WRITE ON!

Newsletter of the North Shore Writers' Association
Linking North Shore writers since 1993
No. 31: May 2023

A Message from the Contest Committee Coordinator

The annual 27th North Shore Writers' Association Writing Contest was a success this year, with a total of 74 entries in poetry, non-fiction, fiction and youth categories. Entries arrived from participants on the North Shore as well as from as far away as Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, and Agassiz.

Now that restrictions have lifted, we were able to meet to present awards to winners on April 29th at the West Vancouver Memorial Library during the wind-up of the North Shore Writers Festival after a wine and cheese social. Winners in each category were presented with a certificate or a certificate with a cash award.

A number of people contributed to the success of the contest this year. Kudos to Mark Turris for graphic design, Doug MacLeod for coordination of entries and judges, Steve Rayner for collection of fees and accounting, Kelly Hoskins for website management, Christine Cowan for collation of information and Tiffany Budhyanto for producing the Winners Edition of the NSWA newsletter. Our contest also had the privilege of working with three dedicated, qualified judges who had a difficult job choosing winners and who also provided insightful, written comments to individuals who were successful in each category.

Congratulations to all our winners! We hope everyone enjoys reading their winning entries. Our association encourages all writers to get those pens and computers ready, and think about participating in the NSWA 28th annual Writing Contest next year!

Barbara Reardon

North Shore Writers' Association
27th Annual Writing Contest Winners (2023)

Fiction

First Place:	*Rabbit* by Taylor So
Second Place:	*Sticks and Stones* by Libby Soper
Third Place:	*North Vancouver, 1903 AD* by Sylvia Leong
Honourable Mention:	*The City Rains Tears* by Laurie Crookell
Honourable Mention:	*The Beginning* by William Koch

Nonfiction

First Place:	*A Moment* by William Koch
Second Place:	*Wesley* by Christine Cowan
Third Place:	*The Clarity of Time* by Robin Jane Roff
Honourable Mention:	*Ella's Porch* by William Koch

Poetry

First Place:	*Breath and Beat* by Colleen Adair
Second Place:	*Eleusis* by Lindsay Vermeulen
Third Place:	*Spoken Sorrows (Glosa)* by Janet Kvammen
Honourable Mention:	*Blood and Resilience* by Martina Revello
Honourable Mention:	*If You Could Hear* by Alexander Hamilton-Brown

Fiction: First Place

Rabbit

by Taylor So

If your mother hadn't been staring in that direction, you would have missed it.

Sitting on the dull vanilla tiles of the produce section, sniffing the supermarket air, is a rabbit. White with black splotches. A child and a woman grin down at it. You watch the child smile, crouch, and reach out. The rabbit's ears fold serenely along its back.

"I wanna take it home."
"No, honey–"
The child starts whining.
Your mother tears her eyes away and pushes her cart toward checkout. "Come on." "That was a rabbit," you tell her in a daze, hurrying after her.

"It was," she says.

You frown, trying to remember something. You scan the magazines on the racks as the two of you wait in line. "Mindfulness For the Workplace." "Temperatures Hit All-Time High." "Was Jesus Real?"

At home, your father shouts over the sizzle of the stir-fry and the roar of the vent. "Oh yeah, tons of rabbits up at the college. They've been laying down poison, there." At the stunned look on your face, he elaborates. "They're destroying all the plants. They eat everything."

"Maybe people could hunt and eat them," you suggest humbly.
He scratches his jaw. "That's not a bad idea. I don't think anyone's allowed to, though." "Why?"
"I dunno. Well, if you see one – don't pet it. They bite."

"They *bite?*"
"Yeah. Don't pet them." He switches off the stove element. "Tell Mom dinner's ready?"

Ms. Bennett hands out fact sheets that have been photocopied across the ages until the print is nearly too warped to read. You're learning about persuasive arguments. She clarifies the issues that are off-limits, then splits you up into groups to read the sheets and brainstorm your own presentations.

You end up with Olivia, Isaac, and Shabnam. The topic of the rabbits arises when Olivia considers arguing for control measures.

"They're a part of the ecosystem," Isaac says.

"Native rabbits are a part of the ecosystem," Olivia says. "These ones aren't native. The native ones are brown–"

“But the ones that aren’t brown are descended from the ones that are brown. Originally.”

Olivia blinks. “Okay?”

They stare at each other, Olivia waiting for Isaac to make a point, Isaac waiting for Olivia to realize he’s made one.

“Maybe we can come up with other ideas,” Shabnam suggests.
“We don’t need to kill animals that aren’t hurting anybody,” Isaac continues. “Oh my God,” says Olivia.

“Maybe we can come up with other ideas,” Shabnam repeats. She glances at you for support.

“Yeah,” you say meekly.

It never occurred to you to befriend Olivia, mostly because they seemed out of your league platonically, but they agree to walk with you after school.

“It’s ridiculous,” they rant, hoisting their backpack. The heavy chunks of glitter on their eyelids make you wonder how they keep their eyes open. “Like, ecosystems are already messed up – because of us – like the oceans and forests – and now they’re even more messed up, and people don’t wanna talk about it. Oh my God look! There’s one!” Olivia points, and it takes you a second to pick out the night-black rabbit poised in the fall leaves. “I’m going to kick it!”

Without advancing, they swing one gangly leg after another in the air, and you burst out laughing. The rabbit darts into the brush.

Your parents, on the other hand, treat the animals as if they’re orphans. Your father starts building a pen in the backyard. “Better than letting them run around and eat everything,” he says.

The city offers residents rebates for setting out poison. Behind the scenes, farmers, hunters, and park officials point out that other animals will consume the poison. So will any animals that eat the poisoned rabbits. Ecologists warn of potential impacts if the population isn’t brought under control.

After trying to keep the animals outdoors, your school gives up and allows them to roam the buildings. Students kept bringing them in to play with, they’re too slippery to catch and put out, and they’re nice to have around. In the cafeteria and the hallways, you hear the sporadic, quiet squeals of classmates huddled over rabbits.

The persuasive argument presentations are boring – we should recycle, younger people should be allowed to vote – until Isaac’s turn. He stands up in his Thrasher hoodie and sweatpants and makes a passionate stand for giving all animals the best lives possible. Ms. Bennett, usually impassive, briefly raises her eyebrow.

Olivia glowers. Their jewelry flashes like knives.

Your parents decide to move the animals indoors to protect them from predators. The rabbits smell, and they're often underfoot, but you've never seen your parents act so tender towards anything.

By the time you graduate, headlines like "Increase in Rabbit Population Worries Farmers" and "How to Protect Your Garden" have given way to "Do We Have Animal Rights All Wrong?" and "My Autistic Son Struggled to Communicate. Then We Adopted a Rabbit."

The other headlines, the ones the supermarket doesn't stock, remain austere. In the café-bookstore, they stare at you while the barista makes your drink. "How a Population Explosion is Altering Our Landscape." "Experts Issued Warnings of Pest Threat." And, on one visit: "U.S. counts 23 cases of rabies in April, five deaths; experts puzzled."

You lift the hefty newspaper and try to keep it upright as it lolls around. You photograph the headline and send the image to Ash (formerly Olivia). They send a scream emoji, then an article from a major news outlet. You stab at the *close* buttons of the page's advertisements until you can play the embedded video. You wait through three commercials.

A straw-haired woman in glasses speaks to a senate committee. "We were looking at a gene," she says, "that we thought may have been involved in determining the color of the eyes. And a substitution we made in that gene sequence, we found, it didn't alter the color of the eyes, but it did produce proteins that changed the animals' expressiveness."

"I'm sorry, Dr. Whitman," a senator says hesitantly, "could you make that a bit plainer..." "It made them cuter."
"It made the rabbits cuter."
"Yes."

"And could you explain the effect of that?"

The doctor begins to gesture. "Yes. Uh, I noticed my co-authors were spending more time with our subjects than on our research, and I wondered what drew them to the rabbits, why they were taking them home instead of leaving them in the lab. So after our paper was submitted for review, I applied, with the department for behavioral research, we applied for funding to study that, and I've included that paper."

"Yes."

"Um, our test group – the people exposed to the modified rabbits – around 80% of them reported feeling compassion towards them. Less than half of our control group, who had unmodified rabbits, felt the same way. So one of the things we can infer is that there may be people who have an immunity, or resistance, to the cuteness."

Another senator adjusts her mic. "Dr. Whitman, I'm wondering if it's possible to make this same genetic substitution in other mammals."

"Yes."
"Do you believe that any labs are doing this right now? In other animals?"

"Yes."

Omg, you write to Ash.
Ikr. I can't believe more people aren't talking about it...I heard some people have to

surrender their rabbits What??

Yea /: cuz they have so many they can't take care of them...lmao I never thought I'd be happy my parents don't like animals

Your household is now up to ten rabbits, and your family wants more. Despite the techniques you learned in Ms. Bennett's class, arguments between you and your parents end in mutual bafflement.

"They were an experiment," you finally say one night, trying not to raise your voice. When they stare at you, amazed, you show them Whitman's testimony. They watch the entire clip.

