

Sixty-eight Writes



Number 3, June 2009

Sixty-eight Writes

© Sixty-eight Writes, 2009

Reproduction and free distribution of this anthology is encouraged. Since this is a non-profit enterprise we don't want to be commercially exploited, although if you can sell this collection for cash we will be kind of flattered. The contributors maintain copyright of their own work, and individual stories may not be reproduced separately in any way without their permission.

To find out more about Sixty-eight Writes, or to print a copy of the anthology, visit our website:
<http://members.shaw.ca/sixtyeightwrites>

Cover art by Emily Jacobson

Sixty-eight Writes

Contents

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Editor's Note..... | ii |
| 2009 Judges..... | ii |

Fiction

| | |
|---|----|
| A Cruel Blessing, <i>by Tara Chang-Swanson</i> | 1 |
| Faith in Folly, <i>by Lochlin Duperron</i> | 4 |
| Illusions and Realism, <i>by Jennifer Perry</i> | 8 |
| She's My Kinda Rain, <i>by Caitlin Sharrat</i> | 11 |

Non-Fiction

| | |
|---|----|
| In the Blink of an Eye, <i>by Jessica Porter</i> | 17 |
| Religion and Secularism, <i>by Jacob Nagrocki</i> | 19 |

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Notes on Contributors | 20 |
|-----------------------------|----|

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Sponsors..... | 21 |
|---------------|----|

Editor's Note:

This is the third anthology to be generated from submissions to a writing contest of the same name, held in School District 68, Nanaimo-Ladysmith, British Columbia, Canada. A keen group of writers graduated last year, and they were a tough act for this younger, smaller group to follow. Some of this year's efforts are a little less mature, a little less polished, but overall they are no less imaginative or deeply felt.

Many students entering work in the fiction category this year chose to take on the challenge of writing from the point of view of the opposite gender. Their ability to do so convincingly won praise from the judges (after the blind judging was complete, of course). The beginnings and endings of relationships are tried and true themes given a fresh look in this collection, and a high impact, high tech chase through an imaginary future ends with a surprise twist.

Non-fiction has always attracted a much smaller group of students. This year the entries were very few in number, and the standard not quite up to previous years. The judges decided to recognize the promising efforts of two Honourable Mentions, but not to award the major prizes. We hope that with the help and encouragement of some classroom teachers more students will give non-fiction a try next time.

This anthology is primarily available electronically via email or via our web site: <http://www.members.shaw.ca/sixtyeightwrites>. Please feel free to print and/or distribute it far and wide – we are very proud of it.

*Nanaimo, BC
June 2009*

2009 Judges:

We are indebted to the following for sharing their expertise:

Fiction

Roger Farr, Poet, critic and Convener, Creative Writing Program, Capilano University.

Dede Gaston, Author (as Dede Crane).

Wendy Strachan, Educator & Founding Director of the Centre for Writing-Intensive Learning, Simon Fraser University.

Non-Fiction

Cale Cowan, Managing Editor, Nanaimo Daily News.

Frank Moher, Chair, Department of Creative Writing and Journalism, Vancouver Island University.

Margaret Thompson, Author and former president of the Federation of BC Writers

Fiction

A Cruel Blessing

By Tara Chang-Swanson

Innocence and how it is lost is a fine line, a tight rope walked by all as we find ourselves hurled through childhood, a blur of discovery and understanding. A teenager is a scorned thing. Usually scowling, owner of cigarettes and a foul mouth. I stepped into this age with open arms, glad to have claim to this title. The line I walked was straight and narrow, with no scratches on my record of innocence and all things good. Jessie was popular. Good looking, loud and cocky. He was all the things that I thought that I wanted. I can remember all the good things from the beginning, the way he would make me laugh, the way all of his friends idolized him, talking about him with a shake of their head and a smile. We went to the movies and sat in darkness, I could taste the salt on my lips from the popcorn oozing with butter, feel the sweat on my palms, and my stomach doing backwards somersaults when he leaned in to speak to me. I came home and sat on the steps outside my house, and felt that anything was possible. I felt happiness bubbling inside of me. I looked upwards and spotted the brightest star, on display for every pair of eyes looking upwards, and made a wish.

This is where a story should end, tied up like a brightly packaged birthday present. But for us this was the beginning. Our first fight came quickly. We screamed and screamed, over something that did not deserve even a few heated sentences. The anger in the air was tangible, I was shocked that I was capable of such emotion, and I felt the urge to reach out and scoop up my words and push them down into my pocket, forgotten, left to wither and die. We both apologized, and I figured it would never happen again, a slight crack in the surface of our story. Shortly after, his phone calls began. When I was at home, it was a summoning that I felt obligated to answer, an invisible string lifting my hand to the receiver. At dinnertime, my parents would shake their heads, a silent nod of disapproval in response to the shrill command of the phone. I would sit in queasy silence, reading what was being spoken without being said. He wanted to know where I was every second of the day. Before, I had seen

myself as an independent person, making my own plans and decisions. But now my existence began to be seen as he and I intertwined as one. There became less of a clear idea of who I was separately; pieces of myself seemed lost, floating in a murky place where I could not find them. He began to get angry if I talked to other guys or people he did not like, suspicious of their intentions. Everyone was always against him, in his mind, wanting him out of my life.

One day we were at his house. He hacked into my computer account, after he convinced me to give him my password. He found what he was looking for, an email from a guy friend. I walked in the room and watched him rise from his seat, slowly and deliberately like a hunter sneaking up on its prey. In that one second the room seemed to become smaller. His hands reached towards me, and for the first time appeared menacing to my eyes. He pushed me into the wall, my back slamming against the sunny yellow paint. I shoved back, and ran outside, barefoot and shaking. He slammed his door and turned the lock. I heard a window opening above me, and my bag dropped neatly in front of me, landing awkwardly upside down, bruised and confused just like me. I was free to leave, but I blamed myself for upsetting him; the ache in my back became numb. I could not walk away seeing as my feet felt like lead. Twenty minutes later, he opened his door, and I walked right back inside.

Always following these fights was hours of his apologies, beautifully spun and full of promises. Layer upon layer of reasons why, and I listened to every single one. Friends had given up asking why we were still together, as the fighting got worse and worse. I thought that no one would be able to understand the reasons behind the attachment. I was scared to admit failure, afraid that giving up on him would mean that I had made a mistake, to lose hope in something that I still believed in so greatly. I felt like I was in too deep, left to float in the deep end of a great dark pool, not quite touching the bottom, but getting closer, my breathing shallow and labored, barely keeping my head

above the water. To the outside world I appeared mostly the same, everyday I put on a mask, and stepped into the world. When I was alone, I retreated, exhausted by another fight that was different but the same, finally letting myself be weak. It was like a magnet pulling me along, I found myself stuck with no choice of getting away, letting the fear of abandoning him keep me from leaving.

We were sitting in a park, the ground soft and moist, and the sounds of a street fair close by. The air was warm and light and the wind lifted my hair off the back of my neck, we were getting along. I was laughing at something he had said, and it was one of the moments that kept me hooked in, when I saw glimpses of what I knew was goodness inside of him. The problem was that these moments were fleeting. Settling for only a second, filling my mind with possibility, and then gone, like a flash of a memory from when you were young. The argument at the park was petty, weary and familiar to my ears. It erupted, and we lashed out at each other screaming and screaming until we reached the peak. I reached out and slapped him straight across his cheek. I had never hit him. The stinging sound shocked both of us, the imprint of my fingers slashed across his face, his mouth hooked into a shape of surprise. He called me every rude word he knew, and I focused on the way he rocked back and fourth, his whole body tense and wound up, a tightly wired clock ready to spring, with his fists clenched closely to his sides. He left and I sat back down, holding my offending hand, wondering if this was the end. It wasn't.

