his sister cut in. "I will care for the child."

"But I love--"

"It is written in the law, Rowan," she warned. Sensing him begin to weaken, she relented a little. "Exile, then. You can do no more for her. Janelle must go."

His protests grew feeble under her assault.

"For the sake of the child, Brother."

Konrad, the boy from the stables, grew frightened as he heard voices coming from the open doorway. Master would be angry if he knew he was shirking his duties once again. He held his breath and turned silently to go. *Exile, then. You can do no more for her. Janelle must go.* He froze. The good princess was in danger! Responding before his courage failed him, he flew through the castle and then down to the orchards, where he knew Janelle would be.

"Princess! Princess!" he gasped, flinging himself at her feet where she stood next to a tree, the only peach tree in the orchard.

Janelle helped him up, crying out, "Konrad, dear boy! Whatever is the matter?"

Taking quick, gulping breaths, he told her all that he had heard. "They plan, they plan to *exile* you!"

The young woman grew frightened. "Why would they do this? Not my Rowan!" She scooped up her basket and a single perfect peach before hurrying back to the castle, the stable boy leading the way.

She found her husband and his sister seated at the high table in the great hall, a number of people sitting at other places around the room.

"Rowan, my Husband!" she called frantically, rushing towards him. Others turned in their chairs to stare at her outburst. "Why do you wish to be rid of me? What have I ever done?"

Rowan's sister spoke for him. "We have found out your secret, Princess," she spat. "You have betrayed him! You and your lover!"

A gasp went up among the onlookers. Janelle looked confused.

"We have heard you speak of your longing for another--"

"It is not so!" Janelle protested desperately.

"You go to the orchards when the Prince is hunting, telling no one. Who is it you meet there, Janelle? Give us the child, and go back to your lover, for you are welcome here no longer!" Rowan's sister grinned evilly.

"Rowan?" Janelle whispered, staring at his bowed head. He did not move. Then, collecting her wits, she said softly, "Allow me a parting gift, sir. I wish to sing you a song." And she began to sing in a strong, clear voice, gently swinging her basket:

*Where is my lover,  
My loved one, my only?  
Where is my lover?  
O come back to me.*

Rowan recognized it as the song she had sung in her chamber only a short while before. He remembered the melody from another time, too, a melody both joyous and sorrowful.... And then a second verse followed, one he had not heard before:

*My love has gone hunting,  
My dear one, my only,  
O Rowan, my husband,  
Come back home to me.*

His head rose slowly, his eyes meeting Janelle's.

"It was to be a surprise, a surprise for you. My mother gave me a peach pit to plant, and its magic has grown. I go to the orchards to tend the tree," she said quietly, hope rising in her. A sudden cry split the

silence, and Janelle reached into her basket and brought out her baby, holding him closely. "This is the first of the fruit." And she gave her husband the peach, watching him turn it around in his hands. All was forgiven.

Rowan faced his sister. "It is you who has betrayed me, not my wife," he declared. "And it is you who will carry out the punishment which you have placed upon her."

And so Rowan's sister was exiled from his lands, never to be seen again.

The peach tree kept blooming and bearing an abundance of fruit year after year, to the delight of Rowan and Janelle's children, and later, their children's children. For as sure as the castle still stands, the tree continues to flourish.

## Rosemary

by Shelby Karin Rae

Flowers  
All of them  
Radiant when suns' eyes kiss them sweetly  
As clouds sweep the sky  
Filling dustpans with sunshine  
Daisies bare arms and buttercups grow cold  
Oh, blind are the eyes; for  
Only children's faces among flower petals my eyes greet  
Bees that sting, poison in their venomous ways  
Hide under false and rosy innocence  
Floral faceplates conceal  
But iron daggers do unsheathe here  
The truer child, much more flowering  
Smiles rainbows as she bends to gaze upon petaled heads  
And to her, flowers smile  
As silent the deadly stinger strikes  
Blossoms usher in the hushed yet violent war  
But the hush is not silence  
Attack with unseen weapons  
Beautiful and shining with dagger-points  
Slicing deeper than skin could protect.

## Brick Walls and Sidewalks

by Nicole DeRushie

The writer's pen is not so much a tool of creation as it is a channel through which dreams may flow. The writer is a freedom fighter combating the stagnancy of his world with no greater weapon than the expression of his own thoughts. What is true originality and why does he seek it out? For a moment he considers writing an essay about the search for originality, but abandons the idea, realizing how popular a discussion topic it is. He sits in a darkened corner of a tiny espresso bar, wearing his nonconformist uniform of black, filling in perfectly a stereotypical model, becoming the very thing he has rebelled against his entire life.

The view outside his sparsely furnished apartment is hardly the kind of view one would expect a writer to want. There is no light, no colour, no sweeping vista of urban sprawl. Across the alleyway outside his window is a brick wall, dirty and faceless; yet how many sleepless nights has he spent fervently writing about the secrets and metaphors therein, lost to all but he? Has the crumbling mortar really that much to tell?

Now see the writer walking down a narrow street desperately trying to grasp the essence of his latest character. This character is based upon someone he knew long ago, a woman, whom he'd known since his early childhood. He could still see her face clearly...long brown hair, clear, sea-gray eyes, a carefree toothy smile written across her face. They had always been there for one another. Though he never grew to love her, he had always cared for her. She stuck by his side through good times and bad. He was concerned, in the last couple of years, when she distanced herself and became more grim and detached. He knew quite well that she had a lot of problems at home, but he thought that she had been able to be strong and continue on unaffected by the stress and strain that was a part of her daily life. Such was his naiveté. He saw her grow thinner and thinner. Her eyes, sinking deeper into their sockets, grew dark and lifeless. Her cheeks lost all of their rosy glow and her hair thinned and was lustreless. She was missing more and more school, she never called, and, when they did meet by chance he saw that she looked sick and had concealed herself in ill-fitting clothing. She started to be angry with him for reasons he didn't understand and teased him about his personal idiosyncrasies that she had once learned to accept. The last time he saw her was school graduation. She was either drunk, stoned, or both. She could hardly stand up and he held her from the back on stage to make sure she didn't sway too much or fall down the stairs. There was something about the forced harshness of her laughter that he found...unsettling. He hadn't heard from her since. He still looked at his phone every once in a while and wondered if she'd call. Was she ever able to straighten her life around or is she walking down lonely streets at night, looking for answers that are never there. He sighs, sad, because this is the same way he thinks of so many of the people he knew, before, when he wasn't alone.