"Well..." Your father shrugs. "I mean...they're not hurting anyone. What do you wanna bet those senators have their own warrens at home."

"Yeah. I dunno," your mother says. She stoops and pets a tan buck that has hind legs like a kangaroo. You feel dazed, the way you did after seeing the rabbit in the supermarket.

Suddenly she sucks air through her teeth and retracts her hand. The buck moves away, flicking his back feet.

Your mother murmurs at the blood shining on her thumb. You numbly help her disinfect and bandage it. She is good-naturedly self-deprecating, talking about how stupid she was. You say nothing.

You and Ash find a place together in the city so that you can be closer to the college campus. Ash is devoted to their agriculture program. "There are still so many farms that don't have any protection," they remark, scrolling through their phone as you meander through the grocery store. "'It's too expensive! It's too much work!' Okay, well, you're losing your crops to rabbits. And climate change. 'But we need to save money!' So, protect your crops, so you don't lose a bunch of money *next year*."

Around you, customers have rabbits on harnesses and leashes. Many more rabbits, ownerless, dot the floors – especially in produce, where they clean up fallen scraps and leave neat piles of droppings.

"They'll collect insurance," Ash grumbles.

“Yeah.” You skim the magazines. “Mysteries of the Deep.” “Getting the Most Out of the NFT Market.” “The Psychology of Kindness.”

You suddenly notice that you’re walking alone. Behind you, Ash stares down at the bottom of the paperbacks shelf. A snowy rabbit sits there, cleaning its face. You widen your eyes.

“Look,” Ash says softly.

“Yeah?”

Ash crouches. They slowly extend their hand and stroke the rabbit’s head. “This one is so cute.”

Your stomach tightens. Then they look up at you and give you the widest grin you’ve ever seen.

“Oh my God,” you mutter, and stalk down the aisle.

Ash stands and laughs. “I’m sorry. Your face –”

“We need chips,” you say loudly. Ash follows you, clutching your jacket and giggling. You try not to smile.

Customers stare at you.

Fiction: Second Place

Sticks and Stones

by Libby Soper

That day as usual, Candace was in no hurry to leave school.

She had gotten in the habit of helping Mrs McGuire tidy the classroom at the end of the afternoon. Candace loved this quiet time, these few minutes alone with her teacher.

She looked for ways to be useful. The blackboards needed cleaning, for one thing. She would fill the bucket with water and, with sweeps of the fat yellow sponge, swallow the faded tangle of words and numbers that cluttered the surface, leaving in their wake gleaming swathes of pristine blackness. She always saved the date for last. This morning in her perfect penmanship Mrs McG had written Wednesday, October 20th, 1965. With a single stroke, today was obliterated.

As she worked, Candace liked to talk. She talked about her parents, her little brother, her plan to read all the books about horses in the school library by Christmas and that she was already up to the letter P. Mrs McG seemed impressed.

She also liked to stay late because the school grounds would have emptied by the time she came out. The popular girls would have already left, pairing off in elbow-locked groups of two or three to head to each other's houses, where they would raid the fridge, watch TV and chat. Candace was never invited, and her mother didn't allow snack foods in the house because of what she called Candace's weight problem. So when her mother would suggest that she ask a nice girl over, Candace would look away and shrug.

When she slipped out the side door of the school, the playground was deserted. Gray clouds bruised with mauve and green scudded westward towards the slanting sun. There was a chilly tang to the air, and she thrust her arms through the sleeves of her cardigan as she began the walk home, swinging her school bag with one hand.

Although her house wasn't far as the crow flies, she had to skirt the ravine that separated her home from the school. She would cut across its shallow end by descending a gravel path through a sparsely wooded area and over a footbridge, and then loop back up to the street and over to her house.

It was when she paused on the bridge that she heard footsteps behind her and knew that she was not alone. She turned to look.

At the top of the path stood Kevin, who was in her class at school. He was kind of funny looking: short and scrawny, with unfortunate ears that stuck out and a pair of thick black glasses that always strayed halfway down his nose. He was the only kid Candace knew whose parents were divorced, and she found it hard to imagine his life with just a mother at home. She considered him curiously and with some compassion. Today, Kevin had committed the unpardonable sin for a boy: crying at school.

At recess, Kevin had joined a game of catch. Candace heard him cry out and saw him on the ground, whimpering in pain. The other boys averted their heads, embarrassed for him, and, moving away, quickly resumed their game. A few of the littler kids ran up to see what was going on.

Kevin stood, swiped his nose with his sleeve. “What are you looking at?” he snarled and limped off.

As she watched from the bridge, Kevin crouched. Picking at the gravel, he chose a handful of the largest stones, thrust them into a pocket, and resumed his selection. Suddenly, he raised his head and caught her staring at him. Before she could look away, he grimaced and then ballooned his cheeks until they were grossly distended in, she realized with a shock, a hideous parody of her own face.

Candace quickly turned and started up the hill, a sick feeling in her stomach. The light was fading, shadows lengthening as if to reach for her. It was time to get home.

Wednesdays her mother went to bridge club and came back just before supper, smelling like the sherry her parents offered friends at dinner parties. Fortunately, she took Jimmy with her. Candace was thankful not to have to babysit her little brother, with his faint reek of sour milk and urine. So on Wednesdays, she had the house to herself.

This also meant she could look for the snacks her mother had hidden. If Candace ever reached for a cookie when her mother was around, that little wrinkle would appear on her brow and she would say brightly, “Why don’t we have a carrot stick instead?” before putting another cigarette in her mouth. Candace hated the “we”---it wasn’t as if her mother needed to lose weight. And one cookie wasn't going to make a difference, anyway.

The path led from the ravine up to street level, where she would turn and pass a row of fraternities, housing for students attending the local college. The spacious front lawns were often raucous with big burly boys playing frisbee or touch football, their shouts and laughter echoing down the street. She looked forward to the sight of their camaraderie, their carefree confidence and swagger.

She was halfway up the hill, panting slightly, when the first stone whizzed past and hit the ground to her right. Startled, she turned. Behind her was still only Kevin, now bent over the bridge railing, seemingly intent on the creek below. Puzzled, she hitched the strap of her book bag over her shoulder and kept going.

Another stone flew by, barely missing her this time. She turned again. Kevin was closer now, and their eyes locked. Deliberately, he shoved at his glasses with one hand and, without dropping his gaze, reached into a pocket with the other. His fist emerged, bulging with stones.

Candace felt a flutter of fear. She turned and hurried up the path. She would ignore him, as her mother said to do when teased.

This time the stone hit her in the thigh. Shocked, she froze, tears of humiliation stinging her eyes.

Behind her, Kevin's voice. "Fatty, fatty two by four," he chanted. "Couldn't get through the bathroom door."

She wouldn't look back, she wouldn't. Rubbing the soft flesh of her thigh, pimpled with cold beneath her skirt, she kept going. If she didn't react, surely he would lose interest.

Another stone, this one striking the knuckle of her hand. "Ow!" she cried in spite of herself. "Stop it!"

"So she did it on the floor," the relentless voice continued. "Lapped it up and asked for more."

To get home, Kevin had to turn right at the top of the hill. Candace would turn left. She would be safe then.

The next stone grazed her ear. She clapped her hand to the side of her head and finally crested the hill, emerging gratefully onto the sidewalk. No more stones followed. She shuddered, took a breath, then continued in what she hoped was a dignified walk.

She hadn't gone far, though, when she realized he was still behind her. The street and sidewalk were empty, so there was nobody to see the next stone that was launched. It struck between her shoulder blades and fell to the sidewalk with a crack.

Kevin's voice, nearer now. "Candy, Candy, pooped her panties." Another stone.

Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never harm me. It's what she was supposed to say if anyone made fun of her, but that was stupid. Words *did* hurt. They stung and wormed their way into your heart. No one could see the bruises they left, though. Stones were worse. Her shame would now be visible.

On the lawn of one fraternity house a crowd of students milled around a picnic table laden with pitchers of beer. Music blared from huge speakers on the front porch and the outside lights blazed. At the end of the long driveway, a small group huddled near a flame-red car, whose engine periodically erupted in a throaty roar. She considered running to them for help, but they would probably laugh at her. No, she would hurry home. It wasn't far now.

By the time she reached the end of the block, several more stones had found their mark. Most hit her body, but one struck the back of her head. She felt dizzy and sick but resisted the urge to reach up to see if she was bleeding.

The sidewalk now edged the ravine. Beside her, the ground sloped precipitously down the steep wooded slope, the gathering twilight scattering gloom in its depths. A few leaves, tinged with the colors of approaching autumn, rattled in a breeze which arose from below, bearing the faint scent of decay.

Finally, on the other side of the street, her home.

The last rock hit as she broke into a clumsy trot. Book bag bouncing against her side, she ran to the front door. It took an eternity to pull out the key, hung by a length of yarn around her neck, and even longer for her shaking fingers to insert it into the lock. Her knuckle left a smear of blood on the white frame as she entered, slamming the door behind her.

