



No. 15: Summer 2019

2019 Writing Contest Results!

Fiction

Non-Fiction

Poetry

**Judges'
Comments**

*Check out our
website*

www.nswriters.com

Write On!

The Winning Issue

Newsletter of the North Shore Writers' Association
Linking North Shore writers since 1993

A Message from the Contest Committee Chair

Doug MacLeod

Congratulations to all the 2019 NSW Writing Contest winners. I know others will enjoy reading these stories and poems. The contest continues to grow with almost twice as many writers entering this year compared to 2018. As in previous contests, the quality of the writing is outstanding. I'm proud that we have created this opportunity for local writers to hone their craft and receive recognition for their accomplishments.

Several people need to be thanked for making the 2019 contest a success: Kelly Hoskins for promotion, Mark Turris for poster and bookmark production as well as assisting in collecting submissions, Chris Cowan and Barb Reardon for collecting submissions and contacting winners, and Wiley Ho for

producing this winning edition of *Write On*. It was lots of fun to work with these energetic and dependable people. Once again, we had excellent judging by experienced local writers. This year they decided to remain anonymous but their professionalism was noticed and we thank them for their work.

The writing process is not finished until work is shared with others. If you didn't enter a piece this year, consider doing so in 2020. Even without an award, entering the contest forces you to up your game and revise a piece of writing to make it the best it can be. Everyone wins.

I extend a hearty congratulations to the winners and to all writers who entered the contest. North Shore Writers' Association members: stand up and take a bow. You continue to create places where writers can meet, learn, grow, publish and win. ■



A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Congratulations to the winners of the NSWA's 23rd Annual Writing Contest. They were presented with their awards at the North Shore Writers Festival reception on April 6th. This newsletter is dedicated to the winning entries.

I love this quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

We are all inventors, each sailing out on a voyage of discovery, guided each by a private chart, of which there is no duplicate. The world is all gates, all opportunities.

I think Emerson's quote perfectly describes writing, where every writer's imagination is unique and their creations thereby. This year's winning entries are great examples of this individual and diverse creativity!

I wish you all a wonderful summer and look forward to receiving your submissions for the September issue of *Write On!*

Enjoy,

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Next 100 Word Challenge Theme:

in for a penny

You may include or exclude the specific words!

Submit your 100-word masterpiece to
 editornswa@gmail.com

by August 31, 2019

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Submission Guidelines

- Submissions can only be accepted from NSWA members.
- Send writing news (recent publications, book launches, notices, etc.) and your creations (poems, short fiction or non-fiction pieces up to 600 words) to editornswa@gmail.com (attachments in Word; pictures in JPEG).
 Snail mail to NSWA, PO Box 37549 Lonsdale East, North Vancouver, BC V7M 3L3.
- Member writing that appears in the NSWA newsletter is eligible for submission to the NSWA writing contest.
- The Editor reserves the right to make revisions or corrections.
- Publication in *WRITE ON!* is at the discretion of the Editor, in consultation with the Executive.

Disclaimer: Contributors are responsible for the accuracy, originality, reliability, etc., of their submission content, and any views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor or the NSWA.

**Deadline for the September newsletter:
 August 31, 2019**



***North Shore Writers' Association
Annual Writing Contest
2019 Results***

Fiction

First Place: Trish Gauntlett for *Sinaaq*
Second Place: Mary Chang for *For Sale: Baby, Found Yesterday*
Third Place: Sonia Garrett for *An Invitation to the Devil: A Survivor's Guide to Loneliness*
Honourable Mention: Patricia Evens for *Project Softness*

Non-Fiction

First Place: Rose Dudley for *Addiction*
Second Place: John Nixon for *Cabbage Trauma*
Third Place: Joyce Goodwin for *Monica My Best Friend*
Honourable Mention: Wiley Ho for *Blind Luck*

Poetry

First Place: Joyce Goodwin for *Not Alone*
Second Place: Trish Gauntlett for *Bending Starlight*
Third Place: Alexander Hamilton-Brown for *Marceau, the Violinist*
Honourable Mention: William Ellis for *Last Day / Piano / Detroit*

Youth

Winner: Arshia Sorourian for *The Coffee Cream Effect*

FICTION: FIRST PLACE

Judge's comments: *Sinaaq* is a mesmerizing tale about three men in Northern Labrador who risk their lives to rescue a young seal. *Sinaaq* is the Inuit word for "the edge of the ice," and to quote the story itself: "*Sinaaq* was a place of cataclysm, where the sea fought and lost its battle with the cold, hurling itself against the blue-white rafts of ice and getting caught time and time again; a place of danger, of constant change and motion, a place beyond mortal reach." This story, like *Sinaaq* itself, casts a spell that draws the reader into the cold, hard and yet magical world of Northern Canada.

Sinaaq *Trish Gauntlett*

In the high arc of first light, the northwest wind raged down from the Torngats, blowing at fifty knots across the coast of Labrador. Winter rode the wind into the sea, coming on fast and early, freezing the rattles and the runs, closing the narrow channels and the last thin corridors for little boats and big.

Jimmy Otokiak crept into the bedroom, edging his way to where his eldest son lay fast asleep. "Ray. C'mon, son," he said, shaking the boy gently. "Time to go. C'mon, my boy."

Ray woke slowly. At sixteen he was a man, expected to hunt, fish and chop wood like the other men - but he was also a boy. He had played computer games until late last night and now it was hard to wake up.

Pearl was already in the kitchen, packing up food for Jimmy and Ray. It would be a long day. The wood was twenty miles away now, a good two hours by skidoo. Jimmy wondered if they would ever move the village closer to the wood. They voted on it once but no-one could agree. So they kept driving the wood ahead of them, like a herd of caribou, getting smaller, thinner, further and further away.

The wind seeped and whined through the thin wooden frame of the house and Pearl shivered. "*Sinaaq* will be singing tonight," she said, gazing out of the window across the bay.

Sinaaq, the edge of the ice. The Inuit word breathed sorcery into the place. *Sinaaq* was a place of cataclysm, where the sea fought and lost its battle with the cold, hurling itself against the blue-white rafts of ice and getting caught time and time again; a place of danger, of constant change and motion, a place beyond mortal reach. *Sinaaq* creaked and groaned and sang with each new conquest, until the warm tides of spring drowned her siren song. But now she was at the height of her power, surging and growing, locking and holding fast.

Ray stumbled into the kitchen, pulling on his old wool sweater. "Who's going wooding with us, Daddy?" he asked.

"Just you and me and Old Stu," said Jimmy.

Old Stu wasn't old. And his name wasn't Stu. Old Stupid, the other kids had called him right from the start. He was always different. You had to tell him things lots of times over and use small words for him to understand. Over the years the name had changed, mercifully, to Old Stu. A small mercy. Very small.

Jimmy and Ray each rode a skidoo, dragging the big komatiks behind to carry the wood. Old Stu was waiting outside his house. He had surprised everyone a few years ago by finding a woman, a small, quiet woman from another place. She was looking to get away from something. People said it wouldn't last because Old Stu was so slow and a woman wouldn't put up with that, but she did. Old Stu was a good hunter and fisherman. He laughed a lot. He was gentle. She felt safe.

They set out in single file along the track through the village, snow furling up from the skis as they picked up speed. The edge of the ice was on the horizon, beyond the limit of their vision, out of the bay behind the islands where the deepest water still fought against imprisonment.

It was Ray who saw it first. He gunned his skidoo up next to his Dad and called a halt. Old Stu already had the rifle in his hand. "What's that? You see it?" said Ray, pointing to the ice out ahead of them. The other men could see it now, two small black specks on the ice, one of them moving.