He walks quickly, hands shoved deeply into the pockets of his leather coat. Out of curiosity, he looks up above the street level at the walls of the concrete canyon, taking in the chiaroscuro of the city. He slows his pace, nearly stopping altogether. It is a work of art all on its own, clashing and violent as a single canvas given to many painters. As he walks down the street he picks up on a certain rhythm that beats like a heart. No one thing is the source of this rhythm, nor is it a figment of his own overactive imagination. It's the pulsing street lights, punctuated by raindrop staccato on garbage bin lids. He times his own footfalls to the beat. Cars on the street, whooshing by on the wet concrete leaving wakes like ocean waves. A splash

through a puddle, the sounding symbols of the orchestra. Somewhere far off, he hears the bass beat from a boom-box with the volume cranked up high. This last distant sound completes the whole thing, wraps it up, and makes it one.

Close behind him, a car horn blares. He can feel himself ripped from the fantasy like a hot pain deep inside his gut. The startling sound shatters the illusion and he is once again standing entirely alone on a dark and filthy street near the heart of a confused and chaotic city. He studies the sidewalk before him as though it could give him all the answers he seeks. Steam lifts from his neck and forehead on this cold and damp evening. He really shouldn't be out here at night. It's not safe.

He isn't concerned with his physical being. Perhaps that is why he has let himself grow so thin. He lives in his head, rarely surfacing to greet the morning at face value, preferring to see what lies underneath. He is often thankful that no one can read his thoughts. He can be so quick to judge and harsh in his interpretations. But this is what he has taught himself to do. As one who is an interpreter of character he always looks for information on every level that is available to him when meeting new people. Among the first things he notices are race and gender. Not because he is racist or supremacist in any way, but because those are the first noticeable features of any character. He takes note and moves on. Next, perhaps, is their poise and their mannerisms. What makes them outwardly unique? Writing about a character and not giving them any physical definition, a soul without a host, is meaningless and cold.

Our writer is tall, thin, and has brown hair.

He notices people staring at him uneasily. He has never quite been able to figure out why...he doesn't look any different, doesn't act in an odd way. Except he has a habit of not looking at his feet when he is walking. He prefers to look at other people and everything that goes on around him. He has raised people watching to a fine art, especially when sitting by a window in his favourite cafe with a steaming cup of tea. He is always hoping that someone will show some sign that somewhere under their guise of normalcy lies a truly interesting character. It's difficult, at first. The sign may be so subtle that it is barely noticeable: an odd piece of jewelry, perhaps, a subtle tick, a strange way of twirling an umbrella or walking stick. After some practice it's easy to see. Do they look at their reflection in shop windows as they pass them? Do they play with a finger ring or their elbow as if they don't know what to do with their hands? Do they pick up their feet or shuffle along?

He believes himself to lead a sad and lonely life. Few friends, distant family, like self-imposed solitary confinement. How can he write about real life when he doesn't even have one? Truth is...he has never tried. Never tried to join a larger social order. What would be the point? He doesn't fit in out there. Perhaps that is the reason behind his obsession with brick walls and sidewalks. They, like himself, are constantly surrounded by the bustling and developing world but have never been an active participant in it.

This realization found, while walking through the dark and seemingly empty streets gives him reason to pause. He drops onto his knees to bend his head low and press his ear to the pavement. He can feel that gritty sand and the dampness. He places his hands gently, fingers spread, palm open on the sidewalk. He sweeps them with his soft skin, wincing at the prick of a minute fragment of glass. He closes his eyes and presses his ear closer, straining to hear...What?

"Are you okay?"

His eyes open slowly to find the face of the newest character appearing on the stage of his existence. The man is middle-aged and black, but not very. Perhaps only one of his parents was coloured.

For a split second he tries to imagine the trials he went through as a boy growing up in a larger society that did not have much tolerance for such relationships. He is not very tall, rather heavy, wearing jeans and a well-fitting suit jacket. He would soon be wet in the light rain that was beginning to fall.

"Are you okay? Your hand is bleeding."

The man is standing only a couple of feet in front of his face. The sole of his left shoe is considerably more worn than that of the other. Curious. The leather is also cracked around the toe, as through it was often bent over.

"Hey, can you hear me? You want me to get some help?"

"No. I'm fine. Have a nice day."

"Jeez, kid, you sure you're all right?" he asked again. His nervousness was showing. He began to shuffle his left foot.

"Yes," our writer says more forcefully. The man backs away slowly, no doubt thinking that the boy is unhinged. Only when he was a good distance away from the crazy person lying prone on the sidewalk did he dare turn his back to him.

Our writer didn't know or care how much time had passed before the ambulance arrived, with all its flashing lights and deafening wails. But once he had been coaxed into sitting on the curb and had a warm, medicinal smelling blanket around his shoulders, his melancholy deepened beyond anything he had experienced before. They were going to take him somewhere so he could rest, they told him. They didn't say where, and didn't seem to care when he told them that he already had an apartment, with a bed, and a window with a brick wall outside. They weren't listening to him. No one ever listened to him. His words were not for hearing. He asked if he could have a pen and a piece of paper.

## Jericho

by Jentine Gootjes

They stare at me,  
My hair that even braids can't control,  
My hooked nose (a gift from my mother's side),  
My thick glasses that magnify my tears.

Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
The words they speak will scar me.

They taunt me,  
My scuffed but sensible oxford shoes,  
My brown corduroy coat ("Is it your grandmother's" they mock),  
My accent for they hear not what I say but how I say it.

And all the king's horses and all the king's men  
Could never rebuild the walls of Jericho again.