The house was quiet except for her panicked gasping. Leaning against the door, Candace let the silence gradually wash over her, envelope her. Her breathing slowed. Gingerly, she felt her head. It wasn't bleeding. She wiped her eyes with a tissue and blew her nose. After all, she thought, she deserved it. What Kevin said was true. What her mother thought was true. She *was* a fatty fatty two by four.

For a few minutes more she stood still, then hung her book bag at the foot of the stairs and made her way into the kitchen. Standing on a stool, she reached in a high cupboard for the hidden bag of Oreo cookies. Quickly, she ate six, bypassing her usual ritual of unscrewing the chocolate wafers and scraping out the filling with her teeth before cramming them into her mouth. The crunchy sweetness was comforting.

Holding the bag in one hand, she crept into the living room, avoiding the large picture window that overlooked the front yard. She tiptoed the last few steps to one side of the window, then sidled her head around to get a view of the street.

Kevin was still there. He was sitting on the curb, back towards her, shoulders slumped, the stringy white nape of his neck exposed. Aimlessly, he bounced a small rubber ball between his feet. It was getting dark. Why didn't he go home?

Then things happened quickly. Kevin's ball took a wild bounce and he darted into the street, hands outstretched. A red car appeared out of nowhere, barely negotiated the corner and then accelerated hard, rear wheels fishtailing. As it pulled out of the turn, Candace heard a thump.

A shriek of brakes. The car slithered to a stop, rocking violently. Through the windows, Candace could see madly gesticulating arms. For a few seconds the car remained still, motor idling. Then with a roar it shot forward and disappeared around the far corner, the sound of its engine fading into the calm afternoon.

No cars passed, no doors opened, not a pedestrian in sight. The quiet afternoon wiped away the incident as easily as the sponge had erased today's date. In the thickening dusk, a small heap of clothes and tangled limbs could just be made out in the undergrowth at the edge of the ravine.

Candace glanced at the telephone in the kitchen. It would be so easy to pick it up, dial 911, say there had been an accident.

But so much easier to do nothing. She took out another cookie and sat down on the couch, a small smile spreading over her face.

Fiction: Third Place

North Vancouver, 1903 AD

by Sylvia Leong

I sat upon a bench on the ferry's upper deck, gliding over a glassy green inlet towards a dripping tangle of waist-high ferns and old-growth trees. My destination: North Vancouver.

The enticing advertisement hadn't bothered to mention the town was still an insignificant hamlet of buildings. How could I live in such a remote location? What in the world would I do with myself?

My Siamese cat yowled as though in commiseration and leapt from my arms to peer over the side, probably thinking of fish. While the awning protected me from the morning's mist, droplets like glass beads collected on Finnegan's malt and coffee-coloured fur.

My cat looked back at me, all twitching ears and blinking blue eyes, as if to say, "What have you done with our lives?" Then, with a sinuous saunter, Finnegan disappeared into the forest of human legs.

It was a fifteen-minute ferry ride between the two shores of what the advertisement had called a Coastal Temperate Rainforest. I gazed longingly back at the urban parent, growing smaller in the distance; Vancouver was still an undersized town, yet a metropolis in comparison.

"I found your cat, Miss."

A man with blue eyes stood before me, his face framed by thick, silvery hair—my gaze roamed lower—a powerfully-built body that sent my blood racing—my gaze roamed even lower—expensive, patent, low-tie shoes. He blinked in consternation at my brazen appraisal. Still, he knew the cat was mine and that meant he'd been watching me with interest.

"Who says Finnegan needed finding?" I asked, my lilt flirtatious. Accepting the cat on my lap, I shifted in a silent invitation for him to sit.

He eased beside me with grace and a commanding presence. "Colonel Alfred St. George Hamersley," he said in an Oxfordshire accent. "At your service." Here was a rare sort of manly-man who carried himself with elegance.

Intriguing.

"Alice Kyteler." I placed my hand on his proffered palm. The underside of his gold wedding band glinted. Such things rarely mattered. His lips brushed the back of my fingers.

My cat rubbed its furry head against my cheek, a purr vibrating its flanks—an oft and affectionate parting mannerism. I reclined against the back of the bench-seat as Finnegan leapt from my lap.

A startled expression crossed Alfred's face.

A smile played on my lips. He expected me to control and confine my cat. This was going to be fun.

"What's a lovely Irish lass doing such a long way from home?"

"Possibly the same as whatever you're doing."

Alfred smirked. "I'm meeting a developer to sell him a piece of land. I doubt, Lassie, you're doing the same."

I met his gaze, wanting with every ounce of my being to prove his condescending carcass wrong. "When you're done with him, perhaps you can sell me a piece too. For better or worse, I'm here to stay."

Beneath his silvery moustache, his mouth twitched, probably wondering if I was in earnest. "May I escort you to the Hotel North Vancouver? At present, it's the only suitable location. The hotel in Moodyville—" he pointed eastward "—is more for sailors."

"Of course. I've already sent word. My room is waiting."

The ferry docked. Alfred briskly diverted two stevedores on their way to unload a ship, hiring them to haul my trunks to my hotel room. I appreciated Alfred's chivalry. It was impossible to stay irritated with a man who proved so effective, and with such efficiency.

With Finnegan at my heels, I threaded my arm through Alfred's, and we waltzed up the pier to an orchestra of exotic birdsong. I inhaled woodiness, wet earth, and cloying green as though I walked through the greenhouse behind my Irish cottage. Mountains, carpeted in forest, commandeered the view.

My mouth went dry. The ascending main road, Lonsdale Avenue, was dirt. We turned onto what I expected they meant by Esplanade, another dirt trail, mounded, with grass running down both sides. To the south, waves lapped against a beach. Otherwise, forest surrounded us—trees soaring into the sky, each the girth of many men, and crawling with ivy. Giant ferns crouched, waiting to spring. Except for the merest pockets, this land was far from tame.

I'd made a huge mistake in coming here. I couldn't live in the middle of the wilderness. What the hell would I do with my time?

Finally, a few lonely buildings popped up amongst the trees. The tightness in my chest eased, but only a little. I spotted the hotel in the distance and glanced at Alfred. “How can the hotel stay in business with such a sparse population?”

“It’s the centre for public gatherings and a holiday retreat for Vancouverites across the inlet.” He patted my arm. “Will you join me for lunch?”

I wanted nothing more. Alfred had the sort of manliness I despised, yet was attracted to in equal measure. A masculinity meaning he knew all about the affairs of men, as well as what it meant to be one. However, that usually came with a fair bit of arrogance, along with little understanding of women. My draw to these types never made sense. “Oh, I wouldn’t intrude. You’ve done enough.”

“My business is a simple exchange of information. It should take thirty minutes at the most, leaving you enough time to settle in. Please say you’ll meet me in the dining room?”

There it was, the crux of my damnable attraction and the foil of his virility—vulnerability. He left himself wide open for rejection the way a person would if they were young and inexperienced, or had a tremendous amount of confidence and self-esteem. With Alfred, of course, it was the latter.

I inclined my head, smiling. “Fine. Send a message when you’re ready for my company.”

With Finnegan in my arms, rough tongue licking the back of my hand, I followed the porter to my room, and the heavily laden stevedores followed.

The word *rainforest* had conjured images of wild animals, so I’d chosen a room on the second floor. My door opened onto the stately wrap-around veranda, meaning Finnegan could come and go at will with a quick leap to safety during carnivorous pursuits.

The stevedores deposited my trunks against the one empty wall in my room and beat a hasty retreat.

My new home was small, yet well appointed. There was a bureau for my clothes, a vanity for my vanity, and a double bed for . . . options. The armchair and side table snuggled under a lace-covered window speared my heart with homesickness for Kilkenny.

Another reason I was so attracted to Alfred: in this rural hamlet lorded over by wild beasts and forested mountains, I was out of my element. The Colonel was a powerful man who had taken great interest in me. For what more could I ask?

No sooner had I removed my gloves, swapped out my handkerchief, and availed myself of the pitcher and basin on the vanity, than a note slipped under my door. Thick hotel stationary held words that warmed my heart.

I’d delight of your company. A.H.

Alfred sat amongst white-draped tables beneath a grand curving staircase. His pleasure was apparent as he rose, grasping my elbow, helping me into my chair, his brows furrowing at the leather attaché case in my hand.

"Did you sell your property?" I asked.

He paled at my unabashed question. Business was a man's domain; a topic they didn't discuss with women.

I bit my lip, stifling a smile. Such a predictable reaction.

"Mr. Diplock is an intelligent man, English of course, and about fifteen years my junior. He got his start in the book and stationary business."

So, Alfred would talk about the man instead of the business deal. He raised his teacup, sipped, and with a sidelong-glance took in my level gaze, my unspoken challenge.

His mouth pressed flat. "Mr. Diplock's done great things with his construction company, but he's overextended, and needs to raise more money. As much as I'd like to give him a deal, I can't." He set the teacup on its matching saucer. "His mind's set on the finest property. My first sale on the North Shore will set a precedent for those that follow. I'd be subsidizing the entire parcel."