The two seals had made a fatal mistake. They had followed fish down one of the last thin rattles where the water still flowed free and then they had come ashore to sleep. Dark brought the concrete hand of winter, freezing the rattle all the way out to the edge of the ice. In the morning the sea channel to freedom was gone and death was in its place. They had struggled hard, flopping across the ice, raising their heads as high as they could to peer out across the expanse of razor white. Starvation had set in quickly. One was dead. The other, terrified now by the noisy arrival of humans, made a desperate attempt to escape.

The men circled the skidoos and sat in silence. They could see the track the frightened animal had made on the snow, disoriented and dying, heading towards the sea and doubling back, time and again.

They were getting cold. The seal had stopped trying to escape and was lying exhausted, breathing hard, its eyes filled with fear.

"Little bugger sure tried hard, eh?" said Jimmy slowly. "Almost woulda made it too if he'd kept heading out in the right direction. Look how hard he kept trying." He waved his hand out over the tracks the seal had made, softening and widening now in the morning sun.

Old Stu coughed and the seal flinched. "Still gonna die though," Stu said. "Trying hard ain't good enough, eh Jimmy?"

Ray looked at his Dad. Something was happening he couldn't quite understand. He had the sense to keep quiet. "What if we..." said Jimmy. He stopped, took a breath and started again. "What if we took him out to ...sinaaq?"

Old Stu looked at him with a wild excited light on his face. "Sinaaq!" he said. "Jimmy, let's do it. Take him to sinaaq. He earned it."

Ray was shocked. This was his father, the leader, the hunter, who was suggesting that they risk their lives for a seal, a seal they would probably kill in the spring if they could find it. But then ... to see sinaaq. He would give anything for that. "Let's do it, Daddy."

Jimmy and Old Stu got hold of the seal somehow. They threw Old Stu's caribou rug over it and hauled it up on Jimmy's komatik. It lay there quietly, paralysed by fear. Jimmy looked out to sea, studying the horizon. "Better get going."

They turned their skidoos away from the land and spread out into single file again, leaving a good distance between. The space between them could mean the difference between life and death. If the ice cracked, if one skidoo went in, the others must not be close behind. They kept their distance as Jimmy raced across the jagged sea towards the morning sun.

They heard it before they saw it. High screams and long groans, like a wooden ship going down with all hands. Cracks and reports like rifle shots, deep rumbles and low hisses sweeping away to spray. Sinaaq. Sinaaq singing.

Jimmy slowed the skidoo to a crawl, listening to the ice beneath the skis, waving the others to a halt. The edge of the ice was fifty feet away. He climbed off the skidoo and walked carefully back to his komatik. He dragged at the caribou rug. The seal was heavy and struggling and he almost let it fall but he managed to get on his knees and roll it out of his arms onto the ice. It could smell the sea. Slowly it dragged itself towards the edge. Jimmy backed away to where his son and Old Stu were standing, eyes shaded against the glare.

“Is he gonna make it, Daddy?” asked Ray.

“Don’t know, son. Wait and see.”

The seal was weak and thin, skin stretched tight across its ribs as it dragged itself on, until it was there at last and with a heavy lunge it disappeared over the edge and into the water.

“Made it!” said Jimmy, slapping his son on the back.

Ray was pumping his fist in the air. “Yes!”

Old Stu was peering out to sea, rocking back and forward on his heels and toes.

“Look at that,” he said suddenly, pointing wildly. Out in the sea, not far from sinaaq, a seal popped up and held their gaze, as curious seals do.

“It’s him. He’s thanking us,” said Old Stu. “He’s thanking us for saving his life.” Jimmy and Ray laughed out loud at that.

“Yeah, right,” said Ray. Jimmy nodded. But their laughter was unconvincing. The seal was thanking them. They all believed it a bit and they knew it.

Jimmy climbed onto his skidoo. “Let’s get going,” he said. “We’ve got lots of wooding to do and we’re late now.”

Old Stu was agitated. “No!” he said. “No. We can’t go now. The seal wants to tell us something else. He’s coming up again. We have to stay.” He was flapping his hands around, stomping his feet up and down.

“Stu. Just calm down or you’ll crack the ice.” Jimmy wasn’t laughing any more. “He already thanked us once. We won’t see him again.”

Old Stu hung his head. “He was gonna say something else,” he muttered.

Jimmy thumped Old Stu on the back to get him feeling better and Ray called out, “C’mon Stu, I got a peanut butter sandwich with your name on it in my pack. Let’s get going.” Old Stu turned away then and walked to his skidoo, looking back all the time, even when they were heading for shore.

They got home late. Pearl and Old Stu’s woman were standing at their windows. That night, in the dark, Jimmy told Pearl what had happened. “You saw sinaaq?” she said. And she almost cried with it, as if it was the most beautiful and painful thing she could imagine.

In Jimmy’s dreams the ice cracked and slapped like a broken shutter in the wind, until Pearl woke him and called him to the kitchen. Old Stu’s woman was there, with a blanket wrapped round her and slippers on her feet. Slippers, in the snow, in the middle of the night.

“She says Old Stu took off,” said Pearl. “Got out of bed, got dressed, got his skidoo and took off. She doesn’t know what to do.”

Old Stu had done this before. Something set him off, he got restless and away he went. He always came back next day. Pearl made a cup of tea and after a while the woman went back to her kids, still scared but feeling better. Pearl headed back to bed and Jimmy stood at the window and looked across the bay. There was a half moon, silver on the ice. Somewhere out there was sinaaq.

In the morning, when Old Stu still hadn’t shown up, they organized a search party. His tracks were easy to follow and the men and machines strung out in a long, thin line, leaving safe distance between them as they headed for the edge of the ice.

The skidoo had gone down under the ice but Old Stu had escaped, soaking wet. He had struggled hard, crawling across the ice, raising his head as high as he could to peer out across the expanse of razor white. But no help came and winter showed him its merciless hand. Old Stu was gone. A woman would be crying for him soon.

Jimmy Otokiak was angry. He felt responsible, like he had set it all in motion. He knew Old Stu had got stirred up by the seal and maybe he should have seen something coming. But this? Jimmy shook his head hard. He just didn’t get it. What kind of trade was this, a seal for a man?

He walked away from the circle of men and skidoos, away from Old Stu lying cold and gone, as far as he could towards the edge of the ice. The spray swept up at him off the sea but no life lifted itself out of the waves to thank him for its resurrection. A small scream soared into the air and hurled itself at the wind. ■

FICTION: SECOND PLACE

Judge's comments: *This is a poignant and gritty story about a homeless girl who finds a baby on the steps of a church and wants to care for it. She uses the baby to beg for money and meets a woman who recently lost her own daughter to the streets. Together, these two women start a different life.*

For Sale: Baby, Found Yesterday *Mary Chang*

It was 5:13 a.m. when the girl found the baby. It was wrapped in a blanket sleeping in a bassinet at the entrance of St. Paul's Anglican Church.

Laura sat on the doorstep of the church every morning to smoke. It gave her a sense of satisfaction to exhale carbon monoxide outside the House of God. Before she lit her cigarette, she noticed a basket hidden behind the potted plant and discovered the baby.

She crouched, lifted the blanket and found a note. Laura read it, folded it and slipped it into her jacket pocket. She strapped the accompanying diaper bag over her shoulder, grasped the handle of the wicker cradle and walked away.

The teenager was sweating as she trudged down Davie Street. The baby was crying, the soother repeatedly fell out of its mouth. At the next bus stop, she placed the basket onto the bench and sat.

She rummaged through the contents of the diaper bag - a milk bottle, formula, diapers, clothing, wipes and a few jars of baby food. She opened a jar of applesauce and poured the contents into her mouth. She shook the milk bottle and stuck the nipple into the baby's mouth. Cold milk dribbled down its chin - its face red, angry, crying. Laura picked up the baby and smelled its bottom.

"You pooped." She crossed the street to McDonalds and walked into the handicapped washroom. "I need to pee. Stop crying for one bloody minute." Laura urinated. She took two minutes to scrub her soiled hands, wash her face, neck and armpits. She soaked a wad of soaped up toilet paper under hot running water, pulled down her panties, cleaned her vagina and anus. She dressed, applied black eyeliner and lipstick.