As our relationship got worse, our words that we used became more creative and threatening. Love was used as an excuse for almost everything; he was not able to let me leave because he loved me too much. He would grip my upper arms, leaving a small trail of bruises, telling me that he would not let me go, he loved me too much. He couldn't let me go to a party without him, he would worry, and he loved me too much to leave me alone. He told me that if we broke up he would have nothing left, that I was everything to him, that I was the only person who understood him. I was overwhelmed with the emotion behind this four-letter word. Love was something that I believed we had, it was the reason why we were still together, the glue that kept us from tearing completely. If I left him what would he have left? What would he do without me? I did not have the strength to find out the answer to these questions.

Time passed quickly; there were more physical fights that would escalate to a slap or a punch, holes in

the walls that created surface wounds, piercing right through to blackness. I thought this was what love was like; you had to go through the suffering to appreciate the good. I could not imagine myself without him, and let this fear dig its sharp fingernails into me until I had nothing but him left, discarding other relationships with friends and shutting out family, sacrificing them with little thought, truly believing that I only needed him to make my life go round. One day at school he would not let me go to class. I tried to step around him; he would push me back, not letting me go. The bright fluorescent lights beat down, the grey walls pressed against us. The squeaky slapping sound of shoes approached; he dropped his hands, and stopped talking. The teacher asked if everything is ok. I nodded once, my throat gravelly and aching, avoiding eye contact. I usually convinced myself that I was fine, but in moments like this I found myself close to unraveling. I turned and quickly walked away, running into class late, and slipped into my seat, knowing that I was being watched from all sides. It happened several times, and I was referred to the counselor's office, where I was met with questions and gentle pushes to help lines and websites. I denied the need for help, faking cheeriness with a weak smile. I became practiced at hiding the marks on my body. If one was spotted, there were always casual stories that I had to fit the particular bruise. It became a sick game in my head, a mental exercise to explain the purple tinted badges of our happy time together.

He was a noose that had been put on my neck, tightening if I tried to move freely, reigning me in if I tried to escape. Several times I tried to break up with him, telling myself that it was the end. It was a lie; I would always go back, knowing what I was walking into, fully aware of the consequences. I was addicted to the drama and the feeling of being loved and cared for so deeply by another person. He would threaten to hurt himself if I left him; and so we stayed together, even though I had completely lost the sense of who I was. I had lost my passions and interests, and my mask was now permanent. I was a shell of my former self, going through the motions, not really existing at all. I never cried, it wouldn't help the situation, and I convinced myself that it would make me feel more pathetic and helpless than I already was. I would push it down; it would swell, a rumbling of emotion that was caged deep inside of me.

I was reading a magazine in my bedroom. I took the quiz out of habit, not really noticing what it was about until I got to the third question. I looked back at the title; "ARE YOU IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?" the words jumped at me, screeching in a high-pitched voice in bold lettering. I slowly

finished the quiz, adding up my score. I had scored a possible twelve out of twelve and I found myself second-guessing my answers, there was no way that this was true. My insides twisted, and I realized that I was tired of lying to myself. This was me. This was what I had become and it was time to stop. I looked back at the twelve out of twelve, and picked up the phone. I told him I couldn't do it any longer. I was tired of the fights, of lies, of unhappiness. He began to weep. It was a horrible sound. A deep noise that drove into my gut and tore my heart like a paper shredder. He told me he would never be able to face losing me. I began to feel myself being sucked in, losing my control. I hung up the phone, and looked around. Everything around me still looked the same; the only thing that was different was me.

I would avoid him in the halls. I didn't answer his phone calls. The main reason for how long this time had lasted was because I was exhausted. I could not stand someone telling me they loved me more than anything else in this world, and then turning around and telling me how much they hated me, of how worthless I was. I was sick of lying to my parents, of having to wear long sleeved shirts in warm weather. His words no longer had the same meaning as they used to; they were recycled and worn. Everyone has a point where they snap. I had reached mine. That didn't mean that I didn't miss him, because that never changed. I had an ache inside of me that I carried around, a constant war between my mind and my feelings. But I was mending slowly, it was a strange and unfamiliar feeling to be alone, but I began to accept it.

One month later

I am in class when I am called to the office, a place I have never graced with my presence, I am quiet and never in need of disciplining. I am taken to the sick room. The only object is a meager cot on spindly legs, mummified in a pale white blanket, with a small pillow trapped beneath it. I sit down and it creaks in protest. My counselor walks in the room. She is a tiny woman, taking up barely any physical space, and yet she seems huge to me, her face looming above me, floating from side to side. She takes my hand; her fingers are warm

and slender, her silver wedding ring digging into me. I hold my breath. She tells me that Jessie killed himself that morning, and that he left a note addressed to me. She tells me that it is going to be ok, and that it is not my fault. Her lies stack on top of each other but I know the truth. She is doing her job and it is useless. I watch her mouth continue to move, her lips stretching over her coffee stained teeth; her fingers still gripping mine. I hear nothing. I turn my face away from her so she cannot see the relief washing over my face. *What have I done* runs through my brain.

Two weeks later

I run with purpose, a fugitive fleeing to safety. The lump in my throat burns, and I am overcome with nausea. I push open the heavy oak door. I am outside in brilliant sunshine, a contrast to the darkness flooding my mind. I hear no sound except my breath, short and quick. I fall quickly, tasting gritty cement. I close my eyes and lay motionless. I wish to be any place but here.

I open my eyes to blazing sun. I feel like hours have passed, although I'm sure it has only been minutes. No one has come after me. I am alone. The cement is still cool and I wipe the vomit from my mouth. I look at my arms, almost free of bruises for the first time in a long time. I push myself to a sitting position. I feel something move inside of me, I feel pieces of myself shifting, reshuffling, and I feel raw and scraped. My guilt is never completely gone; I battle it as it comes in waves, knocking me down and then pushing me back up. I don't try to fight the grief and in certain moments when I find myself waiting for the phone to ring, I realize that he is really gone. It overcomes me to a point that I am sometimes amazed that I am still here at all. The relief that I feel is something that I also face everyday, my emotions sometimes too big and too great for me to separate myself. It is now spring. The flowers are beginning to bloom and the kids are getting restless. In my heart I believe that Jessie died to set me free, he let me go because he lacked the courage to do it alive. He could not face the idea of living alone. I stand up and walk back towards the door, to Jessie's funeral with the sun at my back, feeling that I will be ok.

Faith in Folly

By Lochlin Duperron

Event: T+3 hours

Pulling the sleek, smooth kinetic impeller from a hidden pocket, Ellen flipped a switch on it and fired in one action. The weapon sounded like a small nuclear blast, with roughly the same energy potential. The man in front of her, who was in the process of raising his rifle, disintegrated along with everything in a ninety degree angle from the front of the weapon. The wave of overpressure washed over her, the heat blistering her skin and throwing her backwards. Far in the facility, she could hear the incessant chorus of different alarms.