"What's so fine about this property?" I didn't care so much as I wanted to know how far he would foray beyond customary decorum.

"The northwest corner of the Lonsdale and Esplanade intersection. Diplock plans a two-storey commercial/residential mix called Syndicate Block that will always be at the centre of lively comings and goings to the North Shore. The heart of North Vancouver, so to speak."

My homesickness swelled, yet an idea took hold. I wanted a window on this corner with my kitchen table beneath so I could sit and enjoy these lively comings and goings. If I had to live in North Vancouver, I wanted to be at its heart.

"You trust this man Mr. Diplock?"

"Yes." He blinked at the unexpected question. "Unequivocally."

"Alfred," —without so much as a conversation about it, we'd long since given up on the formality of surnames— "I'm a woman of means. Please tell Mr. Diplock you've found him a silent partner."

A slight flush appeared up the back of Alfred's neck and he splayed his hands on the white tablecloth, both signs of discomfort.

"Also, please let Mr. Diplock know I want a suite of rooms built on the second floor, overlooking Lonsdale and Esplanade, for my personal use. These conditions are non-negotiable. I'll front the remaining money."

He pinioned me with his stare. "You are serious?"

"Absolutely." I pushed my cup and saucer to the side. "And if you broker this deal well—" I set my attaché case on the table "—I'll buy another property from you, one large enough for a small apartment building." My sterling silver châtelaine hung from my waist. I unhooked the key and fit it into the brass lock.

Alfred's eyes widened as I handed him my letters of credit from banks all over Europe, along with a list of references. He took his time, perusing each document and turning over the last page, raised his arm. Mere seconds later, a hotel staffer appeared at our table. "I'll need some stationary please, and a messenger."

Once the stationary arrived, Alfred wrote six words in his confident script.

Your problem is solved. Come immediately. A.H.

I thrilled with his efficiency.

In due time, Mr. Diplock arrived.

I relaxed, allowing Alfred to handle him. No surprise, Diplock was suspicious and uncomfortable with a female silent partner. But Alfred's negotiation skills were impressive, betraying his profession as a lawyer—Vancouver's first. By the time lunch was over, the deal was done and the three of us were not only happy, but laughing like old friends.

"Much obliged to you, Mr. Hamersley, and to you Miss Kyteler, but I want to use the remainder of the afternoon to set things in motion. I imagine you'll want that new home sooner than later." Diplock nodded at me.

I suppressed a compulsion to hug the man, smiling instead.

After Diplock left, Alfred eased back in his chair, grinning. "Well Alice, with that squared away, I have my afternoon free. Can I interest you in an outing?"

I'd no idea what he had in mind and didn't much care. At that point, I had only one interest. Under the tablecloth, I ran my fingertips up the inside of his thigh. His expression froze and red patches darkened on his neck.

"Room two-oh-one," I whispered. "I'll leave the door ajar." The wedding band on his left hand called for discretion.

I stood.

Alfred swiftly remembered his manners, bolting up from his chair. I placed my hand in his and his lips brushed the back of my fingers. He murmured, “I’ll be along, posthaste.”

Fiction: Honourable Mention

The Beginning

by William Koch

John feared but mostly admired his father. Hans was a tall, heavy Bavarian immigrant who made his living selling and repairing home appliances. His transition to North America had been difficult, not only because of his early struggles with English but also the anti-German sentiment infecting North America after World War One. By the time his only son was born, an event that nearly killed his wife, Hans was selling appliances from the eastern Fraser Valley to the ocean shore, and repairing those same machines when they broke down soon after installation. He had a knack for selling up, getting a higher than anticipated price, and moving on until the inevitable leak or malfunction arose in the refrigerator or washing machine. He was prompt with his service calls, solving problems quickly and at a profit when he replaced the gasket he left out during the original installation. His accent was a benefit in this trade, customers mistaking it as a sign of fine craftmanship, not imagining until too late that he was selling them more than just an appliance, but also an unending series of repair bills.

…

When John was born, Hans wanted to distance his son as much as possible from the old country, stressing to him "Don't let anyone know your roots. They will hate you. You have to be strong and aggressive to make it in this country." He had other advice too about whom not to trust, about those who were unworthy. For Hans it was a competitive world. "To be successful, trust no one and show no mercy."

But he could never do enough for his son. At the end of a long work week, he always stopped by some store to find a gift for his boy. The nature of the gifts evolved over time but something always appeared at the Friday dinner table, whether a new toy or later some book or article of clothing. "Enjoy Johnny, you are my special boy." When John was young, he recalled his mother protesting these frequent gifts. "Hans, you will spoil him. We are not rich." Hans did not tolerate these intrusions from his wife. There were consequences.

The rental house John remembered best was an old Tudor style cottage with rough stucco walls, dark wooden window frames and a crumbling roof, its shakes weathered and askew like a haircut mussed by a massive hand. In the winter, there were predictable leaks in the upstairs bedrooms. For years afterward, wherever he lived, he remembered the slow dripping of rain water as it plopped into the sauce pan next to his bedside table. It formed a peaceful rhythm for falling asleep. Hans was not a man for house repairs. "Not getting paid to repair the landlord's property. We'll move if it gets too bad."

The cottage was furnished inside with furniture collected from second hand stores and garage sales. On Saturdays, Hans and John would drive the Chevy pickup with wooden sideboards surrounding the bed from one sale to another, looking for books or furniture that could be re-sold for a profit. "Mrs. Smith, I'll give you a dime for that box of books, no more. Nothing there of value." He was an intense negotiator, leaning his bulk like a falling tree toward the other person, getting a lower price through intimidation.

On Sundays, they sorted through their purchases. Hans kept a long list of second-hand stores that might take an old chair or bookcase. John was his father's helper in these endeavors, carrying old chairs and boxes of books and sets of encyclopedias into stores. This was their weekend routine, the back of their old Chevy littered with boxes and sheets of plastic in the event of rain. Hans drove them from one store to another. At each stop, his father talked to the dubious shop keeper and gauged his interest in their goods. While Hans negotiated, John explored, inspected prices in the store, and checked to see if the cash register had been left open. What couldn't be resold ended up in their living room or at worst waiting in the back lane for the garbage truck.

On special Saturdays, John's favorites, Hans would rise, look out at blue sky and decide he needed a rest. The two of them then drove into the city. They chose their neighbourhoods carefully, looking for wide boulevards and sidewalks and especially large houses. John stared with awe up at the old stately maples and chestnuts hovering over stone walls and metal gates surrounding mansions of varied architecture. "This is how you will live someday, Johnny. In a house with a gate, where you can keep out the human trash." They walked for hours until their feet were sore, studying houses with immaculate gardens and expensive cars. The middle-aged appliance salesman and his son dreamed of what would someday be theirs.

One day, they spotted the ideal home. It was a craftsman-style mansion with several wings sprawling into the garden. John could not imagine all the people or activities that filled this complex house. They stared through the floor to ceiling windows of a large room on the side overlooking a garden and pool. Inside, a ceiling fan rotated above floral-upholstered furniture, large ferns and Bonsai-designed miniature trees. Outside, patio furniture sat by the pool and farther away a small house sat in the corner surrounded by flower beds. "Who lives in that little house, Poppa?"

Hans appraised the cabana with his hard eyes. "Nobody, Johnny. The rich have houses they do not need. It is merely a house in which to change into their bathing suits." The property was surrounded by a low stone wall and stretched over a large rolling green lot with a view through the trees of distant mountains. "This will be your home, Johnny. You deserve this." They stood there for several minutes gazing at John's future. Then the front door opened and they turned to see the privileged owners through the bars of the gate. A slender, dark-haired man in a black suit descended the stairs to the driveway with two boys a little younger than John. The man's love beamed down at his children who were also dressed in black with small caps on their heads. As the father helped his sons into an expensive car, John heard his father curse quietly and turn away "Let's go."

John hesitated, studying the man and his sons for a moment. Later walking back to their own car, John asked "What were those caps the man and boys were wearing?"

Hans turned to him, his face red, lips twisted with disgust. He shook his head and strode to the truck.

…

Even as a small child, John needed little sleep. He roamed the small house late at night while his parents slept, peering into his father's work materials, reading a book, venturing out into the small yard. Some nights he paced the sidewalks in the neighbourhood, studying late night activity through lit windows. A girl reading at a desk, brow furrowed and pencil in hand. He wondered why she studied so late. A man and woman arguing in a living room, a lamp overturned and glasses of brown liquid on the table. During these nightly sojourns, he satisfied his inquisitive impulse to examine other humans, to pull aside their skins to peer inside. Who and what were these people? Who was a threat? Who was weak? But he also battled the feelings of insignificance that washed over him. Was he as special as his father insisted? He walked miles late at night because he couldn't shut off his brain. And then there was the other reason he left the house at night.