"Your turn." She yanked down the change table, placed the baby onto it and removed the diaper. "It's a penis! No wonder you stink." She cleans his genitals, applies a fresh diaper. For a moment the baby stops crying.

Laura lifts him up and sticks out her tongue. He drools, smiles. She sits down on the bathroom floor, nestling the boy in her arms and feeds him the bottle. She sings, "Hush little baby don't say a word, Papa's going to buy you a mocking bird. And if that mocking bird don't sing, Papa's going to buy you a diamond ring." The baby fell asleep within seconds. Laura kisses his forehead. She took a moment to reposition the baby to wipe away her own tears.

"Baby, now that your fed, diapered and asleep, I'll close my eyes. Twenty minutes later, Laura was jarred awake by the knocking on the door. On her way out, she grabbed a half-eaten muffin from an empty table. The girl put on a baseball cap, found an abandoned grocery cart in the alleyway and placed the cradle into it.

"It's not much of a stroller, baby - but we've got wheels!"

She pushed the cart down the sidewalk and settled outside the coffee shop on the corner of Davie and Denman. She sat cross-legged on the sidewalk, removed her cap, placed it beside her, and waited for the morning

rush. “Nice shoes, sir. Got a few bucks to help my baby? His daddy left - it’s just the two of us,” she explained. “Beautiful necklace ma’am. Spare a toonie for my baby boy?”

Some ignored her - afraid to look at the teenager with the nose piercing and heavy eyeliner. A few strangers smiled at the baby, made eye contact and handed Laura bills and coins.

“What’s your baby’s name?” a woman asked.

The first name Laura could think of was - “Jack”.

“Jack’s beautiful,” the woman said. “He looks five months old? What’s your name? Do you have - a home?”

“It’s Laura. My baby’s daddy gone, but I got a home. It’s real tough getting by. People say a baby changes your life. Translation? You don’t have a fucking life. Pardon my French. Nice chatting, pretty lady. Wow - thanks for the fifty. This helps.”

The woman touched Laura’s arm. “Wait - I’m Martha. Please – let me take you for lunch. It’s tough being a single mom – I know. Let’s talk.”

“No, thanks for the offer – Martha. But I need to go. It’s hotter than hell today– September’s a scorcher. Where’s the rain when you need it?”

Laura departed. She fed Jack a bottle, gave him the remainder of the muffin, bought a bagel for herself. She spent the rest of the afternoon with Jack – pushing the grocery cart along Stanley Park seawall, stopping to rest whenever her feet ached.

She took Jack to the playground, pushed him on the baby swing. They sat on the grass while Laura tickled him and watched him crawl. Her mind was at peace. Today she was a normal person, someone with purpose. The sun would be setting in a few hours – time to find home.

Martha followed Laura and Jack – keeping a steady pace behind them. Laura never looked back or paid attention to anyone who was staring at her or the grocery cart stroller. Martha’s own fifteen-year old daughter, Emily ran away from home. She routinely tracked Emily’s footsteps, talked to runaways - searching for clues about her whereabouts.

Laura checked herself into a hostel on Granville. She was fine sleeping on the streets alone, but she couldn’t risk it with the baby. She fed him a jar of applesauce, bathed with him and changed his diaper. She lied down on the bed beside Jack and places her hand on his belly. “I’ll take care of you, Jack. It won’t end the way it did last time – I swear. I’ll protect you,” she whispers. “This time I’ll make it right,” She squeezes out her tears, and kisses Jack’s lips.

Martha checked into the hostel and requested the room next to Laura. The repetitive thoughts came back. It was chaotic being a working single mom without support. Martha blamed herself for neglecting her daughter. If she made more time for her – Emily wouldn’t have run away. If she was observant, she would’ve noticed Emily was in turmoil. If she spent ten minutes at the end of the day to talk – she would know Emily - her hopes, fears, worries, dreams. Now, all she had were Emily’s journals. She didn’t recognize her daughter in those pages.

Their last conversation started with a bitter discussion about Emily being raised without a father and ended with Emily begging her mother to extend her curfew. Emily refused to listen and stormed out of their house in tears.

Martha reminisced the two joyful years at home with baby Emily while her husband supported them before he got killed in a car accident. She rested her head on the pillow and cried.

Laura woke up with the baby at 5am. Martha's alarm chimed. She heard the baby crying next door. Martha showered, applied make-up, dressed in jeans, a crisp white cotton blouse and sandals. Laura rinsed her mouth with tap water and rubbed the crusty discharge out of her eyes. She slept in her clothes.

Martha knocked on Laura's door.

Laura gasped. "NO. Jack – hide in the closet." She stuck the soother into his mouth.

"Laura?" It's Martha. We met yesterday - outside Starbucks.

Who the hell - oh yeah – the lady with the fifty. Maybe she works for Child Services. Shit.

"Laura – I'm here to help. I swear I won't hurt you - or Jack. Please – give me two minutes. I promise I'll leave once you hear me out."

"I'M NOT HOME. GO AWAY." Laura sat in the closet beside Jack, shut her eyes and covered her ears. Jack screams.

"Please open the door. I'm not with the authorities. I'm a concerned mother. I won't go away." Martha continued her pleas to let her in, turned her back against the door, slid down until she was sitting on the floor. She thought of Emily and burst into tears.

The door opened. "Why the heck you crying? Need to change your tampon? Get the hell in before someone sees," Laura said. Martha got up and entered the room.

"I'll get Jack. No point hiding now." Laura straddled the baby above her hip.

"Laura. I know Jack isn't yours. I saw you at the church yesterday and the day before."

"Are you stalking me?"

"My daughter ran away. I'm looking for her. Do you know - my Emily? She has the same blue eyes as me." Martha looked at the baby. "The same blue eyes – as Jack."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm here to bring home my grandson. Emily's diary said a friend would leave her baby outside the church."

"JACK IS MINE. He's not going anywhere." Laura secured Jack against her chest.

"You don't understand. I'll take care of Jack – and you, Laura. Come live with me - and be safe. You don't need to be on the streets. I'll protect you."

"Why do this – for me?"

"I need, we need to do this - together. The other option is I call the authorities - tell them you stole a baby to solicit money. You go to a detention center or mental institution. I fight a losing battle with court to get custody of Jack, whenever they find his father. Laura - you found Jack and kept him safe. I owe you." She rested her hand on Laura's shoulder.

“What if Emily comes back?”

“She’ll live with us – the four of us.”

Laura smirked. “Like one big happy family.”

“You’re skeptical. But this can work – we can do this – together. Laura, I need you to know that I’m here for you and listening.”

“Listening to what, this crazy bullshit? Lady – I don’t believe in fairy tales.”

“This isn’t bullshit, Laura. Think about it. Stay with me for one night. If you don’t feel safe or comfortable, you’re free to leave.”

“Free to leave? Lady, I’m a free fucking spirit. Understand this, if I decide not to stay – me AND Jack are leaving. You can’t take Jack.”

“I know. I promise.”

Laura grasped Martha's shirt collar. "SWEAR TO GOD - YOU WON'T SCREW ME AROUND."

"I SWEAR - on Jack's life," Martha said.

A second chance for me - and Jack – New Jack. I can make good on the promise written in the note. “Okay,” Laura said.

Martha read the final pages of her daughter’s diary one month ago when the RCMP found it - and Emily’s body. Emily developed a crush on a youth minister after she sought advice from him for her dilemma. She became pregnant by a teenaged boy she met online, dated briefly and lost her virginity to. The boy abandoned her once he discovered the pregnancy.

Emily visited the minister at St. Paul’s regularly, feeling safe at the church and trusted him with her secrets. He encouraged Emily to seek faith, confide in her mother, but she was ashamed. She believed her mother would never forgive her and refused to add stress to her mother’s life.