## Ben

by Caitlin Burgess

My best friend Ben has been diagnosed with cancer. The doctors told him there was a good chance he'd be cured, but they were wrong and he has only gotten worse. At first, he looked like any teenage boy. He was tall and muscular. His hair was dyed blonde and always spiked. But after he started chemotherapy, things changed. Now he has lost all his hair, even his eyebrows, and he has lost so much weight since he's been in the hospital that he's shrunk about three clothes sizes. He doesn't mind losing all his hair because he thinks it's cool. All the cool rock stars have shaved heads, that's what Ben says anyway.

From the moment he told me the news, my life has never been the same. Nothing can make me laugh anymore, and I spend most of my spare time at the hospital with Ben. I try to be brave when I see him. I bring him magazines and new CDs so we can listen to them together. We play video games. I try to stay cheerful for Ben's sake, and to tell you the truth, we have some great times together in that hospital room. Ben knows all the nurses. They bring him treats that they sneak out of the cafeteria, and sometimes they let me sneak some in myself. But when I'm home alone it's a different story. I try to distract myself so I won't cry, but it's hard. I miss Ben and all the fun we had.

"Anna?" Ben whispers one afternoon while we are sitting on his bed watching a movie in his hospital room.

"Yeah?"

"When I'm gone..." he trails off.

"I hate it when you talk like that," I say. He starts again, ignoring my comment.

"When I'm gone, I want you to promise me something," he finishes.

"No, I'm not promising anything, because you're not going anywhere." I stutter, the all too familiar tears streaking down my face.

"Shut up, don't start talking like that. We both know I'm not going to be around...well...forever." His eyes begin to swell with tears, but he holds it back as hard as he can. Ben is so strong. I don't think I could be that strong if I had cancer. I'm never sick, and Ben holds up better than I do. I turn and hug his frail body. He grabs me close as if holding on for dear life. Even though he is strong, I know he is scared.

"I'm sorry," I blubber. "I just hate it when you talk like you won't be here tomorrow or something. I want you to stay forever."

"I will stay forever; inside," Ben says softly. "You have to hold onto my memory and you'll always remember me."

"I'll never forget you. I love you." I tell him.

"I love you too." But I know when he says it that he doesn't mean it the same way I do. Ben doesn't know that I am in love with him. I want to tell him, but I am afraid it will ruin our friendship. We are so close and I don't want to do anything to mess it up. Even as his days grow shorter, I can't seem to find the words.

"Promise me something, Anna. Promise me that you won't be too sad. When I'm gone, don't hold back on the things that you do so well. Keep getting good grades, and don't let this stop you. Hey, I don't want to have to come back to haunt you or something. If anything, I want to come back for a good reason," he jokes. He is trying to lighten the moment. Ben always does that. He always wants everyone to be happy. I try to smile for him to let him know I can be strong, but the truth is, I know that no matter what, I will never be able to handle his being gone.

The next day, I am sitting in science class, not listening, thinking about Ben. I don't even notice the long beep that blurts over the PA before the announcement from the secretary. Her loud, old tired voice startles me when she calls my teacher.

"Yes?" Mr. Marcus raises his eyebrows, annoyed by the interruption.

"Can you send Anna Parington to the office right away please? And she should bring all her books with her."

"Sure thing," Mr. Marcus responds. Suddenly I can't breathe. I feel as if a thousand knives have struck my heart all at once, and only one sliver of air is able to slip through to my lungs. I choke and almost yelp in the middle of class. I quickly gather my books, and leave the room without saying anything to anyone. I know everyone is staring at me as I slip through the door. I run down the stairs, but then I stop myself.

"It's nothing," I tell myself, "Stop getting so worked up over nothing." I slow down, and try to catch my breath. I try to think about what else it can be other than Ben. I can't think of anything else. Only the picture of Ben's frail body is plastered in my mind. I start to run down the hall again, until I turn the corner and see my mother. I come to a complete stop when I notice the trace of tears on her face.

"No," I say, moving in baby steps towards her. "No, don't tell me..."

"Anna, honey, Ben's okay, but he stopped breathing today. They tried everything, but they have to use this machine to help him breathe now. It doesn't look very good. He's only got another day or two at the most, honey. Oh, I'm so sorry." She begins to cry as soon as I start bawling.

I don't say anything else until we get into the car.

"I'm staying with him until..."

"I know, honey, oh I know." And that is the last conversation we have for a while because I spend the rest of the day and night by Ben's side. I think about what my life will be like without Ben, and I can't imagine it. Who will I complain about my parents to? Who will I talk about music with? Who will I tell everything to? Ben has been my best friend since kindergarten. I can't even remember a time when he wasn't around, except once when he went to New York for three weeks one summer, and that had seemed almost unbearable. Only last year, I began to have different feelings for Ben. I realized how amazing he was. He cares about everyone around him, he never makes fun of anyone who is different, and he makes

me laugh all the time. I wanted to tell him how I felt so badly, but then the news about his cancer came so fast. I decided I should wait.

When we get to the hospital, I run up the stairs to the fifth floor where his room is. I know I can't handle waiting for an elevator, then being stuffed in the small space with people who will never understand my pain. No one will ever understand my hell. I get to Ben's room, panting, and his parents are at the side of his bed. His mom is holding his hand, and his dad is rubbing the top of his foot. His mom is crying, and I break down as soon as she looks up at me. Ben's mom stands up and hugs me.

"He was asking for you earlier. I called your mom so she could go pick you up from school," she whispers. I turn to Ben.

"Hi Ben," I say softly trying to muffle my tears.

"Anna." He tries to say my name as lively as possible, but he barely makes a sound. His parents and my mom leave the room so we can have some time alone. We just stare at each other and I cry.

"Anna...when I'm gone-"

"Ben, come on..." I cut him off, trying to prevent him from making the moment more painful. It doesn't work.

"When I'm gone, remember the good times, okay? If you always remember the hard times, you'll never be happy. If anything, I want you to be happy. Promise me. Promise me you'll try."

"I promise, but I don't know if I can keep it. You've always been in my life, and I don't know what I'm going to do without you. I don't know if I can keep going. I'll never be able to replace you," I cry.