In the family's cottage down the back hallway, there were two bedrooms. It was an old house, the walls thin, the insulation non-existent. John sensed from a young age that his father had two lives at home, the one he shared with his son and the one he occupied with his wife. Back then, he frequently missed the detail of conversations between his parents, but early on he picked up subtleties. His father's rough grip on his mother's arm and followed by her futile attempts to pull loose. And then there were the nights when their bedroom door was locked and strange sounds came through the walls. The slap of flesh on flesh, squeaking of the old bed springs, his father's guttural exclamations followed by his mother's sobs. It was the latter that led to his late-night explorations of the streets as he grew older. He learned that if he came home from these walks late enough, his mother would have ceased her crying.

It was when he was around eight, that John learned he had the same power as his father. His mother was after him to finish his homework, but he was more interested in playing with his newest toy. Stretched out on his bedroom floor, feet up in the air, running the little wooden car around an imaginary street on the old carpet. He was thoroughly absorbed. "Johnny, you need to do your homework." His mother stood over him.

John made engine noises as his car made a sharp U-turn and accelerated.

"Johnny." She frowned.

He continued to play with the car as if not hearing her.

"Johnny, I'm taking this away until you finish your homework." She reached down and pulled away the car.

John lay there a second, his fingers still curled as if holding the car. Then he jumped to his feet. His mother was turning away when he grabbed her forearm and squeezed hard. "Give it back."

"No, Johnny. You must finish your …"

Then he struck her across the back with his closed fist once, then twice. Tears welled up in his eyes, his jaw set and lips tight. "Give it back."

His mother turned around, the same look in her eyes John had seen when his father spoke harshly to her. It was that moment when he felt special and knew he had power.

Nonfiction: First Place

A Moment

by William Koch

I'm playing scrabble on a wintry weekend afternoon with my old friend Janet. I call her "Janeto" and her husband Richard, "Ricardo," just in case we ever travel to Italy together. Or at least that is my excuse. With her omnipresent smile, Janet has carried the barbell of Parkinson's Disease on her strong shoulders for nearly a quarter of a century. I have run 10K races and the seawall with her, eaten her dinners, enjoyed her smile over the rim of a wine glass, and faced off over board games on laughter-filled nights over the course of four decades.

I am in her home today because she cannot be left alone while Richard runs errands. There are stairs and tripping hazards, which merge dangerously with her desire to be the old active self she ─ and we ─ remember. She fidgets while sitting in her walker that doubles as a wheelchair. As she shifts from side to side, she sinks lower and lower, sliding precariously toward the moment when she might fall. Her spine curves with years of weakening imposed on her by this insidious, relentless disease. Her fingers tremble as she places her tiles on the board. I gaze out the window at the neighbour's house as Janet musters her mental and physical strength to formulate a word. For a moment, seeing her frozen in thought and action above the board, my mind wanders into the past.

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Movement defines life. We start out as new-borns grasping everything with tiny fingers, holding on tight to our mother's breast or to a relative's teasing finger. We graduate into enthusiastic crawling, then toddling around the living room on unsteady legs. Before we start school, we are climbing jungle gyms, hanging from one iron bar after another, progressing one hand at a time while our legs dangle in the air, or racing down the sidewalk ahead of our anxious parents. Then there are high school sports, replete with sweat, sprained ankles, and screaming friends on the sidelines. When we pass out of that era, our activities evolve with expanded choices. Some of us become great hikers and mountaineers. Some cycle, run, ski, or swim. The common element is movement, the regular – for some almost constant – transport from one place to another. This is an activity defining much of our lives, giving us both joy and the confidence to carry on.

Janet has a faded photograph attached to her refrigerator. It shows a slender 20-something woman with walking poles and heavy pack, standing at base camp, the summit of Everest towering behind her. Next to that is a photo of her and two friends leaning on each other after the Vancouver marathon. And another of her splashing in the lake with her son when he was a toddler. The whole front of the white fridge is filled with such memories.

...

"One foot ahead of the other, Janeto. That's right. Step on me. You can do it." We are on Gabriola Island for our August holiday. Three of us progress slowly across the grey cedar deck on a scorching afternoon. A slight breeze floats off the ocean, just enough to ruffle the oak leaves but insufficient to cool us. Finished with lunch, we make our way into the house or under the

shade of oak trees, some of us to wash dishes, some to read or play scrabble. Janet is eager for a rematch.

A twelve-inch stride for Janet takes intense mental focus and some assistance – a tight grip on her arm to hold her up, a foot stuck in front of her to create an obstacle for her to step over, a line to aim for on her now limited horizon. A one-hour hour lunch on the deck requires a fifteen-minute trip down eight steps and across ten feet of deck before eating. Then the return journey. She freezes three feet from the bottom of the stairs. “Come on, Janeto.” Three shuffling steps farther and she will be able to hold onto the rail and pull herself up the stairs, one of us in front of her, one behind in case she falls. She has been falling more lately. At home, Richard has to call the fire department to lift her from the floor.

Janet and Richard have spent a week with us every August for almost four decades. In the past, we soaked each other and our children in water fights, swam in the lake, and swooshed down water slides. Over the years, Janet led us on many midnight swims through a beaver-filled channel off Okanagan Lake, teasing the children by grabbing their toes in the dark. As our children grew, we barbecued, paddled a canoe, and hiked on trails. And then there have always been long nights of board games filled with laughter, shrieks of triumph, and warm glances of affection.

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It is another hot summer afternoon on the island. We amble along a wide trail in the woods shaded by arbutus, oak, and fir trees. The trail is bordered by salal and thickets of blackberry vines, tender, tart fruit hanging in clusters. Janet pushes her wheeled walker over the uneven trail of gravel and decomposing needles. Her front wheels struggle and swivel on the tree roots. Her fingers strain in a blotchy red and white pattern as she grips the arms of the walker. We surround her on all sides, sometimes lift her walker wheels over roots, and talk about the weather and our children’s romances and progress in school. Janet looks up from her hunched posture and tries to contribute. Her voice has weakened over the years. Very animated now, she speaks excitedly but silently about something we cannot hear. When she is angry, her voice improves. “Hey Janeto, tell me to bugger off.” She shouts this out, smiling at the implied disrespect, then says what she really intends before her voice fades back to an inaudible whisper. She spots a blackberry thicket exploding with ripe fruit and pushes her walker forward. I hold her left arm and slide a foot in front of her walker as she leans forward to pick with her right hand. Janet guides two berries to her mouth in a halting, trembling manner, smiles in enjoyment as she chews, then reaches back for more. We make it down the trail a quarter mile before she has to rest.

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It amazes me the technology and public health innovations that have been developed to cope with the frailties of age. Walking poles for sore knees and hips, canes with one rubber foot, three rubber feet, or more. Walkers with and without wheels, some with built-in seats for resting when summer sun sucks energy out of aged bodies. All these exist to help us continue moving when age or disease encourage us to quit.

There comes a period in our lives when our friendships contract. Death, dementia, and disability grow exponentially and painfully. They wrench old friends from our grasp, obliterating them entirely or grinding them down so that they are unrecognizable. Our movement slows, the decline more rapid for some of us than for others. Just as we supported our toddlers with their first steps, helped them ride their first bicycle, or waited for them as they dawdled on an evening walk, now we lift our friends' wheelchairs into the trunk of our car, assist them out of their chairs, and encourage small steps.

...

Janet struggles on this wintry afternoon of Scrabble. No longer does she alert me to high-score opportunities as I scan the board in frustration. She used to effortlessly and generously help me score points as her eyes scanned the board seeing multiple combinations. Now she leans forward in fatigue and her hands fumble with her letter tiles. She forms an illegal word but does not appear to recognize this despite my playful reminder. "Hey Janeto, no cheating now."

Time passes slowly, the weather outside shifts from faltering sunshine to threatening dark clouds. Trees are stripped to their skeletons and shrubs shrivel in the icy wind. On the back porch, the cover of Janet's barbecue flaps noisily against the railing. My eyes survey the house as she considers her next move. There are no carpets on the hardwood floors. All tripping hazards have been removed. The hutch that groaned with food at her standing-room-only parties is now covered with medicine vials and patient handouts about Parkinson's Disease.

Janet turns a letter tile over again and again between her thumb and index finger before slowly raising her head to stare at the board. She sets the tile on the board, moves it into place with a trembling finger, then pulls it back. She shakes her head, then turns to me and whispers with frustration "my brain" before her shoulders droop and she gazes out the window. "Can't do this," she whispers. The long moment ends. Outside, the clouds churn and blacken.

Nonfiction: Second Place

Wesley

by Christine Cowan

Selective memory is peculiar. It seems the brain's rolodex doesn't necessarily choose what we remember 'as if it were yesterday' on the basis of importance, as one would think. For example, why does an image of my mother handing me a peach one nondescript summer day-- a seemingly unremarkable action --flash through my mind with such vividness? I can see her face so clearly, feel the weight of the fruit in my hand, the dribble of juice down my chin. Yet I can't recall with any accuracy the day my grandmother died or my tenth birthday party.