Emily ran away from home before she started showing. Martha was devastated her daughter didn’t trust or seek help from her own mother. She loved her unconditionally - Emily was her life. She was surprised to learn Emily sought God to guide her through the predicament, as she never expressed belief in religion.

Emily fell in love with the minister. When he rejected her after she declared her feelings, she fell into a deep depression. The autopsy revealed she was six months pregnant at the time of her suicide. The baby didn’t survive.

While Laura was distracted rocking the baby in her arms, Martha stole the note from Laura’s jacket – read it and slipped it into her pocket. She watched Laura sing a lullaby to Jack, then they sang the melody together, “hush little baby, don’t say a word…”

Martha walked over and embraced her new family. “It’s time for a new beginning - for the three of us,” Martha said. ■

FICTION: THIRD PLACE

Judge's comments: *This complex story of a woman coming to terms with the devastating loss of a child and then marriage. Only to eschew her Christian past to embrace her passion. There's good characterization and nice twist at the end.*

An Invitation to the Devil - A Survivor's Guide to Loneliness

Sonia Garrett

“Trick or treat,” said a small child.

“I’m sorry. We don’t celebrate Halloween,” replied Grace Fitzwilliam. “But you’re welcome to join our All Saints Craft Extravaganza tomorrow. You can make an angel for your Christmas tree and there’ll be cookies...”

She held out a brochure, determined everything should be as it usually appeared. A hand reached out of the darkness, took the leaflet and tossed it to the rain-soaked yard.

“I told you, we only visit houses with pumpkins set out,” the mother said from under a Bob Marley disguise.

“But there are pumpkins,” the child protested.

Following the Ninja Turtle’s index finger, the mother passed her flashlight over the Thanksgiving display. “Praise the Lord for all He giveth.”

“Come on, there’ll be candy over here.”

Grace walked back into her house and closed the door. Bile gurgled in her stomach. It threatened to sit as self-loathing but not tonight. Hadn’t she tried to persuade her husband about the importance of community? Hadn’t she talked about the way Jesus met people where they were? “Let the little children come to me.”

She stood by the kitchen window. The house on the corner was aglow with dozens of pumpkins. Groups of parents chatted and laughed as their sugar crazed kids raced to their loot. Grace could name most of them. She’d hand written invitations, delivered casseroles and offered help over the years. Their polite words of gratitude were filed in her husband, Michael’s, home office under “Neighbours – warm contacts”. She twisted the wedding ring on her finger. Someone looked towards the window and the laughter made her skin tighten. She stepped back, wiped sweat from her brow, turned and sanitized her hands.

Buzz! The alarm made her jump. The last batch of cookies was ready. They’d need a lot tomorrow. All Saints Day fell on a Saturday this year. Local parents would gladly be rid of their tired, grumpy children for two hours of peace and quiet while Grace’s husband sowed the seeds of faith to the future generation.

“Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so,” Grace sung.

“Yeah, like shit He does!” Grace replied to the ether.

The sweet smells of baking filled the kitchen. It was time to turn her attention to the frosting - Royal Icing; of course, nothing else would work as well. Its glossy, firm texture wouldn’t smudge her designs, they’d be perfect, no edible cement from her kitchen. She reached for the ingredients. The organic powdered sugar stood in the cupboard in a Rubbermaid box with its calligraphy label. She reached for the vanilla extract, food colour gels and next to them, with its label soaked off, silver rum. From the sterile fridge she took egg whites and cream, remember fat is flavour. Finally, she took out salt for balance and cream of tartar for acidity. If only she’d known this when she’d attempted to make Emma’s christening cake.

Her body shuddered as she recalled the smudged cursive letters, sugar flowers and the relief a sleeping baby had given her. The lopsided cake was almost complete when her husband had discovered their firstborn was not breathing.

Grace reached for her stomach. To this day the memory of that night made breathing difficult. Blood drained from her face. She gripped the kitchen surface.

Back then, Michael's mother had taken charge, exchanged christening with funeral arrangements. Ordered the walnut casket with the cream velvet interior and invited her minister into their young lives.

"Why? Why Emma? Why us?" Grace had sobbed.

"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit," Rev. Macintosh had said.

Grace's mother-in-law had handed her pill after pill and she had wafted into a medication-induced slumber. In her sleep, she was running, the whole floor a treadmill, she longed for solid ground, exhausted and unable to breathe. A tooth wobbled and fell out, and then another until her whole life tumbled out of her mouth.

"Emma!" she had screamed.

Her eyes would shoot open, she would sit bolt upright, her t-shirt wet with sweat. Voices had drifted in from the living room.

Back then, it was always Mrs. Fitzwilliam that came to her, wiped her brow and stroked Grace's hair. The touch had made Grace want to run but she exhaled a death wish, lay down and pretended to sleep.

"Mickey needs you," Grace's mother-in-law had whispered. "Fitzwilliam woman have God's strength. You have been chosen. God has something in mind. We see through a glass darkly but all will be revealed in His time."

How had twenty years slipped by? Tonight, she should focus. Grace measured the ingredients into the bowl, set them over a simmering water bath and took out her flexible spatula. The smoothness came from the wrist: stir, cut, scrape from the side, stir, cut, scrape from the side, rhythmic repetition broken occasionally to check consistency.

"Just right," Grace said to no one.

She transferred the bowl to the stand mixer, a birthday present from Michael she'd bought herself. Grace watched the paddle beater at low speed and a tear ran down her cheek into the mixture. She turned the mixing speed to medium, reached out for a warm cookie, bit off the head and threw the rest across the kitchen.

It landed near the craft materials. The paper plate angels were cut, doilies separated, ping-pong balls fixed onto craft sticks and wool cut into strands.

Her Siamese cat, Sheba, sauntered out of the shadows, sniffed the broken cookie pieces, jumped onto the kitchen surface and nudged Grace with her baby soft nose.

"Get that cat off the kitchen surfaces!" Michael would've shouted if he were at home.

Grace smiled, took some icing on her index finger and let Sheba's rough tongue lick it off.

Grace spooned the icing into piping bags and placed it to cool in the fridge. There was time to glance at Facebook.

Ghosts, transformers, Spiderman and princesses smiled back at her. She clicked her likes until her cheeks moistened and her nose started to run. Into the search engine she typed, "childless couple support." The links appeared.

“Figure it out for yourself,” she snarled. “Life’s shit!”

The weight on her chest made breathing difficult. Grace closed her eyes remembering all the comments made over the years. Repeating the pain mantra in her mind.

“I’m praying for you.”

“Have you tried IVF?”

“You had one child, you’ll have others.”

“Have you heard about the healing service at St. Marks?”

“I know someone who lost weight...stopped drinking...held crystals...”

Grace had learned to tune out, get busy, clear the table, prepare dessert and focus on getting to the next day.

With one hand she reached for a tissue, the other to lean in to close the laptop. Ping. A message alert appeared on the screen. “Suzette - status questionable”. Grace’s eyes dried and a smile blossomed as she opened the post. The photo showed her university friend standing, devil horns askew, black dress hugging her voluptuous body and beckoning with a forked tail.

“Oh, it’s like that is it?” Grace laughed.

Suzette was wearing the same outfit she’d worn to the frat house Halloween party all those years ago. The fateful night Michael thought he’d talked her into a threesome. Grace’d let her guard down, felt something awoken with Suzette’s breast in her hand. She barely noticed Michael impregnating her with his guilt.

“And are you wearing red satin and lace cami-knickers tonight?” Grace asked the smiling devil on her screen.

Grace reached out her fingers, drank in the delicious touch of Suzette’s skin, clicked the heart icon, laughed and turned her attention to decorating cookies.

The trick with frosting is to press down with the nib before lifting the bag. Then the sugary messages form clearly. Grace’s hands had become experts – football, baseball, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas all had their own cookies.