"You don't have to, and I hope you don't. I mean, I hope you find another friend who you can trust as much as me, but you'll never have to replace me, because I'll always be in here." He lifts his delicate, fragile hand, and points to my heart.

"I know," I reply.

I never leave Ben's side, except to get a muffin for dinner, which I can only nibble at. I can't eat, and I want to spend every minute that I possibly can with Ben. I love him more than anyone I know. His parents spend the evening in his room, and they let me sleep there with them during the night. My mom goes home, and says she'll be back the next day.

I awake the next morning at six o'clock, a little confused as to where I am, but then with a jolt I immediately recognize the hospital room where I've spent so many days. I am really tired from being awake most of the night, watching Ben sleep peacefully. He looks at ease, but for real, no faking. It's something I haven't seen in a long time. It actually makes me smile to think he has some real peace and is pain free for a little while.

Ben finally wakes up at nine o'clock. He is very weak, and no one even expects him to speak. I can tell by the look on his face that he is almost ready to give up. I begin to cry again, and the skin around my eyes is raw and puffy.

Ben, one of the most important people in my life, is dying. He is my best friend, my life, my inspiration, and my world. We are so inseparable that our parents used to joke that we were attached at the hip. We even had those embarrassing bathtub pictures that parents whip out when friends come over. I wish we were attached at the hip now, so Ben wouldn't have cancer, or both of us could die together.

At 10:30, Ben's parents go to get some coffee. I think this is my last chance to tell him how I really feel. After a few minutes, Ben opens his mouth to say something, but his lips are too dry for words. I bring his Styrofoam cup over to him and he weakly sips water from the straw.

"When I'm gone...I'll never be gone..." he breathes.

"Oh Ben!" I wail. I hug him, and he tries to hug me back, but he can't. I kiss his bald head.

"I love you," I say. I am just about to tell him how much I really love him, when Ben whispers,

"I need to tell you something, Anna," Ben pauses and looks into my eyes. "I've been in love with you for the longest time. You're the perfect girl for me; I love you..." I can't believe what I am hearing.

"I've been in love with you for so long, but I couldn't tell you," I blurt.

"Anna?" Ben breathes.

"Yeah?"

"I'm ready to go now..."

"Okay," I manage to make out as my voice breaks and more tears pour down my face. I kiss him again and then he leaves...

## Passion

by Jennifer Bucci

The sweet moistness against my lips.  
A subtle tension; vibration evident.  
My cool fingers, somehow not as  
Cool as you.  
Warm air passing between us.  
My parted thighs, muscles flexed.  
A tear rolling from my stationed eye.  
Comfortable, yet awkward.  
A feeling I've always dreamed of.

Drowning in a sea too dark to escape,  
Brought on by the passion we've created.  
I rise to greet the warmth  
And light.  
I must close my eyes to avoid suffocation.  
I hold you in my arms, cradled in one elbow.  
My hands shake; my cheeks are moist.  
We worked so hard, and now it's over.  
A perfect execution of a clarinet masterpiece.

## Dirt Rich

by Corrina Christine Lobbezoo

October 3

You'll notice that this is a journal, not a diary. I'm not one of those flaky chicks who writes about her life every night hoping that someday her diary will be published, like Anne Frank or something. Fat chance. I mean, who's really going to care three years from now that Jane so-and-so had a mad crush on the paperboy, hated the tuna casserole her mother made every Tuesday night and got bitchy during PMS. We all do. Get bitchy, that is.

You're probably wondering how I'm any different from one of those ditsy chicks. Well, here you are, journal. I write for me. Sure, I write as if someone's going to read it, but I don't know how else to write. If anyone reads this, it'll be me - only me.

I write here to remind myself that I really do exist, that my secret life is not just a nightmare.

October 17

I love to read. Julie and Anjie, my school friends, felt wounded when they realized that I generally prefer books to people. Why do I? For the same reason guys say they like cars better than women - cars don't talk back. You can take or leave a book without being stuck with it forever, although I've never left a book unfinished. It would seem rude somehow. Also, I need closure. I hate books that end without actually ending, just to lure you into buying the next book in the series. That's cheap. None of the literary greats ever had to resort to such tactics. When I'm an author I certainly won't.

Yes, I want to be an author. It sounds dumb, I know. "Oh, you want to be a writer. How cute." Pat me on the head condescendingly. How many teenagers have said that, after all. Now little Danae Carmichael thinks she can?

I believe that a good reader is a good writer. Just like that. Of course, by 'good reader' I mean one who reads quality. If you immerse yourself in excellent literature, you're guaranteed to reflect some of those qualities in your own work. Not only should a would-be author read often, but diversely. My Law teacher once said, "Everything you read, watch or hear enters your realm of consciousness somehow. Even if you disagree with it, it becomes a part of you." Reading takes you places you've never gone, or, to use my favourite cliché, it "broadens your horizons."

If my theory is correct, I'll be quite the author someday.

November 5

I've read many books on anorexia, "Dying to be Thin," etc. I see some of the same things in myself, only I'm not so out of control. I don't cut my food into tiny pieces and arrange them on plates or anything. And I don't think about food all the time. I just don't eat. It's all about control - the only thing *he* can't curb.

Josie Andrews captured me in the hall today. "Oh my gosh," she gushed, "You'll never believe what happened to me last night." Josie is one of the ditsy types I described earlier. I'll bet she had a pink-and-lace diary in her fur-trimmed backpack as I spoke to her, ready to run to the bathroom and record the occasion if Justin Matthews or some equally hot guy checked her out. My presumption on this matter is not entirely unfounded, although I certainly spite Josie, for she spends an inordinate amount of time in the ladies' room.

Josie proceeded to tell me about her incredibly rough life, blah blah blah. I knew why she was talking to me - her insipid friends were at hand practise. People like that are cheap - that's the only word I can think of that, well, would get by the censors if - oh my gosh - someone decides to publish my journal someday.

Grrrr. She reminds me of Josie Pie, from Anne of Green Gables.