As a retiree, there's lots of time for reminiscing, hours to mull over the movie in my head that was early life. Reel after reel, it's fascinating and often surprising, to discover which events and people float to the top of memory, which ones are hazy and which are forgotten. Wesley Arkwright, a boy in my grade five class over sixty years ago, falls into the first category. Although he crossed my path so briefly, in the kaleidoscope of childhood recollections, his image has haunted me more than I'd like to admit.

He was a tall boy with an ectomorphic build and sallow skin. Wesley looked uncared for, dare I say unwell, with deep-set eyes and perpetual dark smudges underneath them. His hands were claw-like with long, loosely- jointed fingers and nails that needed cutting. Unlike the boys in our class who sported stylish crew cuts and slicked- back styles, Wesley's hair was shaggy, and I'll never know what his parents were thinking when they chose his clothes. His characteristic look consisted of a short sleeved, light-colored shirt and dress pants that were held up with suspenders which pulled the slacks up over his waist-- the original 'nerd' look television character Steve Urkel so humorously portrayed decades later. Their son's wardrobe set Wesley apart from his classmates, as if they needed another reason.

Looking back, I see now there was a hint of sexuality about Wesley -- which side he fell on-- but in those days most of us were innocent, knew nothing about homosexuality or neurodiversity. It wasn't part of the sex talk we all got before high school. Nobody back then had two moms or dads, listened to drag queen readings at the local library or witnessed celebrities who switched genders before our eyes.

Amongst our class of athletic, good-looking boys who played Little League, Wesley was an outsider. Friendless, he was forced onto the playground at lunch and recess, exposed to the swaggering bullies who were waiting to strike when teachers or assistants were out of range. Cussing while kicking a soccer ball, irreverent and loud-mouthed as boys can be at that age, they taunted him with a ditty that was repeated until firmly embedded in our heads. Wesley's surname, unfortunately, lent itself to a childish, but unforgettable, sing- song refrain that reverberated throughout the schoolyard. Or was whispered close to his ear when there were adults around.

"Wesley Arkwright

Couldn't fart right

'Cause his ass is airtight."

I can still hear it, followed by sniggering, guffawing as he was trapped on the sidelines of the playing field, pushing back like a cowed dog into the wire fence that surrounded the school, as if hoping it might swallow him up. It's hard to forget the panic in his eyes. I never saw him cry. Rather, he responded to the humiliation with a type of paralysis, the muscles in his face frozen into a mask of fear as they rained insults upon him. He didn't have much choice, I suppose, a scared rabbit afraid to run in case burly classmates took chase. At least there was a modicum of safety out in the open. Years later, I realized Wesley probably had to face those same boys alone in the washroom or changeroom. It makes me shudder to think about it.

While this was going on, we girls stood gawping nearby in a group, feeling conflicted and helpless, as his eyes silently pleaded with us to rescue him. The simple act of standing beside him might have been enough to stop the attacks, but we hung back, not wanting to be associated with him as if he were a disease we might catch. In elementary school, we girls all yearned to be in the popular group, wanting to be noticed and yet 'one of the crowd' at the same time. Speaking up for Wesley would certainly eliminate that possibility, or so we thought. As a kid, you're thankful to not be the target yourself, your own inadequacies deflected by some other poor soul's, and that it's not *your* surname being subjected to hurtful, derogatory rhymes.

Wesley didn't transition to high school with the rest of us. Did his parents or school administrators switch him to another institution in hopes of a new beginning? Did he quit and go to private school? Become a home learner? We never found out. He just faded from our lives after we'd all moved on. As an aduIt, I've fantasized about running into him at the grocery store or in a theatre. Even on the street-- although it's never happened yet. I'm certain I'd look into those eyes and recognize him immediately.

From time to time, I've googled his name, hoping to locate him, although I'm not sure what I'd do with the information if I did find him. Anyway, it's been in vain. Maybe he's changed to Green or Smith, wanting to ditch a surname he grew to hate. That odious chorus must have been the stuff of his nightmares. I'll always wonder if he carried a victim mentality throughout his life, unable to overcome the early taunting, the judgement. Labelling. Were his young adult years ruined before they began? If so, we were all culpable-- me and the others who stood by as silent witnesses and did nothing to help.

What would it be like, I've wondered, to walk up to his door, identify myself and ask how he is? How his life has gone? Apologize and beg forgiveness. Perhaps he'd refuse to talk to me or act dumb. Say I had the wrong person or wanted nothing to do with me. Maybe he's moved on from a painful past and wouldn't want a reminder. Understandable. I hope Wesley was able to overcome his early trauma and eventually find his tribe, but I'll probably never know. There's no going back from cruelty. The poet Omar Khayyam says it all in his iconic poem:

"The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,

Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,

Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it."

Still, I do hope Wesley's happy somewhere. I like to think he's had a fulfilling life, despite a dreadful start. The best I can do at this point is use his experience as an example to my grandchildren. To save other youngsters from the pain inflicted at the hands of those who are supposed to be friends and classmates. Make no mistake, bullying is alive and well, and so are those who are guilty of bystander inaction. One only has to watch the nightly news. Human beings, like other animals, still pick on the weak and sick--perhaps it's in our nature, our reptilian brain. With cyberbullying a growing crime and bullying in the workplace added to schoolyard harassment, there's still much work to do.

Thankfully, there's hope in the current generation of children. How gratifying to see cohorts of schoolkids supporting Pink Shirt Day in more than 25 countries around the world! It happens on the first Wednesday of each February, a movement that started humbly in a small Nova Scotian town in 2007. A girl was bullied for wearing a pink shirt to school, but two students came to her aid and it grew from there. The special celebration is now recognized by the United Nations, entire elementary school populations declaring their support annually for those victimized by bullies.

My old classmate, Wesley, was born too soon for this kind of positive energy and kindness, but I hope wherever he is, he's witnessing the growing acceptance of diversity in our society.

It's a start.

Nonfiction: Third Place

The Clarity of Time

by Robin Jane Roff

We all have an abortion story. Sometimes it's an aborted plan, a relationship, a dream. Other times it's all three at once. Mine starts with a name: Claire. A sweet, blond cherub of a name for a plucky girl who would never be. I don't know if my baby would have been a girl. I don't even know if my little one would have grown strong enough to survive. I didn't give it time because there wasn't any to give.

It's not that I regret my choice, but I long for a life that would have allowed a different one. I dream of a past that doesn't involve a man who wouldn't smile and chose to smash bottles over his head and break tables in lieu of punching me. Well, I'm glad about the punching part, and the cracked table is perhaps a little charming in a certain light.

I don't regret, but I still cry, over a decade later. I cry with confusion, heartache and relief. He didn't want her – that was clear from the moment I told him. I didn't want him, and he was half of her. Keeping her meant keeping him even if he left, which I knew he would. And so, on February 14th, 2013, I walked into a clinic a mother and walked out something else. It was a day of love, of sorts.

The doctor asked me if I wanted to see it before they put me under. I did. I really, really did. The bed swayed towards the screen uneasily – a blur of greys and blacks, the flicker of a red light somewhere behind. In an instance darkness enveloped the view and time disappeared. I never saw my little girl, but I did say goodbye.

I woke up hours later. The nurses hovered around me, worried. No one slept that long. It was time to go.

"No, I don't have anyone waiting. I'll call a cab."

I staggered onto the sidewalk and into a nearby cafe, the muted mid-winter sun overwhelming my drug-addled mind. I had hospital sized maxi-pads stuffed into my pants and a prescription for pain killers somewhere in my purse. The coffee felt good. The phone call home did not.

"Please come get me. I'm fine, I can wait."

The man in the next booth leered at me with lust-tinged distain. I noticed his blond hair and five o'clock shadow. Not now sir, I'm a little tired.

My love double parked in front of the café. His honking roused me from my stupor. The staff didn't hide their relief when I stumbled out, leaving my half empty cup on the cedar-wood table. I felt like a pariah, even to the man at the wheel. He winced at my appearance. Pale-faced and drooping. Perhaps he felt guilty after all. No, he was going out later to the party we were both invited to – he didn't want his friends to think something was wrong. It *was* Valentine's Day after all, and he had promised to attend.

I found out I was pregnant in the bathroom of my local bar. I was half drunk and feeling off. For a laugh, my friend bought me a pregnancy test from the pharmacy up the street. Neither of us laughed at the result. Fuck – fucked really. Part of me was happy but I threw up anyway.

When I got home, I told the man I loved, and he stared blankly back at me. I'm sure he would have joined me as I cried on my own bathroom floor, my cheek resting against the cold porcelain floor. But I didn't want his comfort, it would have been colder than the tiles.

"We could, you know, make it go away," he proposed from outside the door. "It's not the time."

I spent the next week walking the back alley with my dog, talking to the thing growing inside of me. She made me ill and I survived on saltine crackers and chicken broth. The man I loved went mute and slept ridged in the bed beside me. We tried to go on as if nothing had happened - vacationed to a nearby town. It was quaint and quiet in the after-Christmas lull before the explosion of spring tourists. He spilled a glass of wine on me at dinner and I cried every time we got in the car. It was a gas.