“Oh my God! What a cliché!” Grace squealed, taking the double D sized icing bag in her hand.

Grace remembered all the times she’d worked in the kitchen when their house was filled with parishioners, all there to be with Michael. Occasionally, a wife would offer to help, an excuse to unburden her soul. One husband wanted sex all the time, another had stopped touching his wife. One wanted children, another wanted to complain about the children she had. One was worried about money; another wanted her opinion about tithing.

Luckily, people didn’t wait for Grace’s reply. Like a mystic, she listened, editing the growing mound of unacceptable thoughts. Then, when their words hit the unresponsive sounds of food preparation, the speaker would drift back to the group.

It was Michael who introduced social media into their lives as “the perfect way to spread His word.” Grace created inspirational daily quotes for the church. She smiled at the mountain views, sunsets and happy faces illustrating, “The world is His and everything in it.” The message wouldn’t read as well if the Lower Eastside was depicted, or a car crash closing the highway, or a coffin carried in a father’s arms.

She shook herself from her memories and focused on her new angel design. Squeezing the eyes into existence gave her immense satisfaction. Her resolve was cemented with each dab of colour until the last grinning face was complete.

Grace had time to glance at her profile while the frosting set. It was different from the official page, only twenty friends mostly pre-dating Michael. She posted images of cozy romances read by the fire, knitting and photos of her Siamese cat - nothing too personal.

“Why on earth would you spend so much on a cat? If you must get an animal, why not rescue one?” Michael had asked.

Grace had clenched her fists and said nothing. She was tired of waifs and strays. Her life was full of soup kitchens, weeping widows and winter shelters smelling of stale tobacco and urine.

Sheba was the first extravagance she'd allowed herself. Others followed; career mentoring, night classes to improve her qualifications, professional resume preparation, interview coaching, new clothes bought at full price, massages lavishing her body with sensual oils and human touch. If Michael had noticed, he hadn't said anything. He filled the silence with complaints.

“Cats belong on the floor.”

“Your cat's fur is on my sweater.”

“We can't afford a cat flap.”

The cat responded by raising her back and hissing when Michael walked into a room.

Grace opened her own bank account after her first promotion, carefully transferring her old salary into the joint account and paying Sheba's vet bill from her own.

A message pinged on her screen. “How are you?”

“Nearly there. Did you see my invitation?”

“Yes!!!!!!” There followed an emoji of a Champagne bottle exploding with streamers.

Sheba jumped onto Grace's lap.

“There's no time for sitting tonight,” Grace said, gently picking up the cat and placing her in the travel basket.

Each cookie was placed into a gift bag and stacked in a display basket. Grace's heart rate increased, her hands began to sweat and her stomach lurched.

“I'm doing this for you,” she said to her mewling confidant.

Grace's mind had been made from the moment she saw Michael throw Sheba from his sun-soaked desk, her sleek body catching the doorframe and her regal mew releasing pain and indignation.

There was a knock at the door.

“Trick or treat.”

There stood Suzette, strikingly calm and beautiful. Grace pictured the red underwear.

“I'll have the treat,” she said.

She picked up Sheba and glanced over her shoulder at the two-dozen Devil cookies, complete with red horns, forked tail and a smirk. The black writing read, “Fallen from Grace”. Then she walked, away from her solitude to her repacked car, hand in hand with the Devil. ■

NON-FICTION: FIRST PLACE

Judge's comments: *This captivating story takes us on a transformational "trip" into a beautifully described journey of body and spirit that reveals itself just in time to feel grounded.*

Addiction **Rose Dudley**

How can anyone satisfactorily explain an addiction? —how it lures one with its charm? —entraps one in its unrelenting grip?

Does it begin with a pressing need to fill a void? to escape reality? —one faltering step followed by another, then another on a narrow and often precipitous climb that stretches into infinity? — unheeding? euphoric? Every journey begins with that same first step, but how can we ever grasp where that road might lead us?

Countless times, we have set forth on such a journey, but this one we have been assured will be unique, life changing, the ultimate experience, one that has been undertaken by millions before us—people from every walk of life and detailed in memoirs.

We are alone when we set forth—a mixture of trepidation, expectation and excitement.

The first day is, as always, the most difficult when we are most likely to fail as many others have done. It is an uphill struggle with our baggage weighing heavily upon our shoulders. Dense fog partially blinds us, and we are soon sodden in a heavy downpour. Strange, moving shapes loom out of an enveloping, thick, gray mist that swirls like smoke around our heads. Are the shapes real or imagined? They silently edge towards us in an eerie mass. We are completely disoriented. It is only the reassurance that we can give to each other that impels us forward through the encroaching darkness—to our day's end and desired rest.

Night is a living hell. Fellow travelers cry out in their nightmares, toss and turn, leave their beds to wander without purpose. We are mentally and physically spent, but sleep eludes us. It is a relief when dawn breaks, and that first shaft of light gleams down upon a mass of disordered beds.

In the gloom of early morning, those who have hardly slept begin fumbling desperately in scant belongings to find the necessities for today's journey. Soon, we will all be heading off in the same direction. It is still barely daylight, as we are cast out once more onto the path. The fog has begun to lift, the rain has ceased, an orange sun is rising in a pink tinged sky, imparting hope.

We begin to engage with others on the path—some plodding wearily along with heads bent, lost in their own world, others, fleet of foot but eager to share their stories.

Alicia has the demeanor of one who began her journey long ago. She limps with pain in shoes so worn her blistered feet protrude through flaps of leather. She seems anxious to unburden herself to anyone willing to listen—a forbidden love affair—an attempt to heal a broken heart. We are drawn to this trusting but tortured young girl who carries her flute to play along the way.

Day after day, we meet so many with histories to share—one, a young girl whose onerous workload caused her to take this step of which she never thought she was capable. Now, she is here on our shared path, groping to find her way. We become uplifted by the camaraderie that has begun to swell amongst us and the support that we can give to each other.

We are put through our paces every day, mechanically placing one foot after another on increasingly firmer ground and now, at night, physically exhausted, we sink into blissful sleep, oblivious to the crying out, the nightmares and the restlessness of those who cannot yet find peace. We wake refreshed, impatient to continue along our path.

So many, we learn, have walked this way repeatedly, and we are beginning to recognize how any addiction seizes one and holds one in its power. Many will return again and again. We already feel their pressing

need.

A new traveler joins us, silent and pensive. Initially, she is reluctant to share her story of a journey precipitated by the slow and painful death of her husband, from cancer, only months earlier. She had never imagined that she could tackle something of this magnitude alone, but, on this road, she has discovered that no one ever needs to be alone.

She introduces us to a doctor and his wife who, having experienced financial ruin incurred through no fault of their own, are working through their anger, already beginning to realize that the battle they have been fighting is not yet lost.

As days and weeks pass, we unlikely mortals—of all ages, all languages, all classes of society, become cemented together by a common goal. There is a lightness in our step as the trappings of life start to fall from our shoulders, and an overwhelming sense of spiritual freedom begins to overtake us. Our hearts and souls, rather than our feet, now propel us forward.

Every morning, we are excited to get back on the road to experience that feeling of well-being. We attack the days with new-found vigor. There is such a clarity in our brains resulting in a heightened appreciation for nature's beauty. The singing of the birds becomes more distinct, their colors more vibrant. The daily call of a cuckoo transports us back to the guileless days of childhood. Why had we never noticed that spring is clothed in such a wealth of green? that those once dull, grey-brown mountains are a blend of lustrous hues? that the sky is a constantly changing blue? Our eyes seem to have fully opened for the first time—our senses have become more acute. Nature has infiltrated our lives—we are experiencing such inner calm and a new zest for life.