“Very little time left...” Ellen said to herself quietly as she pulled herself up. She had to escape, just had to, or everything that she had done, everything the Resistance had done, would have been for naught. Looking to her other pocket, she saw that the cylinder of polymorphic memory crystal still glowed a deep pink; the battery on its bottom forcing it to hold its structure. If she didn't escape before the battery died, the Artificial Intelligence inside of it would die, and it would take everything it knew with it to its grave. The AI was an incredible opportunity for the Resistance, one that they had committed everything to getting. It was all-or-nothing, as the Resistance had overextended itself to get it.

Sprinting down the damaged corridor, dodging fallen support beams and other debris in the twilight from the emergency lights was a surreal experience for her, possibly due to the intense concussion she had incurred during her violent disagreement with the wall when she fired her weapon. Taking a right, she encountered a sealed blast door and paused to think of a way past. She began to fret for a moment, as she had a precious twelve hours to escape and make it back to Resistance headquarters.

Finishing her retrospection, she swore. Without access to the main shaft, she would never make it up in time. It was obviously her luck that the damaged blast door was the only one that could not be circumvented in her path to the primary shaft. Doubling back, she knew her sole way out in time was

the Magnetic Mass Accelerator Array, a very high-tech, advanced, large bore, surface-to-space gun that fired super-dense kinetic rounds at several times escape velocity. Finding an entry point to the firing cylinder, she pressed the open button, which flashed red and announced that due to facility alert status, the coils were being kept 'warm'. Entering the cannon would mean that the metals in her bloodstream would be ripped out and attracted to the coils. Frowning, she knew the only way to use the cannon as an escape route would be to go to the secondary command hub for the external weapons systems, a level up. Sadly, the only way to travel between levels besides the primary shaft were locked maintenance shafts. Nothing was ever easy.

Moving down the dark deserted corridors, she saw several bodies, torn apart by the internal defense system, and walls black with carbon scoring. Turning one last corridor, she found where the staff of this level had made their last stand. Entering a battlefield of destroyed security bots, blown out turrets and corpses, many corpses, she felt the bile rising in her throat as she saw the floor was slick with the blood not only of military personnel, but of researchers and maintenance personnel too, and their families, at the back of the destroyed barricade of furniture. Because their best way out of the level was the maintenance shaft which had been sealed at alert status, it was at the center of the barricade. Ellen would have to climb over it to get to the shaft, and over a proverbial mountain of bodies.

Pushing vile thoughts to the back of her head she vaulted the barricade and went for the door to the shaft. Locked; as expected. However, unlike the people around her, she had the access code... that's why they didn't. She had reset all the codes. In spite of herself, in her mind she saw the chief technician punching his code in over and over again, with the screams of the dying all around him. The sounds of the weapons must have been deafening in this hallway.

“One, one, two, three, five, eight, one, three.” With just the slightest pneumatic hiss, the hatch began to rise. The main lighting was active on this level, bathing the shaft in a bright, harsh light. Squinting, a

detached part of herself noticed that she had been in the dark for a very long time. Getting her feet beneath her, she quickly looked around. A few seconds of observation could save her life. Exiting, she walked the deserted hallway towards the control room. The hallway was barren, all military. This was not a civilian level of the facility, so none of the comforts that civilians expected would be here. Walking up to the transparent door of the security room, she noticed that the card reader had been partially disassembled, as if someone had been trying to break into it but had been called away... or killed, judging by the blood splatter that was on the left wall. Frowning, she grabbed the reader part of the terminal and saw that the cables still attached it to the base. Quickly swiping her false access card, she started to take a step forward, and nearly bumped into the still sealed door. A mechanical male force read out in a monotone:

“Access denied. The security accounts manager service is currently offline. Maintenance has been notified.”

“Well, I doubt that maintenance is going to be responding anytime soon.” Wishing that her impeller was good for more than one shot, Ellen recalled the diagrams of the security systems she had examined before entering the facility and drew the portable security server out of another hidden pocket.

Wiring the box in, she tapped the front of the box three times, and it lit up. Text began to scroll on the screen while Ellen’s eyes glazed over as she waited for the magical marvel to render an obscenely expensive security system useless.

A short sequence of beeps brought Ellen back from her stupor to find the borders of the screen flashing from the uniform black to a deep red and back again. Grimacing, she realized that her sabotage had been better than she had first expected. She had flashed new protocols to all the card readers that prevented them from completing a handshake and so prevented them from ever opening whatever they were attached to.

Beginning to tap a few commands in, she found it hard to concentrate with the steady thud in the adjacent hall. Her eyes suddenly widening, she turned towards the connecting hallway. A maintenance bot stood there, heating its spark welder up. Lunging to the side, she felt the heat from a near-fatal blow wash over her for the second time in what seemed to have been nearly no time at all. Rolling onto her feet, she sprinted around a corner. Breathing hard, Ellen swore for permitting it to get so close to her. The blisters on her skin that were just beginning to stop stinging from her first near-death experience had reawakened with a vengeance. She could give herself a painkiller she had

in her jacket pocket, but it would dull her senses and slow her down. A half second slower and she would have melted into jelly beneath the maintenance bots’ spark. Speed was life. Hearing the slow steady thump of the bot coming for her, Ellen forced herself to start moving again. The level was designed as a tiny square, so perhaps she could take the main corridor all the way around back to the main security office. Sprinting off, she took one turn, two, three, and ended up exactly where she started.

“Back to square one”. Quickly pushing the last few commands in on the black box, she saw the transparent door slide open soundlessly. Grinning, she stepped through and hit the close door button on the other side. Facilities like this were built so that doors were easy to close, but hard to open. The door closed just in time, too, as the maintenance bot, having doubled back, fired a spark at her, which splashed harmlessly against the supercomposite door. The security room was designed not only as a secondary command center but a bunker within a bunker. Crossing to the overlook command console, she typed in a few quick commands that shut down the coils to the MMAA. Going to exit, she was dismayed to find that the maintenance bot didn’t have anything better to do but watch her through the door, immediately crossing it out as an exit. Moving to the adjacent room, she found an armory.

“Wow, the Empire has nice toys.” The armory was lined with kinetic accelerator rifles, larger (and more controlled) versions of her impeller along with suits of armor for an Imperial guard soldier. Beginning to don one, she saw herself in a mirror. At twenty-one years of age, Ellen had long, alizarin red hair, blue irises and very pale skin. She was dressed in an engineer’s outfit, a powder blue uniform that had been worn too long. It was wet with sweat and blood, torn in many different places and covered in black carbon marks. Stripping down and finishing a suit of armor and a rifle, she suddenly realized why the Imperial soldiers were so hard to beat. The suit molded to her body and seemed to carry itself, and she could feel the power it gave her.

Finding the escape hatch that led into the firing shaft, she attempted to open it, but found it locked. However, the magnetic clamps that had previously held it shut had been disabled by some fluke of luck. Grabbing the edge of the hatch and pulling, she could hear the Neosteel resin in the motor cases bending. Pulling it all the way open, and jumping down onto the catwalk that had automatically deployed when the door “opened” in the shaft, Ellen made her way to the lift. Deploying it and climbing on, she arrived at another catwalk, which extended for her. Several seconds later she was moving up the ladder that would take her to

level one. She felt like she had cheated a tiny bit, bypassing all the troubles of the other levels, but wasn't overly worried. Entering the poorly-lit foyer, she stopped dead in her tracks and froze. In front of her was a seven foot tall man-like creature, covered in rust-brown fur, similar to a fox. He stood silently, a lanky creature clad in golden robes with human proportions belying his strength. Standing bi-pedal on paws and using a bushy tail for balance, she could see in its eyes that it was fiercely intelligent, and very possibly malevolent.