November 10

*He* went on a rampage tonight. The satisfaction I feel in knowing that *he* hates me being this thin is the only morsel that keeps me alive, moving, living. *He* hates skinny girls, and *he* hates it when I don't eat. *He's* tried to force feed me, but it didn't work. I figure that someday I'll reach skeletal thinness, and *he'll* find me so repugnant that he'll never touch me again. Ever.

November 13

"You have the perfect life, Amy. You're so lucky! An indoor pool, a Mercedes that your charming step-dad bought you for your birthday!!" Hah. Why do people still believe that riches equal happiness, that prosperity brings contentment? Talented writers have written brilliant works to dispel that myth, yet the power of the written word has given no clarity here. Perhaps these people just don't read enough.

November 29

I had a fright today. I came into my room and the cushions that cover this old journal seemed to have been moved. Journal, you would certainly give up all my secrets. *He* would beat me to a pulp if he knew I kept record of my life. *He* wants no one to know of the life he really leads (behind his solid oak doors), how his business is sinking fast and how he beats his step-daughter.

November 30

I walked on eggshells today, wondering if he had found my journal and hadn't said anything just to psych me out. Mrs. Anderson, our cleaning lady, stopped me in the hall after dinner, and whispered "You'd better hide that writing book of yours better, honey. Wouldn't want the old man to find it." Whew.

When Ray glared at us suspiciously, Anders bustled back to her dusting. "Have you seen Mrs. Mop," she called. "No," I snorted, "Maybe she's in the closet with Mr. Broom."

When Anders, as I call her, came to Canada, her first employer swore by the power of Mr. Clean. So Anders assumed that Canadians have titles for all their cleaning supplies. Hence, the existence of Mrs. Mop, Mr. Vim, and Miss Vinegar-and-Water. After our ultra-feminist neighbour had her over for coffee, Anders found a new name for Mrs. Dustrag: Ms. Dustrag.

December 14

Driving home from the bank today, I saw a little kid sitting beside his gravel road with a yellow-blue quad. A sign on the quad said "For Sale." I wished that I had access to enough cash so I could stop and buy it from him. I wonder why he had to sell it, when he loved it enough to sit out in the cold waiting for a buyer.

December 21

"Brevity is the soul of wit." William Shakespeare.

January 6

I dislike the presumption of teachers. Do *you* know what Ernest Hemingway was thinking when he wrote this book? How on earth would anyone but Hemingway know?

Every written work reveals something of the author who wrote it, but who is to say what it reveals? I used to think that writing is frightening, but no - it is safe. For although I reveal pieces of myself, the reader will never know which pieces are parts of me and what parts I merely made up. Writing is revealing, but no one will know any more about you after they've read your work. Writing is playing mind games, as it were. Writing is swordplay ---- I prod and poke and when the reader is ready to lunge at me, thinking he knows my weakness, I laugh; for he does not even know where I am. He knows nothing. He has seen much of me, many pieces, but is unable to ever put the puzzle together. He will always have these useless scraps that never seem to fit because the puzzle is larger than his card table, bigger than his kitchen, vaster than his mind.

January 17

I squinted out the car window and saw a lady running towards the wreck, yelling for someone to call nine-one-one. Except she said it like "Somebody call nahn-won-won!! Somebody call naan-won-won!!" A scene straight from a movie, until I realized that I was part of it. Then I shook violently, and could not stop. People came up to my window, asking me if I was okay. "Yes, yes, I'm okay." But no one believed me because I was shaking so hard, and blood was everywhere. It must have been mine, but I don't know where it came from. I got out and shakily walked towards the cop, who needed my insurance and driver's licence. The cop kindly informed me that he didn't need my bank card, just my driver's licence. My bank card? I stared at it for a long moment before I really saw it. An ambulance zoomed up. The cocky driver, whose name tag said "Brian" told me to come with him and off we sped to the hospital. A nurse, checking me out for internal injuries, discovered bruises that could not have been from the accident. With a worried look on her face she trotted out of the room to find a doctor. Ray's secret is out; I am not about to stop it.

My brain must have gotten scrambled in the accident - I can't remember where I live.

January 24

They brought this shrink in to see me. What a big help.

Ray left the country without a trace, bankrupt and alone. But I am petrified that he will come back for me. I refuse to enter my house. My social worker, Bertha Dymont, is a selfless lady with five gold hoops in each ear and dark eye makeup. She extracted all my belongings from the house, and has found a place

for me to go - "the Safe Place," she calls it. Bethsaida is a home out east for abused women. They help you find a job, a place to stay and a way to move on with your life. At least that's what Bertha says.

February 11

Bertha has pointed out that it is no longer necessary for me to starve myself. True enough. I'm eating quite "normally" now, but as soon as I feel threatened, stressed or depressed, my immediate thought is to skip the next meal. But I fight that urge, and when I get it I write a story instead, or a poem. Rather amusing in today's world, to have to abstain from dieting.

I hate cheesy happy endings where all the pieces fall into place and everything works out perfectly. But there's never an ending, really, if you think about it. Not even at death, because life still goes on for the living. Now that I've made myself feel better about that...

I got a job at the local newspaper - I know, I know, how did I manage that? Well, I wrote a scathing letter to the editor my first week about the quality, or rather, the lack thereof, in their humble newspaper. I don't guess that's the most common way to land a job, by criticising the company, but the editor agreed with my denunciations. He told me; "You're exactly right. When I hire you, what are you going to do to improve all the errors you've pointed out?"

I like him - he's a zany guy. He hired me on one condition, that I go to school. "I'm already finished high school," I replied. "University, you turnip. You've got talent - you waste it and you'll be out of a job." How many employers call their employees turnips?

This will be my last journal entry. Now that I'm safe, away from him, this journal no longer has purpose. I am sure of my existence now, and I am in control. I volunteer at Bethsaida, and although I still want to be a writer, I also think about social work. Maybe someday I'll be able to help girls the way Bertha helped me. . .