Each day, there are few decisions to be made in our simple, uncluttered lives. We have been traveling for weeks with the bare minimum of possessions and an ever-lightening load on our shoulders, but we lack nothing. Why, we begin to ask ourselves, when we can live so simply, so fully and contentedly, do we wish to return to the challenges of daily existence? — challenges that have brought most of us here to this place? Why do we choose to live in a society of want not need that rarely, if ever, guarantees happiness? We have no answers.

Towards the end of our journey, we spend the night in an ancient monastery. We are fed a simple meal for which we must participate in the evening service. We file into the chapel, breathing in the musty smell of centuries mingled with incense and candle wax. The little chapel is dimly lit by candles throwing a warm glow onto the faces of the congregation waiting patiently in the hard, wooden pews. As each new person enters, the candles flicker casting shadows which dance like spirits around the walls. A single light illuminates the altar before us, reflecting on the gold-clad Madonna and Child.

The priest speaks in a language that we can barely understand, and then we recite prayers in the languages of members of the congregation—French, Spanish, Japanese, Dutch, Korean. It matters not that we cannot understand the words. We fully comprehend their meaning. Our new friend takes up her flute to play. The haunting melody of Ave Maria fills the church and our hearts. We dab at our moist eyes. Some members of the congregation fall to their knees. Even the non-believers amongst us feel the gentle touch of a spirit upon their bowed heads. No one will forget the healing power of this evening.

We will reach our journey's end all too soon, but we savor every new and precious day. Our bodies have become so dependent on their daily potion. We are addicted—addicted to the purity of mental and physical well-being—to a feeling of unmitigated happiness.

We will soon be suffering withdrawal from our endeavor and the companionship of new friends, but we already know that we will meet here again and trudge along a similar path together.

Our pilgrimage does not end until we arrive at the place that the Celts call, “The End of the Earth” where the land falls steeply into the ocean. We bathe our feet in its coolness, contemplating the enormity of our achievement—a 780 km. journey along El Camino de Santiago.

We need, now, only to witness the burning of worn shoes to ash, symbolizing a triumphant end and the promise of a new beginning. ■

NON-FICTION: SECOND PLACE

Judge's Comments: *This short, well-crafted, story with a humorous undertone. It reflects a time in history as viewed through the eyes and taste buds of a child in the 1940's. The reader cheers as adversity is overcome by ingenuity.*

Cabbage Trauma

John K. Nixon

My relationship with the family of green-leafed vegetables can best be described as wary. In spite of their widely touted richness in minerals and vitamins they have never rated highly on my list of culinary preferences. Spinach, which I enjoy, is an exception. But Brussels sprouts and cauliflower I can tolerate in small doses, broccoli I have only come to appreciate late in life, and kale (allegedly the most nutritious of all) is fortunately a rarity. It is the lowly cabbage, however, that stirs within me a deep-seated suspicion bordering on hostility, in spite of my late wife's well-intentioned attempts to disguise the stuff in various cleverly concocted dishes.

The roots of my cabbage phobia almost certainly go back to the summer of 1944. I was then a seven-year-old attending a primary school south of London, England. During the worst of the German V-1 flying bomb attacks on London and vicinity it was decided that the school (like many others in the London area) would be "evacuated" to a region in southwest England, well away from the capital. In our case this entailed transporting most of the children (aged between four and seven), including my younger brother, sister and myself together with the teaching staff, to a former farmhouse in Lydford, Devon on the edge of Dartmoor. There we were billeted for several weeks while classes continued in somewhat makeshift surroundings. A number of masochistic mothers (including my own) volunteered to come along to provide supervision outside classroom hours and to accompany the children on walks in the surrounding moors.

Fragmentary memories linger of children, walking two by two in crocodile formation, accompanied by adults at front and rear, snaking along the moorland trails. We caught occasional glimpses of wild Dartmoor ponies grazing in the distance. At least once we came across a group of bemused British army recruits, in camouflage uniforms and blackened faces, crouching in the gorse and bracken. In retrospect they were probably in training before being sent to France, as this was shortly after the D-Day landings. To us it all seemed like a surreal adventure, far removed from the horrors then unfolding in Europe.

With wartime food rationing in effect, obtaining nutritious food was a constant problem. Canned and sometimes rancid corned beef from Argentina alternated with whalemeat and horsemeat as a substitute for fresh beef products. Potatoes were frequently harvested late due to labour shortages on the farms and often were served up with blackened spots caused by frost damage. Another gastronomic delight was the swede, a bland tasting turnip that in peacetime was only fed to cattle.

The school was fortunate however to be able to hire a Flemish cook to prepare meals for the displaced children. Unfortunately for the latter her cooking left much to be desired, in particular her approach to boiled cabbage. This appeared to consist of dunking half a cabbage in tepid water for a minute or two, then chopping the half-cooked mess into pieces, complete with large yellowing chunks of indigestible stalk, to be served up daily to the long-suffering children. This must have represented some sort of nadir in the appalling annals of British institutional food!

Dinner, as I recall, was served at mid-day with the children seated on hard wooden benches either side of a long table. A supervising teacher sat at one end, from which vantage point she could observe the entire table as far as the windows overlooking the garden at the far end. During the hot summer months the windows were left open to provide fresh air. The meal typically commenced with the teacher saying grace and exhorting the children to finish all the food on their plates, remembering as they did so the poor unfortunate starving children of

occupied Europe, who would certainly be outraged by the sight of wasted food! Needless to say this was easier said than done, especially when confronted by the dreaded chunks of cabbage stalk!

Before long the little tykes rose to the challenge with enthusiasm. The two children seated either side of the teacher would periodically divert her attention for a minute or so. As soon as her head was turned, each of the other children would surreptitiously pass a spoonful of the inedible bits to the plate of the next child. Thus, as the meal progressed, the food rejects migrated in incremental jumps the length of the table, arriving on the plates of the two children seated by the open window. At opportune moments each of these two would rise furtively, plate in hand, to toss the accumulated detritus out of the window to the flowerbed below! At the end of the meal nothing but clean plates could be seen! As far as I can recall, the ruse, cunningly conceived and flawlessly executed, was never detected by the unsuspecting teacher.

In retrospect it was a brilliant solution to a vexing problem. A classic win-win-win-win-win situation! The children escaped the indigestible, the teacher was relieved to see her directive obeyed, the cook was satisfied that her fare had been consumed, the starving children of occupied Europe had been given their due and the flowers in the garden received a daily dose of vitamin- and mineral-rich compost!

Needless to say, the experience has left me with an abiding admiration for the organizational ability of six-year-olds when faced with adversity. That and a lingering distrust of cabbage! ■

NON-FICTION: THIRD PLACE

Judge's comments: *This story tells both a personal and universal tale of a friendship between girls, "coming-of-age" in 1950's Ireland. The details are well-woven against a background of the convent school experience, conflict and resolution.*

Monica My Best Friend *Joyce Goodwin*

In nineteen fifty-seven the Soviets launched Sputnik, the world's first satellite to circle the globe. I was mesmerized at the idea of it orbiting the earth. I was eleven years old at the time and attending a girls convent school. Monica a new girl became my best friend. We would sometimes gaze up at the night sky, count the stars and look for the satellite. But when a short time later the Soviets launched a dog into space on a one-way journey, I was so horrified I could not bear to look at the night sky anymore.

Though Monica became my friend, I loved and hated her with equal ferocity from one month to the next. There was rivalry between us from the beginning. She frequently got on my nerves, following me around, copying things I did and intruding into my space when I did not want her to. In spite of this, our friendship grew through a shared love of ponies. We dreamed of owning our own one day. Names like Tiptoe, Rani, Cloud and Lass would nuzzle our pockets for sugar lumps. Our suburban Dublin neighbourhood was still very rural with horses and cows in the fields. Landowners lived in secluded Georgian mansions behind high stone walls. Housing developments would later transform the area, but then we were still free to wander.