"So, you are the one who has caused all that we see here." A frightening voice, mostly because it was so calm. It didn't look like the fox person could produce human speech with such a muzzle, but the voice was perfectly articulated. Trying frantically to get the rifle unslung from her back, she didn't even see him cross the five meters between them before he hit her, a powerful blow that sent her rifle spiraling away from her, but not hard enough to break any bones.

"Do you have any idea what you have done here? So many deaths, and for what, so you can hope to slaughter more innocents?" The voice was calm, but Ellen could feel in her bones that it was merely the calm before the storm. She had made the mistake of getting into hand-to-hand combat with an abomination against the one true God, a member of the genetically engineered Emperor's personal guard. He had reflexes orders of magnitude faster than hers, and he could hit her with enough force to turn her bones to powder if he wanted. The only thing Ellen was counting on was that this one was as arrogant as the rest of them and tried to play with his prey before killing her. She hoped she could knock some of the arrogance out of him, but it didn't bode well that no human had ever won a fight with one of the abominations. As long as she kept him talking he wouldn't kill her.

"I'm fighting to free my people! Something *something* like you would never understand!"

"Is that what you really believe, little girl? That you free your people by blowing them up with bombs in markets and assassination attempts?"

"The only people we target are collaborators! Traitors to their own kind!"

"Ah, yes. They collaborate by living their lives in the splendor the Empire gives to all citizens. They collaborate by not living in fear of arrest because they have not helped to slaughter their own kind."

"And the Empire doesn't? What about the inquisitions of knowledge, the orbital bombardments?"

"I did not say that the Empire had clean hands in this matter, child. No one is innocent in this war anymore. There are only varying degrees of guilt among both our sides. The difference is that those in service of the Empire give their innocence to protect that of the average person, while your side gives your innocence to try to take it away from others."

"Those people lost their innocence as soon as they turned their back on God."

"Ah, the comment that is at the root of this entire war. It never fails to come back to this. So, child, because these people do not believe as you do they are not worthy of life?"

"As they have turned their back against God, God turns his back against them."

"Rhetoric! Do you even know what you are talking about, child, or are you merely repeating what your elders have told you? You wage your entire war on nothing more than fiction that has been rewritten since the beginning of time to control the ignorant!" Ellen could see his fur begin to fluff up; it was obviously very hard for a member of his... race to keep their emotions hidden.

"That 'fiction' is the Word of God, you blasphemer, you heretic! It is the commandments we must follow to enter Heaven... although soulless creatures like you need not apply. Your Emperor will soon meet the same fate as Lucifer, whom he has tried so hard to copy."

A grin slowly spread over his face, another expression that she would have thought impossible for a muzzle. "Interesting that you should mention that, child. I find your choice of terms in this matter ironic. A heretic is someone who chooses his own path, while Lucifer actually means "The Bearer of Light". The Emperor has truly brought light to our dark world. And even so, your religion states that your god is the only god and that you must believe in your Jesus Christ in order to ascend to your Heaven, correct? What about the Islamic peoples, the Jewish, the Hindu? None of them believe in your Jesus Christ as your lord. Are they doomed to your Hell? Are you doomed to theirs for not believing in their laws?"

"Quiet, creature. You would never understand faith."

"Ah. It is so very hard to reason someone out of a position they have not reasoned themselves into. Your god states that you must not kill, but what about all the souls you have claimed today? Are you repentant for their deaths?"

“I am not sorry to you, animal. God will forgive me. I am fighting against a secular empire, one without morals and full of fools who play God.”

“I was hoping for something a little more enlightened. The empire is full of enlightened scientists, wonderful artists, visionary writers...”

“And acceptant of deviants and immorality at every turn.”

“You say that like it is a bad thing, child. So, you are permitted to do whatever you choose on this plane and you believe that you will be forgiven for all your sins, all the deaths you have caused? I do hope your god has mercy on your soul, for I shall show you the same you showed to those below us.”

Ellen rolled onto her gun and brought it towards him, but he was already gone. Spinning, she saw just a blur of movement before the monomolecular sword bisected her weapon. Falling backwards, Ellen drew her combat knife, a sharp carbon-steel blade. In the low light, his sword, a mimic of a rapier, had a two-dimensional blade that when looked at straight on looked like blue smoke reflected endlessly. When looked at from the side, it was invisible.

“Even in the face of the end, you show no fear, child. Your lives are so short... perhaps that is why you are willing to throw them away. Goodbye, child.” Ellen never saw his next movement. The blade passed effortlessly through her armor and into her chest, puncturing both her lungs. “I am sorry.”

“I was just doing what was right...”

“We all are, child. We all are.”

“I’m cold. So very cold.” Ellen drew her last breath just as dawn broke and light flooded through the foyer windows. Still holding her corpse, the Grand Master of the Guard watched the life drain from her features as her blood soaked the fur on his hands.

“Sleep with dreams of oblivion, child.” Retrieving the small pink glowing cylinder from her jacket, he stood and walked away, his paws not even making the slightest noise on the polished metal floor as the pool of blood slowly spread over it. Stopping in the doorway, he turned around to view the foyer; the light from the front windows was low enough to cast long shadows on the floor, giving the impression that the blood pool was coming from the darkness.

Illusions and Realisms

By Jennifer Perry

I was shaking from excitement when I walked home. The sun was shining, the sky was bright, and everything was right with the world. In other words, the school dance was tonight – and I was determined to talk to Sarah.

Sarah Armelle was my longtime crush. I had also never talked to her. Well, unless you count the time she asked me for a pencil, and I nearly melted when she smiled at me. The only problem was the fact that she was incredibly popular, incredibly gorgeous, and just plain...incredible. It also didn't help that she didn't even know I was alive. But tonight, everything was going to change. I could feel it.

As I entered my house, I shut the door quietly, hoping to avoid any encounters with the members of my family. I tiptoed up the stairs, avoiding the creaky spots I knew so well. But of course, Nicky and Mickey were waiting at the top of the stairs anyway.

Nicky and Mickey were my two stepbrothers. They had never liked or even been kind to me, a total skater boy, and I had never got along with them either. I waved, and tried to get past them to my room, but they blocked my way. Mickey started. "Chase, Mom wants you to take out the garbage and make dinner in an hour. Oh, and my homework is on your desk. I want it finished by 5." Nicky joined in. "We need you to clean our rooms too. Oh, and one more thing. I hope you weren't thinking of going to the dance tonight, because Mom needs you to look after Fifi."

I balked at them. They glanced at each other slyly, with what can only be described as an evil smile on their faces. I was in shock; all my plans were falling apart in front of me. "Vicky wants me to baby-sit *the dog*?"

Nicky and Mickey gave identical shrugs, and Mickey said, "Don't argue with us. It's Mom who wants you to, not us. Besides, you know how lonely Fifi gets." He gave a small giggle as he said it. I rolled my eyes and turned around to find Vicky, my stepmother. As I jogged down the stairs, I heard them laughing and whispering behind me. I found Vicky in the kitchen, eating ice cream out of the tub. She was a bulky, large woman, but had only been that way after my father

died. We had never gotten along either; she was jealous that I held my father's attention so raptly. Now, three years after my father's car crash, and her inheritance of his estate, she was refusing to give me college money unless I did everything she wanted. Literally, everything she wanted, as well as the commands of her sons. She looked up, but didn't acknowledge me. "Vicky," I said carefully, "I can't baby-sit Fifi tonight. I promised Fran I'd take her to the dance." This wasn't strictly true, but not really a lie either. Vicky just looked at me, ice cream dripping from her spoon. She took another bite. "Too bad for her then. She shouldn't have bothered with you, should she? You're babysitting Fifi tonight. I feel like going out." My eyes narrowed, and I tried again. "Vicky-"

"Do you want to go to college or not?" I breathed in deeply, trying to restrain myself. I left the room without saying another word. I doubt she even noticed. When I got to my room, the phone rang, and I answered immediately. "Hello?"