**Falling**  
**by Leighanne Parkes**

The world is  
Falling away from me,  
Crashing desperately into oblivion,  
Or am I  
Falling away from the world?  
Up side down, down side up,  
A stumble in every stride  
Along the wretched path  
Through life.  
The trees they laugh at me,  
Scornfully, but I deserve it.  
They are anchored, I am not,  
So I continue to fall.  
Placid lakes smile serenely,  
Secrets.  
Raging oceans, scream,  
Judgements.  
But I cannot hear,  
I am so far away from everything,  
Because I am falling away from the world and no one will stop me.  
No hand, no heart, no help  
Is extended out to me.  
So I fall, and  
I don't even know  
Why.

## Yellow Roses

by Jennifer Bucci

Cold, hardwood floor, pale and familiar, blemished with streaks of darkness. Apocalypse ringing from the shadows of the apartment, bleeding warmth. The pain pressurizing; sorry without apologies, surprise without intention. A sudden disturbance is met by a rainbow of broken glass. silent and waiting, the pieces shiver, lying separate and exposed across the floor, reflecting a mosaic of memories, complications, faults. Events and people sparkle in the glass, touched softly by moonlight from the window and petals of yellow roses. Sharp edges, beckoning warmly. Jackie takes off her socks.

Blue walls, dark and strong; empty, closing in. Jackie shivers, fighting to stay in control; eyes closed to avoid suffocation, panic. To avoid remembering. Her mascaraed eyelashes stick to each other. Another barrier is lost. Jackie watches herself from across the small room, through a veil of yellow roses. The sun is rising, spilling white light over the sill of the window, waking the fish in the bowl. Jackie feeds them pieces of herself and flakes from a red tin.

A frame, scratched deeply along the left side. Dark wood, unidentifiable, synthetic. A motionless face contained within the box: thin, pale, cold, unblemished. A mane of raven black, falling like rain onto tense shoulders, locking away the pressure and the pain. Jackie stares into her own icy eyes, sullen and sad, dark circles spreading like oil over her white skin. She watches the wrinkles coming, climbing over the mounds and ridges. Webs of visible experience, adulterating youth, touched gently by yellow roses. Jackie laughs. Soon she walks away.

"What's wrong, Jackie?"

"Nothing."

"You sure?"

"Yes."

"You're not upset?"

"I'm not angry."

"Maybe you should be."

"It wouldn't help."

"Yes, it would."

Yellow roses, still and silent, matching nothing, representing everything. Cold hands, involuntarily clutching green stems, hidden by stiff leaves. Claw-like thorns prick ignorant fingers, long and slender, elegantly groomed. Soft bundles of primrose float ethereally above all else, gaudy and false. Jackie plucks

one of the petals and drags it along the mounds and ridges, powdery soft. Then she touches her cheeks. The petal falls from her fingers and lands amongst its peers, sliding into her dry, mascaraed eyes, icy cold.

\* \* \*

Jackie's mother died of cancer. November 24, 1996. Jackie would remember the date forever, though she had no memory of the occurrence itself. She was far away when it happened; contained in her own impermeable life; held there by her need for independence. Jackie's mother had been weak, subordinate. Jackie wanted to be nothing like her. She distanced herself from the pain, the way one might quarantine for a deadly contagion. "Voluntary isolation," her psychology professor would have called it, if they were still on speaking terms.

Jackie's father had struggled desperately to pull the two women together. He spent hours drawing layouts, planning exactly which strategy would work and which would not. Jackie usually fell for his ridiculous schemes, feeling nothing but stupid afterward. Jackie's mother laughed at reacquaintances. Jackie never stayed long.

Their problem had always been envy. Jackie envied her mother's beauty and vivacity, her ability to turn heads upon entering a room. Jackie's mother envied youth and intelligence, and Jackie's relationship with her father. These jealousies were never expressed as such, being forced into hiding behind bitter arrogance and brutal hatred toward each other. The mother-daughter bond had always been one built of tension, and went on forever that way until it was brought uncontrollably to an end. The sickness came in early spring, bringing with it a temporary warmth. That flower died, almost instantly.

\* \* \*

Yellow roses, still and silent, matching only her mother's skin, representing the pain she had endured in her struggle to overcome it. Cold hands, stiff yet pliable, molded against their will to suit the shape of the green stems. Claw-like thorn prick elegant fingers, long and slender from years of unuse, from feelings of inadequacy. The soft petals float amongst themselves, lost against the white lace camisole her mother always wore. It is worn again, today, only because it matches the light. Jackie plucks one of the yellow petals and drags it along her mother's exploding cheekbone, emphasized now by circles of rose-coloured cream. The white powder clogging her tiny pores makes her look even more fabricated than she ever had in her own life. Jackie wonders if she is satisfied with the way she has been presented, as helpless and pure, as contained and alone. The petal falls from Jackie's fingers. She feels the sting of tears in her mascaraed eyes, icy cold.

\* \* \*

The reception was held in Jackie's parents' home. Over fifty guests attended, though most were Jackie's ex-boyfriends from high school, who she had fallen out of love with when they tried to be gallant. Jackie smiled at their regrets and apologies, taking note of the pity they thought they felt for her. She excused herself politely each time she was touched, ashamed of the pity she felt for herself. After nodding off the last excuse she could handle, Jackie went upstairs to her old room and closed the door. A thin, but visible blanket of dust covered all of her memories: The soccer trophies on her desk, gymnastics ribbons, finger paintings, and the tiny pair of ballet shoes on the wall. Jackie sat at her old desk, dragging her fingers through the dust to feel what used to be there. She could sense the ridges in the wood, like veins, pulsating

with the beat of her heart. She pulled her hand away. At that time, she noticed a cluster of framed photographs, each of a variably significant event in her life. She picked up one, her grade eight graduation, and examined the characters within it. She noticed her mother first, looming in the bottom left-hand corner, not involved with the pose, but looking on. Jackie set the frame back on her desk and picked up another. Her last ballet recital. Again, her mother was not included in the group. She stood off to the side, with a look of regret across her otherwise blemishless face. Jackie had never noticed this before. She picked up another photo, and another, and another. They were all the same. They were all meant to be of Jackie, but what they showed now was the lie her mother had tried to bury. Was it possible that her mother had cared after all? Was it possible that she had wanted to be involved? Jackie set the last photo down on the desk and shook her head. She was disgusted by the idea, and pushed it from her mind.