At school Monica and I endured the wrath of Mother Seraphia our math teacher who would scream at us in Irish, "scairse scairse". We apparently scoured her as Christ had been scourged, she became furious at our incomprehension. Some said she was too brilliant to be a teacher. She scared us and often humiliated Monica in the front of the class. I felt sorry for my friend at those moments, although I was also secretly pleased that I never had to endure such shame myself. In French class Mother Edna would cry out in frustration, at our refusal to take her pronunciations seriously. "Girls it is the eleventh hour," she would say. Our attempts at proper French would send us all into fits of convulsive laughter. Sweet Mother Donat persuaded us, through her own love of the Irish language, that it was beautiful. We did our best to please her. Grass hockey was our after-school recreation. I was envious of Monica's speed down the wing and the cheers of applause she garnered from the sidelines. I was jealous that she was better at the game than I ever could be. After "away" games across town, we would tumble into Cafolla's café on O'Connell Street in the city, dump our hockey sticks on the floor, and search for coins to put into small jukeboxes on the tables. We rhapsodized over "divine" singers, like Cliff Richards, Fabian and Ricky Nelson. I indulged my teenage fantasy by hanging an autographed photo of Fabian over my bed.

It was after smoking our first cigarettes together with local boys, that things changed forever between Monica and me. Before that moment I really had not understood how far she would go to upstage me. The boys showed us how to hold the cigarettes between our first and second fingers. "Take a drag and for Pete's sake don't start coughing, someone will hear you," we were told. Prophetic words, no sooner uttered, than a fit of coughing overcame me, a burning sensation attacked my throat, my eyes watered and I started to choke, smoke came out of my nose and mouth in a paroxysm of gasps and splutters. The boys studied me with what felt like pity and scorn, proceeding to show how it should be done, rolling out perfect circles of blue smoke. I felt sick but it was my so-called friend Monica who really turned my stomach. There she was, inhaling without coughing, a poisonous smile on her face, a smile I would see many times over subsequent years. She had practiced smoking without telling me, she even blew smoke into my face. "Oh sorry, I didn't mean to do that." I knew her apology was feigned. The boys were impressed, slapping her on the back. "Well done Monica." I could see admiration in their eyes for my

more experienced friend. I hated her at that moment, she always wanted to better me, was the first to smoke and to go out with boys. I felt betrayed by her that day, she had made me look stupid and seemed to enjoy doing it.

Monica and I were forever falling out. There would be a row and then we would gang up on each other, inviting other girls to take sides, which they invariably did. So then, there would be Monica's gang and my gang orbiting each other warily. I wanted to get back at her by telling her that her father had put his hand up my skirt but I didn't. He said it was our secret so all I only told her was that I had a big secret and I wouldn't tell her what it was. I worried that she would tell her mother and then I would be in big trouble. She told me she too had a big secret and she was afraid she might die. She boasted later that she had started menstruating.

Occasionally I could impress Monica. I informed her that we had a Lorenzo Lotto painting in the house. Her mother had told her it must be worth a fortune. The truth is we just called it a Lorenzo Lotto because it reminded someone of a painting they had seen in the Louvre in Paris. We fervently prayed that one day it would be revealed as a Renaissance masterpiece. The large oil painting portrayed the Holy Family with a naked baby Jesus. My father that his "sainted" mother told him a priest had given it to her family during the war. The church had been accidentally damaged by a Luftwaffe bomb. The painting was inexplicably burned on the exact spot where the baby Jesus would have been exposed. My father pronounced that a demented priest had probably burned it on purpose in the name of modesty.

We in turn had to show modesty when inside churches and wore black lace mantillas over our heads. We endured weekly admonishments from the priests who did their best to put the fear of God into us, speaking of the seven deadly sins of pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth. Lust seemed to preoccupy an inordinate amount of space in their sermons. Perhaps it was the vice we remembered most as priests tried to persuade us that we were born sinners. It seemed that everything we did was sinful in those days. We went to confession frequently to repent, to request forgiveness and absolution from sins we presumed we must have somehow committed.

As teenagers we listened to Radio Luxemburg. Dancing to rock and roll music felt liberating. The church called it "jungle dancing" and the work of the Devil himself, but that only made it seem more exciting. We lined our bedroom walls with the smiling faces of our idols and kissed their paper lips, imagining how a real kiss would feel. Sometimes Monica and I would fall in love with the same boy and endure a state of febrile anticipation until we found out who he liked best. Attempts to divert the boy's attention were a complete waste of time, as boys were often utterly oblivious to our machinations. We thought they must be just stupid.

When old hurts, still festering in the back of our fertile minds, would rise to the surface we vented our anger. "I will never speak to you again," Monica would say. I didn't believe her. "Suits me," I would reply. I didn't mean it. Curiosity about each others lives soon overcame our fury and we forgave each other again and again. Truces were negotiated between us with stuffed furry animals. Panda bears became symbols of peace.

As we grew older, after school we would often get the bus to the boy's Jesuit school and watch them play rugby matches. We could not get enough of the tumbled muddy hairy mess of legs lying in a scrum on the field. Later with increasing guile we would inveigle rides home on the handlebars of their bikes. Some boys would give us our first kisses. With fits of giggles we shared those secrets later and feverishly imagine what was yet to come. If someone reported our disgraceful, hysterical behaviour to the nuns, we would hear about it the next day. Summoned to the parlour we would be upbraided by Mother Superior, who was doing her best to educate us to become well behaved young ladies of good character.

"Girls, you have disgraced yourselves, you should be ashamed, you have let down the school uniform. I am very disappointed in you." Thus chastised we went on our way and carried on as before.

Monica and I bought our first stiletto heels before we left school. I got mine first, therefore I was furious when she bought the same shoes, white with pointy toes and narrow high heels. We were forbidden to wear them in the school building because there was a nail at the tip of each heel that made indents into the parquet flooring. Nuns would rush towards disobedient girls, their arms waving, rosary beads rattling and long dark veils trailing behind them, in efforts to prevent further irreversible damage to the religiously burnished surfaces.

Growing up we were fascinated by all things American. Everyone knew someone living in America. Maureen O'Hara was a film star whose mother Mrs. Fizzsimons lived up our avenue. She bred chickens and we would buy eggs from her. I always asked what Maureen was doing at the time. The usual answer was that she was away making a film with John Wayne. I remember thinking she must have known John Wayne very well. I never laid eyes on Maureen.

In June 1963 a young Irish American president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy came on a three day visit to Ireland. "This is where it all began," he said. He was visiting the Kennedy ancestral home in Dunganstown County Wexford. He had tea with his cousins in the ancestral home of his great-grandfather Patrick Kennedy, who left for America from the stone cottage in 1848 to escape poverty and starvation. Patrick settled in Boston where he worked as a cooper and started a family dynasty.

"He brought nothing with him other than a strong religious faith and a desire for liberty," the president said. Crowds lined the streets cheering as if to welcome a returning son. We hung on his every word. Some said he was a saint. " We need men who can dream of things and say why not." He promised to come back but five months later he was assassinated. The country went into deep mourning.

Monica and I lost touch after leaving school. Years later I heard she had married my first true boyfriend. I have to admit that my inexplicable reaction to that piece of information was extreme irritation, a visceral response to memories of a childhood friend who could still affect me though time and distance had long since separated us. ■

POETRY: FIRST PLACE

Judge's Comments: *This poem is alive with vibrant imagery and laced with surreal effects. The poet takes simple words and weaves them into a magical tapestry. The following excerpts paint the mood of the poem: "as roses unfold into spaces shaped by birdsong" "I am no longer alone".*

Not Alone ***Joyce Goodwin***

A quiet listening
as dew slips off a leaf,
chicks crack eggshells,
wings beat gossamer time
as roses unfold into spaces
shaped by birdsong.

A baby cries out,
my dream became
the child I imagined
breathing beside me
I am no longer alone.