"Hey Chase, it's Fran." I rolled my eyes. I knew her voice inside out by now, but she always said that when she called. Francesca Goddard was my best, longest, and truest friend, who I had known for many years. She was a tiny person, her features packed into a short, lean body, and pixie-like face. "Hey," I said, "I can't go to the dance tonight. Vicky's making me baby-sit Fifi."

"You can't be serious," she said in a monotone. "That woman is so incredibly selfish. And stupid. I seriously doubt Fifi would care if you were there or not." I smiled. "Yeah, I don't think so either," I said. Fran could always cheer me up. I heard Fran huff on the other end, then say, "Well, look. I know you really wanted to go to this, so we need to make it happen anyway. I'll bring over Dad's tux and shoes, and get someone else to make sure Fifi doesn't accidentally kill herself, or whatever it is Vicky thinks she's going to do. Then I'll meet you at the dance. Okay?"

I grinned. Normally, I would have ignored my own thoughts, but tonight I was going to indulge the rebel inside me, and go with this crazy plan. "You're the best Fran. I really want to talk to Sarah tonight. I feel

like this is my chance.” Fran ignored that sentence, saying “One more thing. Whatever you do Chase, don’t lose the shoes. They’re my Dad’s favorite. Plus, they’re Armani.”

“No problem,” I said. I thanked her again, and hung up. Sighing, I started Mickey’s homework. Just after Vicky yelled up the stairs that she was leaving with Nicky and Mickey, Fran’s older sister arrived. She had a beautiful silk tux and leather shoes that looked extremely expensive, as well as a car waiting to take me to the dance. I got dressed fast, and on the way I bought a lottery ticket for good luck. It was a kind of tradition Fran and I had.

When I arrived at the dance hall, I was more nervous than I could ever remember being before. I kept picturing Sarah’s face in the back of my mind, and I wondered what she would look like. I couldn’t find Fran anywhere. But when I went inside again, I saw Sarah. She was standing at the foot of the staircase, laughing with her friends. She was in a pink strapless dress that ended at her knees, and matched her honey-blond hair perfectly. Her blue eyes sparkled under the disco lights. It took me five minutes to get the nerve to go down the staircase. A further ten minutes later, I still hadn’t worked up the nerve to talk to her. But she got to me first.

“Hey,” I heard behind me. Her voice. The voice. I turned around slowly. She looked even better up close. “Hi,” I said slowly, hardly even believing this was happening. Sarah was swinging around a glass of something sparkly, and probably spiked, in one hand. “Do you want to dance?” she asked abruptly, continuing honestly, “Because you’re kind of cute, and you have a really expensive-looking tux, and this is my favorite song.”

I nodded slowly, screaming in my head from excitement. As I cautiously took her hand – her very soft hand – to lead her onto the dance floor, she tripped over her foot, nearly spilling her drink, before I grabbed it and left it on the table. Yes, I realized, she was a little tipsy. It was not something I completely approved of, but I was sure she had other qualities. When we started to dance, she practically fell on me. Then, she started talking. And talking. And talking. She talked about her visit to a Bryan Adams concert, and how she got to meet him after, and he smelled really good. She talked about the trips she’s taken all over the world. She talked about the time she went to LA and ran into Brad Pitt, and he told her she was pretty. She talked about her Prada backpack. She talked about her Gucci purse. But most of all, she talked about her shoes. Shoes, shoes, shoes. By now, I was feeling so disappointed, as well as bored. This wasn’t my Sarah. I thought she had been deeper, more intellectual. Even

now, her layers of makeup were so thick I could hardly see her face.

I interrupted the stream of mindless chatter right as the clock chimed twelve. Taking that as my cue I said quickly, “Oh my god, its midnight!” I took a glance at my watch, and gave a look of mock disappointment. “I’m so sorry, but I have to go...clean my room. Or I’m grounded. Sorry.” I unclasped her hand from mine, and started to back away slowly, making apologetic motions.

She looked very confused and sad, a puppy dog look on her face. Her lower lip was jutting out slightly, and an hour ago I would have done anything to take that expression away. Feeling nothing towards her now was so strange. I was amazed that I honestly did not care, and I realized she didn’t attract me whatsoever. Sure, she was pretty. But I could never have the kind of conversations with her that I do with Francesca; intellectual, comical conversations. More than anything, I realized it felt liberating.

I started to smile from that thought, that feeling of being set free, until her eyes set sight of my shoes. Her blue beams suddenly turned glassy out of shock, and gained a hazy look of dim adoration. They glanced up at me, and as I started to turn away she grabbed me with a shocking burst of energy. I froze, more out of shock than anything else. She whispered huskily into my ear, her breath hot on my cheek. “Are you wearing the Armani Leather Derby shoes?”

She was clutching me so hard I thought it might bruise. “Um, yeah, I think so,” I said awkwardly, trying to shake her off me. Her perfume was suffocating. Instead of letting me go, she clutched tighter, and slowly reached her hands down my leg, to the shoes. She stroked the shoes gently, her glassy eyes shining at the leather. We were standing in the middle of the dance floor, and getting a lot of weird looks by now, and I was feeling pretty uncomfortable. I stepped back, trying to make my getaway, but she clutched my foot tighter, so tight I was starting to drag her across the floor. I shook my foot; she was being ridiculous. She held on. I shook my foot harder, stepping away again. She grabbed onto the edges. I shook my foot, and took another step. She tore off the shoe.

I was so surprised I didn’t even run. She looked just as surprised as me, but instead of having my look of horror, she looked ecstatic. In emphasis, she gave a shriek of joy, kissed the leather, and ran off. She didn’t even give me a second look. I almost sighed in relief, until I remembered what Francesca had told me when lending them to me.

“Whatever you do Chase, don’t lose the shoes. They’re my dad’s favorite.”

I groaned. Despite my instincts, I thought of Francesca, and ran off after Sarah. Well, I couldn't really run with only one shoe, but I tried. Limping, I looked everywhere. Sarah was gone. She wasn't in the dance hall, the bathrooms (don't ask), or outside. Finally, I went out into the parking lot to search for her car. I couldn't find it either. Sighing in frustration, I collapsed on a bench. I looked beside me, and realized in shock that there was already a pretty girl sitting there. "Oh sorry," I said, "I didn't mean to disturb you—"

I cut off when I realized that the girl was Francesca. She didn't look like her usual understated self tonight, with a fairytale white dress on, and her hair up in curls. She looked beautiful. Much more beautiful than Sarah had ever been. But as I looked closer, I saw tear tracks underneath her eyes.

She was looking at me in shock too. "Wow," she finally spluttered out, "You look amazing in that tux." She laughed. "Way better than Dad ever did."

"You look amazing too," I said eventually. We both looked away, a little awkwardly. I decided to get straight to the point. "What's wrong?" I whispered, wiping a tear off her cheek. "Oh, nothing," she said, her voice squeaky, and her reply too fast. I pursed my lips. "Come on Fran, I know you aren't okay. What's wrong?"