The decision to agree with him was easy. It came to me at work, staring at my computer, helping someone else through their conflict. Tears fell onto my keyboard but continued to draft emails with cheery salutations. I loved her but I couldn't keep her. This wasn't the time. That evening, as I pinched up crumbs and loaded plates into the dishwasher, I told him what I was going to do. Silence. Perhaps the hint of a smile beneath blond stubble, and the faintest exhale of tension, but it was lost behind the clank of knives sheaved into holders.

Recovery was long. I lay in bed or walked ghost-like through my days. I bled a lot. Deep, rich, red blood, the colour of the boxed chocolates on my nightstand. They would go stale before I had the stomach to eat them. Given to me by a friend, for the day of love. She didn't know what had happened.

April 18th, the height of spring's rebirth, I begged him to let me ski – to escape into the mountains and refill my soul. He agreed, but he would come along. I couldn't leave him, he told me. I acquiesced. It was a brilliant day – crystal skies and soft warm snows. We plodded up the trail. I rejoiced in every move of my broken body and mind. I was finally free from the weight of it all. He grumbled at the strain and challenge, the heat and the scratch of ill-fitting boots. I lost my mind again. I pleaded with him to let me have this day. To find some measure of happiness or at least give me this time to enjoy. He raised his fist and left me. I screamed at his receding form, "I'm glad I killed our baby." A phrase that stung my core. He never looked back. I still don't know if I meant it.

I sat in the crusty snow, weeping for nothing and for everything. No one would come to pick me up this time. I was alone. I dragged my body to the top of the mountain and tried to love the man who stood beside me. The winter-bound alpine summit glistened like a million diamonds in the sun. The sound of meltwater ran beneath our feet, undermining the ground on which we stood. The earth was casting off the things that chill its heart. I could do that too. I could abort this dream, this relationship.

The man I loved turned down the mountain and asked about dinner.

Time was up.

The end came later than you would think. August, almost September. It came after a marriage proposal and a nice meal; a joke that landed wrong and the attempt to clear the air. A book thrown, a bruised body and a name called. I phoned my parents and resolved to really leave. The tears streamed down my cheeks in long, slick lines as I finally aborted the shattered remains of long held plans. But it was time.

We were away from home again, on a small island in a dark and wind-swept sea. We sat next to each other on the boat back to the city on seats of cracked and pealing blue vinyl. The sounds of water beneath our feet filtered up above the din of a tired motor and the sun threw streams of diamonds across the frothy waves. He scowled. I laughed with red-rimmed eyes. It was a day of love, of sorts, and I had the time to watch the world as it took new shape.

We all have an abortion story. A relationship, a dream, a plan. Mine just happens to start with a name. What's yours?

Nonfiction: Honourable Mention

Ella's Porch

by William Koch

Ella, my maternal grandmother, was the self-appointed matriarch of a small town on the Montana Highline, an agricultural area bisected by the Great Northern Railway linking Minneapolis and Seattle. She moved to Montana with my grandfather, a small community banker who lent to sugar beet farmers and small businesses scattered across the desolate great plains. The death of my grandfather and my father's new job with the Great Northern Railway several hours drive away were the triggering events for this story.

When I was seven, my parents and I moved to the windswept eastern foothills of the Rockies, known as the Rocky Mountain Front because it opens up like a large undulating carpet of yellow grasses and rocks ending abruptly in the spectacular ragged peaks of the Rockies. We seldom appreciate the relationship of emotional well-being and geography. Ripped away from their old nurturing environments, love and laughter may not survive in unfamiliar soil. Adapting to new environments and acquaintances was natural for my father. He had wandered from the Dakotas to Montana, on to war-torn islands in the Pacific and back again after the bomb. What was easy for him overwhelmed my mother. Always slow to develop friends and now separated from her mother, she retreated to the television or her bedroom for weeks at a time. After our move, she often visited her widowed mother, dragging me along against my father's wishes.

Ella's house sat a block off the main street of Chinook, a small town named for warm winter winds that swept away the bitter arctic chill and melted the snow into wind-rippled puddles. Many of Ella's neighbors walked past her raised front porch during their daily errands. Before my first memory, this porch was renovated into an outer room surrounded with large windows from which she could observe all who passed by. In the spring, her handyman removed the storm windows and replaced them with screens. This arrangement fended off the clouds of mosquitos that swarmed from crescent-shaped ponds abandoned by the Milk River's meanders, and moderated the heat of summer when the cool breeze from Canada whispered through the windows.

Ella furnished the porch to feed her fantasy that she lived somewhere more cosmopolitan than the depopulating northern plains. She had followed the love of her life to Montana but preferred New York, a city she had visited only once, and chafed at the habits and speech of small-town residents. She imagined herself only temporarily torn from the heart of cultural influence on the eastern seaboard.

Chairs of yellow wicker sat in each corner. Two oriental throw rugs, purchased on vacation in a larger city, decorated the hardwood floor. Prominently displayed on a glass table and fanned out for visitors' admiration were copies of the *New Yorker*. In the warmer months, she sat in her porch, read, and entertained visitors. When my mother and I visited, she accepted the role of Ella's obedient companion, serving coffee and dry, commercially-prepared cookies to guests. Left to my own devices during adult discussions, I played with a baseball or read juvenile fiction in the cool den overlooking the back garden. At the end of a day overseeing the comings

and goings of her shady street and inviting neighbors for coffee, Ella would debrief with my mother about the peculiarities and weaknesses of her guests.

It was a June morning the summer after I turned nine when I first became aware of Ella's acidic appraisal of others. Cottonwood fluff drifted across the lawns as the high-pitched call of a meadowlark pierced the open air. I sat engrossed with a Hardy Boys mystery as I escaped the heat in the shade of a lilac bush near the porch.

Harry, the local hardware store owner, passed by on his mid-morning walk. He wore his usual khaki trousers and short-sleeved dress shirt. Ella and my mother sat in the front porch reading different sections of the newspaper. As Harry passed by, he called out "Mornin' Mrs. M." and Ella looked up to see him waving with his large hand, callouses prominent from years of handling lumber and hardware.

Ella stood and waved back, her gesture more command than greeting. "Harry, come in for coffee. Dorothy's visiting." Harry turned up the sidewalk toward the front porch. "Dorothy, make some fresh coffee."

Harry sat in the corner chair and carefully cradled a delicate porcelain cup of coffee in his huge hands. "Dorothy, how are you and Jay liking Augusta?"

My mother hesitated, her gaze disappearing into the distance as it did so often. "Oh … we like it. Jay … he has made friends. But it is a long way from home for me." Her eyes shuttled nervously toward Ella. Hidden outside below the window, I glanced up from my mystery and recalled how my mother repeatedly told my father how much she wanted to move back near her mother.

Harry sipped his coffee in a long pause of silence.

"Harry, how is our store?" Ella asked, communicating her expanded sense of ownership given that her deceased husband had loaned Harry the money to start his business some twenty-five years ago, a debt long since paid back with interest.

"Business is great. Sometimes it's hard to get young guys to do the heavy lifting, but overall, we do well. My wife thinks we should take more vacations because my assistant could run the store herself." Harry smiled as his eyes softened with contentment.

After thirty minutes of exchanging gossip, Harry excused himself. "Mrs. M, it's been nice talking. You too, Dorothy. Thanks so much for the coffee." He gently set the cup and saucer on the table. Harry strode toward Main Street, hands in his pockets and whistling out of tune.

Ella's commentary began after he turned the corner. "Can you believe how self-satisfied that man is, Dorothy? A big uneducated man with dirt under his fingernails who doesn't appreciate all our family has done for him! Since Brooks passed away, I haven't once heard him thank me for how we helped him build his business." Sitting under the window, I wondered about the reasons for her displeasure with this friendly bear of a man.

Another day that summer, I was playing with a baseball in Ella's front yard when Miss Miller passed by on her way home from the school where she taught fourth grade. I tossed the ball high into the air and then ran under it, darting in front of her on the sidewalk and breathlessly exclaiming "oops, sorry," just as she reached high and caught the ball above her head.

She danced deftly past me, tossed the ball over her shoulder into my glove, and laughed her high melodic trill. "No need to apologize. Hello Mrs. McClintock; how are you today?"

Ella gestured for her to come up. Miss Miller settled into her chair as my mother slipped quietly back to the kitchen to make more coffee and I continued to toss my ball high up into the blue sky rising above the cottonwoods. It was not until their coffee talk was finishing, that I came back inside.

"Goodbye Marian, it was nice to visit." Ella stood and held the door open.

"Thank you for the coffee, Mrs. McClintock. And Dorothy, it was so nice to visit with you." She skipped nimbly down the steps and continued on her way home. Ella started in as soon as my mother returned from the kitchen. "Dorothy, that young woman has unrealistic dreams. She thinks she will be able to get a teaching job in New York. She talked so much about the theatre scene in New York, you would think she was an arts critic. Some young women have too high an opinion of themselves."