\* \* \*

"What's wrong, Jackie?" her father asks, almost accusingly, upon finding her sulking by the dessert trays.

"Nothing." Jackie's tone is sardonic. She doesn't want to be his shoulder to cry on.

"You sure?" stepping closer to her, Jackie's father seems angry at not receiving the response he expected.

"Yes." Jackie's throat is unusually tight.

"You're not upset?" He knows she is avoiding his assistance to save her own identity.

"I'm not angry." Jackie's eyes remain far away. Her voice is distant. She is afraid.

"Maybe you should be." Jackie's father begins to cry, though he hides it behind his rage. He thought he had raised his daughter to respect him. He thought he had taught her honesty.

"It wouldn't help." Jackie wants to be alone. She hates being reminded of her emotions.

"Yes," Jackie's father adds. Everything about him is cold. "It would."

\* \* \*

Back in her apartment, Jackie switched on her stereo. She considered putting in her favourite *Cranberries* CD, but settled for the *Time Warp* that was already there. She couldn't remember from where she had gotten it. Probably one of the art students she had befriended last fall. Her boyfriend at the time hadn't approved. He was older and well respected by his peers. He had warned her of the furied temperaments of artists, advising her to stay away if she wished to save her own sanity. Jackie turned up the stereo.

She sat serenely on her blue sofa with a box of Lady Fingers and a can of Coke, allowing the pulse of the bass to penetrate her skin and live in the tips of her fingers. She looked into the clear water of the fish tank beside the window, haloed by moonlight, blanketed in yellow. She observed the blue and purple organisms contained there. She disliked the way they looked at her, with their enormous eyes, always open, and their pursed lips, twitching constantly. She knew they were deliberating her, sharing their theories and disgusts. She knew they watched her undress. She knew they were unimpressed.

\* \* \*

A frame, scratched along the left side. Jackie stares at her own reflection in the glass. Her face is thin, pale, cold. Her hair hangs lifeless onto her tense shoulders, reminding her of the heartache she has avoided through her seclusion. Friends demand too much energy. Boyfriends are too invasive. Jackie stares into her own icy eyes, sullen and sad, underlined by gray smears of fatigue. The pores in her pasty skin are clogged, powdery and white. She watches the wrinkles coming: laugh lines. But Jackie isn't laughing. Her mother is. Jackie can hear the voice inside her head, telling her to buy the yellow roses.

\* \* \*

And she did, but only to stop the voices. She placed the yellow bundles strategically around her small apartment, despising the clutter, but fearing the alternative. She locked her compulsions away from the world, the way her mother had taught her; pushing away the friends who loved her, the boyfriends who tried to help. She hated the way she submitted to her mother's ideals, even when they clashed strongly with her own. She hated the way that even now, in her time of freedom, she remained complacent to the whims and appeals of the woman she respected least in the world. She kept herself locked away, to hide the woman she was becoming. She wished she could ignore the transition as easily as she had ignored the maker.

\* \* \*

Blue walls, dark and strong; empty, closing in. With each passing day the obsession grows. The roses are everywhere, thickening the air with their irreverent pollen, laughing along with the ghosts. Jackie shivers, alone, eyes closed to avoid suffocation, panic. To avoid remembering. The laughter is outside of her now. It comes from the mirror on the wall. With every yellow rose Jackie buys, another memory is forced into consciousness. With every tear she cries, another foundation crumbles from her wall of immunity. The space feels darker, warmer now with the intensity of the bouquets that line it. She watches herself through a veil of yellow roses. The voice in the mirror laughs at her. She sees who she will inevitably become: cold and bitter, regretful and alone. She never seems to realize that she's already there. The sun is rising, spilling in through the window, thickening the air. Jackie cries tears of yellow roses.

\* \* \*

So many memories, which had been repressed, reintroduced themselves to Jackie, appearing forcefully behind her blinking eyelids. Friends she had gained and lost in her childhood; high school boyfriends, perfectly eligible, thrown away because her mother had approved them. Jackie remembered the interest in her mother's mascaraed eyes. Jackie had thought she'd forgotten. She wished she could take back everything she had lost; everything that was taken from her. But it was impossible. It wasn't revenge that she wanted now; it was assistance. She wanted her mother; a mother she had openly envenomed while secretly venerating. With no one to guide her life now, Jackie felt lost. She struggled to grasp the foundations of her own existence.

\* \* \*

Cold, hardwood floor, pale and familiar. The laughter rings loud in Jackie's ears, echoing off of the four walls which she can reach out and touch around her. It's loud...too loud. The pressure in her head has become unbearable. She is surrounded by yellow roses. Staring into her own icy eyes, the eyes of her

mother, she prays for a way out. She is tired of being laughed at. She is sick from the staleness of the air. The boss calls to ask why she hasn't been to work. It's been over three months. Surely the grieving... The laughter. It's back. Snatching its wooden frame from the wall, Jackie throws the mirror against the floor. It shatters upon impact, sending generations of broken glass flying through the suffocating air. They land silently on the floor, where they shiver in anticipation. The pieces are naked, covered only by random rose petals which the yellow moonlight embraces. Sharp edges, warmly beckoning. Clutching the edge of the table top, Jackie feels her fingers turning white at the knuckles. She takes off her socks. Then, to escape the memories, she steps across the broken glass.

## OUR JUDGES

Many thanks to our distinguished panel of judges. They volunteered their time and their expertise to read and critique our 275 entries.

**Dale Behnke** – has recently retired from an overly long career as a teacher of literature, communications and foreign languages at Mohawk College. In addition to being an appreciative reader, he is a lover of wine, music and travel. He plays mandolin with the group *Turkey Rhubarb*.