"No, no, I'm fine," she said, putting a hand on my arm to calm me. "I'm just...glad you had a good time with Sarah." She smiled sadly up at me. "I saw you two dancing." I gave a small snort with laughter, and Fran looked confused. I looked at her, saying honestly, "Sarah is so materialistic! She's ridiculous, she's almost as bad as Vicky! And she's so boring too; I seriously

think she has fewer brain cells than the rest of us." Fran just stared at me in shock. Then she started laughing, a deep, long, contagious laugh. I laughed with her, glad that I had made her happy. When we stopped we shared a comfortable silence for a few moments. Then, Fran said seriously, "Chase, there's something I need to tell you." I nodded, listening intently. "I know we've known each other for a really long time, and you probably don't think of me like this, but...where is your shoe?"

She looked up at me in confusion, and I blanched. "Well, Sarah actually grabbed it and ran away with it." Her jaw dropped. "I'm so sorry Fran, but she knew they were Armani, and I don't think she's going to give them back, and—"

Fran was laughing.

"It's okay, don't worry. They're not the Armani pair. I couldn't give them to you because Dad was already wearing them. They're an old pair I found at the back of his closet. I don't think he's even used them, actually."

I laughed again, at all the unexpected, crazy occurrences of the night, and the strange predicament that was my life. Adding to the list of unexpected occurrences, when I turned to Fran, she came right out and said it. "Chase Cinders, you're my best friend, but I think I love you." And the craziest thing was, with Sarah out of the way, I realized I felt the same way.

I won't say we lived happily ever after, but it was definitely close.

I also won my lottery ticket.

She's My Kinda Rain

By Caitlin Sharrat

As I sat on my porch listening to the rain hitting the tin roof, all I could think of was how much I loved the rain, how it sounds how beautiful it is. I look over across the yard and see my truck; the rain is washing away all the mud from work today. I take another drag of my cigarette and flick it away watching the sparks spinning in all directions until it hits a puddle and sizzles out. The phone begins to ring and it catches my attention and I drag myself away. I answer the phone, "Hello?" I say.

A gruff voice says, "Cal?" I knew that it was my ass of a boss from the yard.

"Yes."

"We need to talk."

There was a pause and he continued, "This business can't use someone like you, you've been late three times this week and all the other employees find you a threat. You're intimidating Cal; it's better you than all of them, sorry."

In complete shock I just hung up the phone and I walked outside and the rain had stopped. Great, I thought unenthusiastically I hopped in my truck and grabbed the pack of cigarettes sitting on the passenger seat. I grabbed the last one, cracked the window, lit it and drove straight to Charlie's place. As I lean over the steering wheel and look up at the starry sky all I could think was cars. That was all I knew... and Bruce's place was the nicest and closest to Kingston... my mind snapped back when a possum jumped onto the road, I slammed on the brakes, dropped my smoke in my lap and hopped out of the truck and slapped it off myself. The

possum just looked at me and sauntered off. YOU'RE WELCOME I said sarcastically.

Thankfully I was close to Charlie's. I could see the Sweetwater Mountains as I turned down his driveway and crossed the little creek before his house. I put the truck in park got out and when I turned around there was Charlie standing on the steps with a smoke in his mouth and a beer in his hand. I stood there for a second staring at him. He was tall and thin with sandy blonde hair. Almost as if he knew, he had a beer on the step for me and as I got closer he bent down and tossed it at me.

"Come inside," he said. I wasn't there to argue so I walked inside.

"So did you kill him?" he asked with a smirk.

"Nah, what am I gonna do Charlie? He gave me some B.S spiel then had the nerve to say sorry!"

"Listen Cal, I know a place I'm sure you'll like," Charlie said with a clever grin.

"I don't know Charlie, how far away is it?"

"Right close to Kingston," he replied. I stared at him for a moment; he had somewhat of a reassuring smile on his face.

"Alright, gimme the number."

I take it gratefully, give him a hug and walk outside. A hand reaches from behind me, over my shoulder and passes me an unlit cigarette I turn and smile, he pats my back, rolls his eyes and walks inside. I turn back around, make my way back down the steps, across

the drive and into my truck, spark my smoke and make my way back home clenching my hopefully new found job.

I wake the next the next morning to the tree outside my window tapping gently. Squinting I remember that I have that number. Jumping out of bed my foot get's caught and I fall flat on my face. I get up once again, fully awake this time, run to see what time it is and skid to the phone hoping that nine AM wasn't too early on a Saturday. Dialing the numbers with shaky hands. A sweet voice answers, "Hello?"

"Hi," I reply, "Umm, I got your number from a friend...he said you needed someone to work for you."

"Ah yes, hold on a minute please," she said, then an older women's voice came on.

"Lookin' for work huh?" Without giving me a chance to reply she said, "We need some vehicles fixed and some fences mended, think you can do that?"

"Of course ma'am," I say enthusiastically.

"Good here's my address: 135 Buckcreek Road. Do you have a name?"

"Sorry yes, I'm Cal Sawyer," I reply feeling like a complete idiot for not introducing myself.

"Can you be here today?"

"I can be there in a half an hour!"

"Good, see you then, bye."

There was a click on the other end. Throwing down the phone, grabbing my keys I ran out the door.

The property wasn't that far away from mine, with a long gravel road. Getting closer I can see two houses with a tractor and a couple of cars. Getting closer to the house I see the fences that need to be mended. A woman steps outside of the little house and meets me at my truck. She asks, "You must be Cal?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Well I'm Ruth, Ruth Logan."

Just then the door crept open and the most stunning girl I had ever seen walked out. She took my breath away and my heart skipped a beat. Ruth followed my gaze, turned and said, "This is my daughter, Rain-Marie."

I acknowledged with a slight nod as I kept my gaze on Rain. She was beautiful, with long brown hair and her deep hazel eyes. She walked down the steps past her mother and put her hand out for me to shake it. I looked at her and shook her hand. It was smooth but it was a firm shake. I smiled slightly, she looked at me, our eyes met quickly and she looked away. Thankfully Ruth came in and said, "Well I'll take you on a tour."

"Yes ma'am." I said regretfully. She showed me everything. Where the tools were for the fence and the cars; she showed me the other house which was for rent, and that was where I could use the washroom and take my breaks until they could find a renter. Ruth stopped just in front of the door, opened her coat and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. I looked at her then looked at the smokes, she smiled and said, "How old are you?"

"I'll be twenty on the fourth of July." I said.

"Hmm. My daughter will be eighteen on the eleventh of August." There was a slight pause and she went on, "Would you like a cigarette?" She said in a promiscuous manner. I smiled politely and said, "Yes." She said goodbye opened the door and left, leaving me to go and collect my supplies for the day's work.

The next few weeks I would only see Rain when she was out with the horses. Everyday when I would take my break I would watch her ride off elegantly. Later that day when I was fixing the fences Ruth drove up to me in the truck that I had fixed earlier that day. She came to a halt, rolled down the window and happily invited me for dinner. I was nervous to accept the offer but I knew it gave me the chance to see Rain's delicate face one more time.

I arrived in my best shirt and pants with my hair slicked back. I shakily walked up the steps, nervously knocked on the door and waited with a million thoughts running through my mind. Ruth answers the door, looks at me and slightly bites her lip I smile awkwardly and she invites me inside. As I walk inside the scent off sweet potatoes fills my senses. I look across the room. Rain is sitting at the table looking at me. I can hardly look away. Ruth invites me to sit at the table; there was lots of food, sweet potatoes, chicken and ochre with an apple pie cooling on the window sill.