"Oh mother, she didn't mean anything by that; she would just like to live somewhere more ─"

"Don't tell me you think she has any chance of moving away. Some people don't realize their limitations. They can never escape. Small towns, small minds. She shouldn't fool herself." Ella dismissed Dorothy before she picked up a pristine copy of the *New Yorker* from her coffee table and began to leaf through it.

That evening, after dusk descended into darkness, my mother washed dinner dishes and I settled into the plot of another Hardy Boys mystery. Ella's smoky voice summoned my mother to the front porch. "Dorothy, come here. We have something to discuss." I heard my mother's hesitant footsteps leave the kitchen for the front of the house. I followed quietly, sensing the imperative in my grandmother's voice and reluctance in my mother's response, before I settled into the darkened living room to eavesdrop.

"Now Dorothy, it's a good thing you brought Billy's report card with you. I have Jane's report from last term as well." Hiding in the darkness, I wondered why my grandmother had not only my report card, but also my cousin's. "Now Dorothy, see how well Janey is doing. Nothing but top marks. Her mother says she drills Janey on grammar and checks her homework every night. Now Billy … Billy appears to be struggling."

"Oh mother, he is doing well. Look at all those A's."

“But look at those two B’s, Dorothy. That is the point. Certainly, he can do better. Do you check on his homework, give him extra practice?”

“… I check sometimes Mother but it isn’t easy for me.” My mother’s chair leg ground noisily into the parquet floor as she squirmed and her voice faded into a whisper. “You know I am not well.”

“You look fine to me. Yet when you visit, I don’t see Billy doing anything other than reading those mystery stories and playing with a baseball ─”

“Father would have enjoyed throwing a ball with him.”

“He would not have been impressed with this report card. He had standards. Unless you do something, your son will become a very common person. He’ll never distinguish himself.”
“Oh mother, he is only nine years old and ─”

“Age has nothing to do with it. If you think so, you are a negligent mother, letting your son amuse himself with useless pastimes. He will turn into his father, a common worker who has to follow work wherever it goes, and you … not only are you a negligent mother, but a disrespectful daughter. Do you not care what I think of your son?”

“Oh …” something rattled in my mother’s voice.

“Tomorrow I want you to find something more suitable for Billy to read.”

“Yes Mother …” A chair pushed back and my mother’s small footsteps fled to the kitchen.

“Did you hear me, Dorothy?”

There was no response other than banging pots in the kitchen sink. I slipped up the steep staircase to my room and stared out my window. The street light on the corner threw shadows of the old cottonwood toward the house.

Some days afterward, my father collected us for the drive home. As I carried my small suitcase past Ella on the porch, she reached out for me. “Give your grandmother a kiss now Billy, and remember to study hard when you get home; you have some catching up to do.” I stood rigidly, arms glued to my ribs. On the drive home, I sat in the back and gazed out the window, while my mother recounted to my father the details of our visit and my father listened, his jaw set with anger, eyes dulled with despair. Amidst the yellow, tree-dotted plains, the Missouri River meandered by in its timeless fashion as the Rockies slowly approached.

Poetry: First Place

Breath and Beat

by Colleen Adair

Breath and beat of the story tumble onto the page
as if needing air and light to survive,
casting eyes about to see who might catch the words.
An unshared story is nothing, has no life
no beat and breath, no shine of eye or invitation to join in the telling.
An untold story remains dormant
like bulbs never pushed up through rich soil
or eggshells intact, never cracked to
birth a new bird to sing,
or bright green leaves, tightly wrapped
never to unfurl and catch the rain or sun drops.
Breath and beat of story knock at the door
peer out the window, look through the cracks
seeking light and voice and audience
so that they might dance across once empty stages and
tumble across rocks into pools of reflecting water
that washes and sustains.
So that they might sing in full colour and emotion and history,
sweeping arms wide to bring the words alive, be touchable.
Breath and beat felt in the vibration of the stones and floorboards,
across moist lips and soft cheeks, into waiting hands
that reach and hold, caress and savour as the story unfolds
like a ball of yarn rolling across the floor,
threading the way from then to now,
from there to here, from why to understanding,
from one heart of breath and beat
To another. And then another.

Poetry: Second Place

Eleusis

by Lindsay Vermeulen

I hung a painting of pomegranates
over the hole you punched in the wall.
It softened things

to think that I might not linger here forever
in the cavern of your grief
heartsore, caressing your white knuckles

That there might be spring again
when I could emerge, blinded, bird-boned
into the dappled light

Poetry: Third Place

Spoken Sorrows (Glosa)

by Janet Kvammen

Each and every sorrow is known.
Under the weight of rain, the grass lies down,
the thin blades bent beneath
their own hidden lives.

"Book of Medicine" – Randy Lundy (Field Notes for the Self)

the vastness of sky alone
covers the low fields, a shelter
of dark blue blankets memory.
Spring rivers in humble prayer.
Again, autumn's wilt will come,
and arbutus shall winter to bone.
Death is always in season,
and Octobers will always end.
When seeds of grief are sown,
each and every sorrow is known.

Here, a sense of déjà vu,
entombed between
the natural world and the other side,
leaves us to the inevitable.
We've all been there before,
wearing our sorrow like a thorny crown.
Death, as the seasons, brings change.
Life storms in every weather,
treading water, we struggle not to drown.

Under the weight of rain, the grass lies down

weaving a pathway from grief. A step
forward to embracing broken-ness.
A familiar voice heard
in the stillness of mourning:
the dialogue between the living,
the lost and the dying. A wreath
of sonnets woven in pain.
Between life and loss, shards of light
leak through the luminous sheath,
the thin blades bent beneath.

Even as the raven in the wilderness
converses with starry-nights,
and triumphs dawns approach,
the darkness listens. Let the spirits speak,
waiting for their light to unfold.
In stasis peace thrives,
golding barren trees, and shadows of the mind.
Soft as birdsong, voices of healing and of pain.
We're not alone — for within the hallowed survives
their own hidden lives

Poetry: Honourable Mention

Blood and Resilience

by Martina Revello

Blood runs deep through the veins of the land Carrying stories, struggles, and a demand
For justice, for healing, for a rightful place For Indigenous peoples of Canada to embrace

The blood of their ancestors, the blood of the earth A connection that stretches back to their birth
A bond that's been tested, but still remains strong

A legacy of resilience that continues on

Their blood has been spilled, their lives have been taken Their culture suppressed, their spirit shaken
But still they rise, with a determination so deep

A spirit that refuses to be put to sleep

Their blood is a symbol of their strength and their fight A battle that they continue day and night
To reclaim their lands, their language, their pride

To heal the wounds of the past, to never hide

So let us honour their blood, their pain, and their plight To stand with them and make things right
To listen to their voices, to give them space

To acknowledge their struggle and their rightful place

For the blood that runs through Indigenous veins Is a symbol of the resilience that remains
A legacy of struggle, but also of hope

A testament to their spirit, that helps them to cope.

Poetry: Honourable Mention

If You Could Hear

by Alexander Hamilton-Brown

If you could hear the way things sound,

Not up here, but underground.

You'd hear chirrups and chirping of clackity crickets

Chattering together in snickety snickets.

There's the pitter and patter of busy ants,

Bringing home supper of yum-yummy plants.

You'd hear little foxes yelp in their lair,

And a rabbit digging burrows right under your stair.

And further below that, there's sleepy Miss Mouse,

Snoring all through the winter in her little mouse house.

Chipmunks would be chattering of how, on tip toes,

They could steal a hen's breakfast from right under her nose.

And not forgetting those short-sighted moles,

Throwing up lots of dirt from their secret mole holes.

But listen real close, and you might hear some wiggles;

That's the sound of wee worms making lots of wee squiggles.

Newsletter Submission Guidelines

The NSWA publishes a quarterly newsletter that showcases member news, events, resources, and even excerpts of works. It's a great way to see what other writers on the North Shore are up to, get inspired, and to contribute some of your own work.

To become a member, simply visit nswriters.org. If you are already a member, here's a refresher below on guidelines for submitting to our newsletter. The deadline for submission is June 10th.

You may submit any of the following:

- A blurb about your recent publication, or writing news (e.g. book launches, author readings, writing awards)
- Your poetry or prose (up to 600 words, fiction or nonfiction, and it can be an excerpt from a larger work)
- Artwork or photography befitting our winter theme (please send high-quality JPG or PNG files)
- Writing workshops or resources to share with fellow members
- A submission to our 100-word challenge (the next edition's theme is: the North Shore)

Please note:

- Only submissions from NSWA members will be accepted.
- Poetry, short fiction or nonfiction. No op-ed articles please.
- Email your submission to editor@nswriters.org.
- Contributors are responsible for the accuracy, originality, and reliability of their content.
- Please check spelling, grammar, and punctuation prior to submission.
- Writing that appears in the NSWA newsletter is eligible for submission to the Annual NSWA Writing Contest.
- Publication in the Write On! newsletter is at the discretion of the Editor, in consultation with the Board of Directors.