POETRY: SECOND PLACE

Judge's Comments: *This poet's mindset provides very thought provoking poetry that marries the real to the surreal. The visual of a departed spirit bending starlight and proving the spirit never dies is such a positive message.....Here in this poem science and spirituality blend majestically.*

Bending Starlight *Trish Gauntlett*

If it is true that starlight bends around dark matter,
around what once was there and is forever gone,
then I must say that science proves the loss of you.
Light bends away and round you
in that great emptiness
through which the particles of time and space
entangled
turn precisely when the others turn.
Is this the only way to know that you are there?
I stop and turn not knowing why
or walk an unplanned path
or stumble on a secret conversation
and in those moments when the road not taken
stretches impossibly behind me,
I wonder if you too have turned and we are still entangled,
twisting and turning in perfect parallel
and you are out there somewhere bending starlight.

POETRY: THIRD PLACE

Judge's Comments: *This is one of the most visual poems I have ever read. It is short and sweet packing a powerful punch. Lines that open the mind "The instrument of spectral sound" and "Fingers fly across imagined strings" and "A virtuoso miming notes that only he himself can hear". A very eclectic and inspired mind is at work here.*

Marceau The Violinist ***Alexander Hamilton-Brown***

How firmly his chin holds fast
The instrument of spectral sound.
With surety of touch his fingers
Fly across imagined strings.

How gracefully his bow is bent,
And soundless sounds engage the ear.
A virtuoso miming notes
That only he himself can hear.

POETRY: HONOURABLE MENTION

William Ellis

Detroit

At Grand Circus Park, before the river,
Woodward becomes, for one short span,
the groomed avenue it once was:
a tended place of shrubs and trees
and the Byzantine pomp of Deco Detroit:
facades with banded tiles, stiff bas-reliefs,
sleek trceries of chrome, and stained-glass
windows;
and in arched doorways, halls, and soaring vaults,
the dazzle of mosaics - gilded skies
and zigzag patterns of the Jazz Age
in every parrot shade.

But until then, the road is a skeletal spine
of a hollowed-out city whose body is mostly bones.
At intervals, the monumental shapes
of libraries, museums, churches, colleges, and stadia
rise as if extracted from a burial of ash,
but in between, of houses, shops, bars, eateries
that knitted every interstice
and quickened the once-filled sidewalks

with a street-side warmth and glow,
only a few remain, as witnesses to widening zones
of ghostly lots, from which all trace
of brick and mortar, wood, and stone
has vanished, as if never there.

In a Europe shattered by war, Walter Benjamin
pictured the Angel of History,
blown by a storm out of paradise,
and doomed to face only the past.

Eyes open wide with compassion,
and watching catastrophe piling up ruin,
the angel is helpless. At last, all he sees
is a rubble heap touching the sky.

Here, if there were such an angel,
he would encounter American amnesia.
When the storm razes the past, what remains
is not even ruin, but erasure.

Last Day

That tall narrow house in the heart of the city
we rented the year when I was in third grade
must be gone

even then the dense fabric of buildings
was fissured by rubble-filled spaces
I did my best to ignore

it was easy
the three-story school still filled a whole block
brick and stone built to outlast the Great Depression
a phrase I did not understand
but whispered by everyone older as if
the ground had once sunk beneath them

the way to the school was sprinkled with shops
the tailor the grocer the five-and-dime
the eatery run by a classmate's father
with swivelling stools a long marble counter
and dented aluminum trim
where on our last day I persuaded my father
so careful with money to let me order
the apple pie topped with ice cream

later I lay in the screened-in porch
on the water-stained sofa left behind
by the tenants before us which Mother so hated
as movers passed shuttling back and forth
with our furniture

spotless but never so soft
and I saw from across the small span of the street
Mrs. Collins wave to me from her high window
beside her a pot with a single flower
that also waved nodding a miniature sun
on the end of a long drooping stem

head dizzy with sugar I pictured the ranch house
my father had built now ready at last
on the outskirts where new tracts devoured the fields

I clung to the couch inhaling its perfume

imagining I was reversing time
the truck not the old house was being emptied
our leaving was our arriving

Piano

It lay in wait inside the meshes of the antique market
hidden behind tall shelves and tables piled with clothes
its sleek black surfaces the same as I remember

a Kawai grand piano the double of the one
my father bought my mother for their seventh
anniversary
the year that she began to give me lessons

her back bolt upright
coiffed head nodding stiffly
she counted out the time
as my reluctant fingers sought the notes
and all the while I longed to be sixteen
when I would be allowed to quit

for me it never was what it had been for her
who also hated practice
but steeled herself to play
and won at last a scholarship
her passport from a dying town
to somewhere more alive

until the day it wasn't
I was born her studies ended
although she did leave after all
but only for a suburb of a larger dying place
there she took on pupils
when Father lost his extra job
and by that time they had three sons to raise

I dreamed I wandered in an empty hall
only the piano was there smoke rising from its strings
which somehow managed by themselves
to play repeatedly an off-key tune

sobbing a child again
I tugged and tugged and tugged
at the single door that would not open
wondering without reply
how I could quench the fire
I had no memory of having lit
but only I was in the room

YOUTH: WINNER

The Coffee Cream Effect

Arshia Sorourian

Imagine walking up the stairs of your office and under the door of your meeting room you see a lingering cloud of white smoke and dust, and when you take a deep breath, you smell something familiar: coffee cream.

This is the story of a 5-year-old boy whose mom would go to the office several times a week, go to meetings and leave her boy in a room alone for a very long time (at least for him) while going to meetings. One day this little boy got tired of this, teamed up with a little girl who also got tired of being alone, and they both decided to trash the place with coffee cream, yes, coffee cream powder. The whole office was completely snow white with dust everywhere. It was like it snowed, the printers were all sticky as we tried to clean it with water. The pens wrote powder instead of ink, the filing cabinets exploded with dust when opened, and heaps of coffee cream spilled out of the client info forms. His mom stormed in, shocked while coughing, and yelled at them to get against the wall. The girl and boy stood there while their mom yelled and yelled and yelled while the other employees helped cleaning it up.

Although they cleaned it up, to this day, every time you walk on the floor, it produces a white powder cloud that a group of ants will scatter and consume the cream. That boy was me. What will be your reaction if your child did this?

That night I was filled with anger because my mom yelled at me in front of the others and didn't talk to me for the rest of the day. So, my brain decided, "it was time for revenge." After three days of evil planning, my revenge plan was to trash the place (once again) so I dumped all of my red paint on the carpet of my room (red because I liked my blue and green paint and didn't want to waste it.) There was red paint everywhere and even though it was washable paint, it flowed deeply in the carpet and didn't go away. That night instead of yelling at me, my mom sat and thought, maybe there is a reason behind his actions because no one will do something like this without a reason. She decided to look more into it, and realized she needed more quality time with me, so instead of spending five hours with me but not paying attention, she would spend 2-3 hours actually playing or doing something with me (quality time). A year later I am still sitting in her office, waiting for her meeting to be over, but this time I didn't rebel. I didn't get sad, and I happily enjoyed my life with a caring mom even though she still leaves me alone for a long time to go to meetings.

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A hearty thank-you to all of our volunteers for their dedication and hard work!

Events Calendar

June 17 **NSWA Year-end Celebration at The Silk Purse**

August 31 **Fall newsletter deadline**

Summer Break

Sept 9 **Dare to be Heard**
Sept 16 **AGM and Election**

Oct 21 **General Meeting**

Nov 18 **Christmas in November, details TBD**

Winsome Quotes

“Winning doesn’t always mean being first. Winning means you’re doing better than you’ve ever done before.” — *Bonnie Blair*

“You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.”
— *Wayne Gretzky*

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” — *Winston Churchill*

Write on!



The North Shore Writers' Association thanks the North Vancouver City Library for their generous support of our ongoing activities and special events, and also for their support of all local writers and readers. The Library plays an active and varied role in the cultural life of our community - for more information and to find out how to participate, go to: www.nvcl.ca