We begin to eat and Ruth had to start the conversation. "So how did you get our number for work?" She asked inquisitively. "My best friend Charlie Barker

told me about you. I'm not sure how he knows you though."

"Charlie did some work for me a long time ago, but something happened and he left," she said reluctantly. I looked at Ruth and she looked away quickly, then I looked at Rain. She had tears in her eyes. Ruth got up and said, "Excuse me, but I have some dishes to attend to."

As she walked away everyone felt the awkward silence. I looked at Rain once again and said, "Would you like to go outside?" I could see she was very upset but she gave a smile. We both got up and I opened the door for her. She went and sat on the steps and I sat beside her and neither of us said anything. I thought of things to say but before I had the chance she opened up to me and she told me about her and Charlie's love. "Charlie was a great guy and I thought that we were in love but Charlie was scared of love and I was left alone," she said while she wiped her tears and continued to say, "but while I thought I was in love, I did not know love until I met you." As she looked at me in fear of what I might say, I gently tucked her hair behind her ear, I looked in to her eyes and I knew I loved her and I said, "Listen, from the moment that I saw you I never thought I would never be able to settle down and be in love. When I see you my heart stops and I don't know what to say and I want to be with you."

Suddenly it started to rain. I looked at her and grabbed her hand and asked her if she wanted to dance. We walked down the steps and into the rain, and our love was there as we danced hand in hand. As our gaze met I leaned in and our lips lightly touched.

As I woke the next morning remembering the night before I jumped out of bed with a slight spring in my step, hopped in my truck, cranked up the country and sang the whole way there. When I arrived, Bruce's truck was there and I didn't understand why. I jumped out of my truck and quickly went inside, only to find the three of them sitting in the living room. They all looked over at Bruce. His face went off colour and he jumped up quickly.

"What are you doing here!" He exclaimed.

"I work here what about you?" I said with a snarl.

"I'm here to see my daughter." My heart dropped. I was in complete shock. I had no idea that Bruce had a kid, and what are the chances of me

falling in love with the only one. Ruth looked at us and said, "You obviously know each other."

"Yes," Bruce said, "I fired him about a month ago from my yard." I didn't know what to say. I looked around like a fish out of water. All I could say was, "I have work to do." I walked away in anguish and went straight to the old house. Rain was closed behind me.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she said.

"Cause I didn't know." I look at her and I could tell she was hurt but it was true I had no idea. Then she looked at me and said in a frustrated tone, "I'm goin' ridin'."

I looked at her and nodded my head. As she walked away I waited a minute and stepped outside into the wind. I watched her walking towards the barn, I just turned around and made my way to the fences.

I finally got the last row of fencing up on the east side of the farm, when I saw Rain's horse come galloping by without Rain. I ran down to the riding ring and I saw Rain laying on the ground. Her body seemed mangled as she lay against the fence. I sprinted closer to her and just looked at her. Her head was bleeding badly. In a split second I was running towards the house to call 911 and tell Ruth what had happened. As I leapt into the house Ruth stood up quickly and asked, "What's the matter?"

"It's Rain, we need an ambulance!" I said in my most stern voice. Bruce was already running down to the ring as I got on the phone with the ambulance. As I told them what happened all I could see was her body lying limp in the dirt, her beautiful face covered in blood.

The ambulance arrived a short time later. Bruce and Ruth both went in the ambulance with Rain and I drove close behind them. It seemed to take forever to get to the hospital, and when we got there it was all a blur. Rain was put on a stretcher and rushed inside. I tried to follow them into the Emergency room, but a man stopped me and there I stood, looking like a lost puppy not knowing if she was ok or even alive.

Hours passed.

The doctor came into the waiting room and said, "Your daughter is in coma." He stood looking into Ruth's eyes. They were all welled up. She was crying and Bruce was just looking into nowhere. The doctor took a quick look at me and walked off. My heart fell. I sat down with my head in my hands, thinking of her beautiful eyes and that night in the rain.

The next few weeks were horrible. I was by her side everyday telling her stories, and telling her how much

I loved her. Today I brought my guitar and I had something special planned as I got it all tuned. I hadn't noticed that Bruce and Ruth were standing in the doorway. I began to strum and the words just poured out, "She's my kinda rain like love in a drunken sky, she's confetti fallin' down all night, she sits quietly there like water in a jar. She's my kinda rain." There

was a slight twitch in her fingertips. As I look up at her she's staring at me with a slight smile on her face and I couldn't help but let a tear roll down my cheek in sheer happiness. I hear Bruce and Ruth begin to cry but I drowned it out. I am lost in thought, her beauty, her everything. The only thing I could think about at the moment was that I love Rain.

Non-Fiction

In the Blink of an Eye

By Jessica Porter

I struggled to open my eyes, though I was afraid to find out what was on the other side of the darkness. I could hear a low constant beeping sound. I wanted to reach over and turn it off; make it stop, but all I could feel were tubes and cords. I located a button, and pressed it hard, hoping that would stop the awful beeping. Of course it didn't, it just made a new beeping sound; an awful high pitched one. In a matter of seconds, a nurse rushed in. A light went on, and she was quickly at my side. She kept talking to me, in a rushed manner, but all I could see was her lips moving. I tried to make out what they were saying, but I didn't understand. Everything was silent. All of a sudden, my sister came into the room where my mom already sat. At that moment it came back to me, as if the last puzzle piece had just been clicked into place. I couldn't remember everything, but I could remember some of it, which was more than enough.

It was early on a Friday evening, and my sister Chrissy, her boyfriend Corey and I decided to go out. We stopped at one of the local restaurants named Chico's, to grab a bite to eat and decide what kind of adventure we were going to go on. Soon enough, we all agreed that skating would be fun, since they had the new glow in the dark skating at the newly built rink downtown. When we got in my sister's car, I called my friend Brooke to see if she would like to come along. She was staying at her grandparents' house that weekend and would do anything to get out of the house for a few hours. Her grandparents lived down in North Nanaimo, on the high side along the ocean front. Their driveway was slanted and very steep, with one side being a slight cliff. As Chrissy was backing down it, she turned too soon and we almost went off the end of the cliff. Good thing we were almost at the bottom so it was only merely a two foot drop or it would have been a bit scarier of an event. We all laughed the shakes off and continued down the road to head to the skating rink. All of a sudden, a deer jumped out into the middle of the road and my sister, who is terrified of deer, screeched to a stop. Tears streamed down her face as she tried to catch her breath. After a couple minutes, she regained her strength to carry on down the road,

slowly, on the look out for more deer. We all found it funny that we almost got into two accidents in the last five minutes, because you never think that it would happen to you – until it does.

The clock on the dashboard stated that it was around eight pm as we drove by Chico's along Bowed Rd. This time, as we rounded the bend in front of the gas station, the outcome was a much different. People say that accidents happen so fast you can't see it coming – and it's true. The last thing I remember is driving along the road, singing and laughing, then all of a sudden a dead silence as we watched the nightmare unfold. A lady under the influence of alcohol and drugs, going way over the speed limit, came over the center lane and headed straight for us. My sister reacted very fast, and swerved so it wouldn't be a head on collision. Instead, the other vehicle smashed directly in between the driver and the back passenger – the driver being my sister and the back passenger being me. The impact made our car spin around and abruptly stop by hitting a light post. The abrupt stop made my head go crashing through the little back passenger window, leaving me with a bad concussion. The only thing I actually remember from the accident is sitting in the ambulance, strapped to a stretcher with a neck brace on, and looking up and seeing my sister's face completely covered in blood. She sat so still and brave, and here I was, screaming her name and crying for her. She held my hand and told me everything was going to be okay, but I couldn't believe her, seeing her the way she was.