**Gillian Chan** – was born in England in 1954. Before she trained as an English and Drama teacher, she had many different jobs, including bank clerk, shop assistant, mail sorter, and bartender. She came to Canada in 1990, settling in Dundas, where she still lives with her actor husband, and her son. Her two collections of short stories for young adults, *Golden Girl and Other Stories* and *Glory Days and Other Stories*, draw upon her experiences as a teacher and her love for books written for young adults. *Golden Girl* won the *Hamilton and Region Arts' Council Literary Award* in 1995 and was one of the short-listed finalists for The Mr. Christie's Book Award in the same year. *Glory Days* was a short-listed finalist for both *The Governor General's Literary Award* and the *Mr. Christie's Book Award*. Gillian has just published her first novel for young adults, *The Carved Box* (Kids Can Press), a historical fantasy set in the Dundas area in 1801.

**Charles Cushing** – retired several years ago after working in cataloguing and public service at Terryberry and Central Libraries. He enjoys poetry and historical fiction, but his true enthusiasm is for fantasy and science fiction. Born in Montreal, he is fond of river cities.

**Gérard Dion** – has been a professor in the Language Studies Department at Mohawk College since 1969 and serves as a Communications Consultant for business and industry. He has edited numerous collections of stories, novels and poetry and has written and developed CD/ROMS for Literature and French-Canadian culture. He is a Board Member of Family Services of Hamilton, former Vice-President of the Canadian Metis Council and remains active as a musician and performer.

**John Ferns** – is a professor of English at McMaster University. He has published two books of literary criticism: *A. J. M. Smith* and *Lytton Strachey* and five books of poetry: *The Antlered Boy*, *Henry Hudson*, *The Snow Horses*, *From The River*, *Affirmations*. He has also co-edited with Brian Crick, George Whalley, *Studies in Literature and the Humanities*, and with Kevin McCabe *The Poetry of Lucy Maud Montgomery*.

**Wade Hemsworth** – is writing a serialized novel for The Hamilton Spectator, where he has worked as a journalist since 1987. He is the author of two books published by Penguin: *Killing Time* and *Both My Legs*. Wade has a history degree from McMaster University and plays electric bass in a local bar band called *Just Lost*. On weekends, he enjoys paddling his restored 1935 Chestnut canoe.

**Eleanore Kosydar** – is a poet, writer and photographer whose writings have appeared in a variety of publications (including *Tower Poetry*, *Country Connection* and *Canadian Author*). A profound love of nature suffuses her work. She is co-author with her husband, Richard Kosydar, of *Natural Landscapes of the Dundas Valley* (published in 1989), and author of *Moon Spirit: Love Poems of A Mated Woman*, a collection of her own poetry, photographs and sketches (published in 1998 by the couple's Tierceron Press). At an earlier stage in life, Eleanore and Richard designed and built two houses together. Eleanore recently completed a two-year term as president of The Tower Poetry Society, which is Canada's oldest poetry society.

**Chris Pannell** – is a poet, editor, and technical writer. In 1996, he published three broadsheets entitled *Fractures / Subluxations / Dislocations* which won the Hamilton & Region Arts Council poetry book award. In 1999, his second collection, entitled *Sorry I Spent Your Poem*, was published by Watershed Books. His new manuscript is called *The Man Who Grew Too Much*.

**Marilyn Gear Pilling** – began writing in mid-life. In the past ten years, her poetry and stories have been published in most of Canada's literary magazines, broadcast on CBC radio, have won several national awards, and a series of Hamilton and Region Arts Council Awards. She has published a collection of short fiction and a chapbook of poetry. Currently she is writing book reviews and Community editorial board essays for the Hamilton Spectator, teaching Creative Writing in McMaster University's Continuing Ed division, and working on her own manuscripts of prose and poetry.

**Bernadette E. Rule** – is a local freelance writer and storyteller, who also works as an Artist-in-the-Classroom. She teaches courses in the "Writing Certificate Program" at McMaster University. Current chairperson of the Hamilton Poetry Centre, she has had five collections of poetry published, her most recent being *The Weight of Flames* released from the St. Thomas Poetry Series in Toronto in the fall of 1998.

**Kerry Schooley** - Written under pseudonyms, Kerry J. Schooley's fiction and poetry are widely published in literary journals, anthologies and the mystery story collection *The Rouge Murders*. His poetry has been performed on the CBC, and his articles and reviews have appeared in *The Hamilton Spectator*, *id* and *VIEW* magazines and on the 701 website. Mr. Schooley has organized, hosted and performed at numerous literary events around Ontario, Quebec and New York. He has recently co-edited with Peter Sellers Canada's first anthology of noir fiction entitled *Iced*. He also teaches and leads creative writing workshops at McMaster University.

**Gisela Sherman** – writes articles and book reviews for adults and books for young people. She was an elementary school teacher and school librarian, then taught creative writing at Mohawk College. Now she teaches writing at McMaster University, and gives booktalks and workshops across Canada. She is President of CANSCAIP (Canadian Society of Children's Authors, Illustrators and Performers). Her three novels are *Grave Danger* (winner of The Hamilton Arts Council Award for Best Children's Book of 1997, shortlisted for the MYRCA Awards, and a starred winner of a Canadian Children's Book Centre "Our Choice" award), *King of the Class*, and *There's a Snake in the Toilet*, (winner of The Hamilton Arts Council Award for Best Children's Book of 1995).

**Michelle Steeves** – is an award-winning journalist who has been an editor at *The Hamilton Spectator* for twenty years.

**John Terpstra** – has published six books of poetry, the most recent being *The Church Not Made With Hands* and *Devil's Punch Bowl* – both of which won a Hamilton and Region Arts Council Book Award for Poetry in their respective years. In 1991 he won the CBC Radio Literary Competition with a poem entitled *Captain Kintail*. On other fronts, he also has released a CD of poetry and music, *Nod Me In, Shake Me Out*, and Gaspereau Press will be publishing *Falling Into Place*, his first non-fiction work in Spring 2002. The Hamilton Public Library has created a web-site around one of his poems, *Flames of Affection, Tongues of Flame* as one of its two millennial projects. The web-site features a reading of the poem, music, artwork from the Art Gallery of Hamilton, and archival photos from Special Collections.

## Our Contributors

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