Apparently the neighborhood houses that saw or heard the accident came rushing to our side. They brought blankets, water and their comfort in hopes of keeping us calm until the ambulance and police arrived. The vehicle who hit us tried driving away, but with all four tires off, the rims allowed her only a short getaway. The police found her just a little ways up the road, with a two year old child in the front seat. Luckily, she had enough common sense to strap the poor child up in his car seat and he was okay. At the

hospital, child services arrived and took the boy away so he could have a fresh start at a better life.

Meanwhile, I woke up at the hospital not knowing anything that was going on. The nurse told me I had been in an accident, and my family was here to see me. My mom had been sitting beside me holding my hand the whole time. I was completely unaware of anything around me, and I just kept asking where I was and why. Naturally, my mom kept asking the nurse if this was normal. She told my mom that yes, it is and that they gave me a cat scan and everything showed to

be completely normal. I vaguely remember anything from that night. The only memory I have of the whole accident is the horrific scene of seeing my sister's face covered in blood in the ambulance. Still to this day, I don't even remember having done my exams, which took place about a week and a half prior. I'm just very grateful that we were all lucky enough to walk away from the accident with only the memory to haunt us.

Next time you think this kind of thing could never happen to you – think again. I never dreamed that this would happen to me in a million years, but in the blink of eye, everything can change. The world is full of wonders.

Religion and Secularism

By Jacob Nagrocki

Religion is a big part of many people's day to day lives, and even if you don't believe in it, you are still inevitably exposed to it. For some it's just church on Sunday morning, or an old Christian school, that is easily forgotten. For others it's the clothes they wear, daily rituals and a piece of hope. However, for just as many it's a ruling force, dictating their lives and rights. Even so, modern progress has brought us an alternative to superstition, faith, and biblical teachings. Knowledge from research and experience, supplemented by logical thinking, gives us a secular way of thought, more so when the afterlife is taken out of the question. Yet, with a purely secular train of thought, have we put our morality at stake? Without religion, which is ultimately an explanation for why we're here and where we are going, can we keep good virtues or are we simply afraid of judgment? I think that's up to individuals to decide.

The ideal individuals from these very different groups, can be hardly distinguishable from the outside. It can even be possible for these two groups to exist interdependently. When it comes down to it, it's really only their faith, or lack thereof that is different by definition. Nevertheless, this one area can change quite a few things behaviorally.

The ideal religious man is highly esteemed by his peers on his virtues more than anything else. While his job need not be religious, some of his leisure time may be dedicated towards his religion, whether this be prayer, meditation, or time spent in a holy building. Other leisure activities are to be within the confines of what his religion deems wholesome and ethical, or at the least, not outside of those lines. Sincerity with others is quite important, he should be helpful and virtuous not in worry of his afterlife but to increase the well being of those men around him. At the same time, he will be confident knowing that he will be rewarded for his efforts in life. When in conflict, he looks to the skies with pleas that an answer will come to him, and during good times he will send thanks just as heartily. His concerns with society will be how his religion is being tolerated and how its morals are standing up to those around him.

The secular man is known as a man of experience, knowledge and logic. If his work is not related to the arts or sciences, he might spend his free time looking into them. He might be agnostic, believing that something is probably up there but not understanding how that relates to him entirely. As a result of this, he probably sets his own moral standards and seeks for himself where it is he should be going with his life. He is comfortable living his life under his own standards and that he can count on good judgment if that is what is awaiting him. Of course, even without this possibility on his mind it is important for him to see other human beings do well. When in conflict he will try to reason out a solution. He might try a series of things to test or use past experiences to solve his problem. In good times he will do what he can to expand his own mind, while following a trend of progress in technology and human rights. Freedom of speech is an important part of these rights, because without it little progress can be made by individuals and small groups. In areas with low human rights standards for religious reasons, it is important for them to maintain their right to speak up, and they don't believe that religion is a valid excuse anymore.

To summarize, the ideal religious or ideal secular lifestyles easily fit the mould of a moral life. However easy it would be to bash religion in certain areas of the world, where it causes fighting, retracts from human rights or deals questionable punishments, it would be just as easy to turn around on secularization and say they are causing unnecessary exclusion of some religions from innocent people. With this in mind, they are perfectly reasonable endeavors on an individual basis. Certain changes will hopefully take place to accommodate both groups. Even with religion as a reason there are certain things that won't hold up to human rights standards forever. I can't totally agree with secularism either, I believe that religion is good for society, at its least, to provide a framework for good morals. Neither group is perfect, and I believe it is up to us, not just as individuals, but as a whole, to reform how these things go.

Notes on Contributors:

- Tara Chag-Swanson** Grade 11, Nanaimo District Secondary School. First Prize (Fiction).
- Lochlin Duperron** Grade 11 Ladysmith Secondary School. Second Prize (Fiction).
I love to read, write and work on computers. I enjoy academics and I'm looking to go into molecular biology and make the world a better place.
- Emily Jacobsen** Grade 10, Nanaimo District Secondary School. Cover artist.
- Jacob Nagrocki** Grade 10, Dover Bay Secondary School. Hon. Mention (Non-Fiction).
Writing is something that I've always enjoyed doing. Outside of high school I hope to keep putting my thoughts into written words. My goal is to study sciences at UVIC and eventually relate that knowledge and experience with the public in a practical way.
- Jennifer Perry** Grade 10, Wellington Secondary School. Third Prize (Fiction).
Reading and writing have always been an enjoyable part of my life, and I'm sure they always will be. Besides that, I keep busy with schoolwork, and greatly enjoy singing in my spare time.
- Jessica Porter** Grade 12, Cedar Secondary School. Hon. Mention (Non-Fiction).
- Caitlin Sharrat** Grade 12, Cedar Secondary School. Hon. Mention (Fiction).
-

Our Generous Sponsors:

Cash contributions:

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Shaw Cablesystems | http://www.shaw.ca |
| Coastal Community Credit Union | http://www.cccu.ca |
| Mid-Island Co-op | http://www.midisland.coop |
| Gabriola Sounder | http://www.soundernews.com |
| Black Press Vancouver Island | http://blackpress.ca |
| Parent Advisory Councils: | Nanaimo District Secondary School Woodlands Secondary School |
| Nanaimo Daybreak Rotary Club | http://www.rotary.nisa.com/daybreak |

Gifts in kind:

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Staples Business Depot | http://www.staples.ca |
| Nanaimo Daily News | http://www.nanaimodailynews.com |
| Island Radio | http://www.islandradio.bc.ca |
| Woodgrove Centre | http://woodgrove.shopping.ca |

Media support:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| A-Channel, Vancouver Island | http://www.achannel.ca |
| Nanaimo Daily News | http://www.nanaimodailynews.com |
| Nanaimo News Bulletin | http://www.nanaimobulletin.com |
| Ladysmith Chronicle | http://www.ladysmithchronicle.com |
| Gabriola Sounder | http://www.soundernews.com |
| Flying Shingle | Gabriola Island |
| Shaw TV Nanaimo | http://nanaimo.shawtv.com |
| The WOLF | http://www.1069thewolf.com |
| The WAVE | http://www.1023thewave.com |
| Youthink Magazine | http://www.youthink.ca |
| The Mind's Eye | http://www.nysa.bc.ca/MindsEye.html |
