



School District No. 73 (Kamloops / Thompson)

2018 Young Authors' Conference

Marg van Duesen Award Recipients & Honorable Mentions

ELEMENTARY WINNERS - Recipients of the Marg van Duesen Award

Shaelynn Jones, Gr. 5 Rayleigh Elementary: "Death Leaves a Heartache No One Can Heal"

Alexandra Rudge, Gr. 7 RL Clemitson Elementary: "Winter's Ember"

Honorable Mentions

Evangeline Middleton, Gr. 4 Beattie Elementary: "The Other Real Story of Goldilocks"

Kiara Aldana, Gr. 5 Kamloops Christian School: "A Journey to Heaven"

Maggie Sinclair, Gr. 6 Aberdeen Elementary: "Geometry" and "Snowflakes"

Gemma Hughes, Gr. 7 Dallas Elementary: "Society" and "Bullying"

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#### ***SECONDARY WINNERS - Recipients of the Marg van Duesen Award***

***Vivian McLean, Gr. 10 Desert Sands Community School: "A Poem for Chocolate" and***

***"Today, on the Streets of Vancouver"***

***MacKenzie Sewell, Gr. 12 South Kamloops Secondary: "Groceries"***

#### ***Honorable Mentions***

*Fyfer Brookes-Gillingham, Gr. 8 Brock Middle School: "Valerie"*

*Marysia Drozdz, Gr. 9 St. Ann's Academy: "Growing Up" and "Rain"*

*Alia Sandeman-Allen, Gr. 10 South Kamloops Secondary: "Exhaustion" and "Good days"*

*Jaida Barker, Gr. 11 South Kamloops Secondary: "Fallen Stars"*

*Kaila Hindle, Gr. 12 NorKam Secondary: "Perfection"*

*A Poem for Chocolate*

Vivian McLean

Grade 10

Desert Sands Community School

The kids scamper up the trees in the blistering heat,

Knowing they must make haste if they hope to eat.

Other kids hold machetes in their scarred, seasoned hands,

Never quite knowing where the next blow will land.

Whether it be by the illegal weapons they use daily,

Or by the supervisors who once promised them safety.

When the pods are wet, the blades easily slip,

And when the men are angry, they resort to the whip.

These conditions are normal to many of the kids,

Who once fell innocently for the overseers' fibs.

The promises of money, the chance to help their families,

They lure children in, while they know nothing of the fatalities.

They will be educated by the agonies, the casualties,

The cavities in their fantasies, rotted away by tragedies

Unbeknownst to us.

These will hurt more than the cavities in their teeth,

For the child's mind is more fragile than what is beneath.

So even as they're deprived of food, money and rest,

The struggle to retain hope is the truest test.

Many of them, young and old, try to escape,

Knowing that if they don't, they may suffocate.

The labour, otherwise known as slavery,

*A Poem for Chocolate*

Vivian McLean

Grade 10

Desert Sands Community School

Abuses both mind and body majorly.

It leaves scars and scrapes, wounds that will never heal,

Not only on the workers, but also upon the cocoa fields.

The tree was once a signature of culture,

A beam or branch in the South American structure.

The locals would put hours of effort into the beans,

Making them into a drink for sacred ceremonies.

They would share their precious drink with travellers passing by,

Proudly allowing for any and all to give it a try.

Foreigners of the land and sea took advantage of their generosity,

Enslaving the people and their plant with a neoteric ferocity.

The people had never experienced such ill intentions,

And they provided their sacred plant and drink in submission.

The plant had been a gift to them by the King of The Gods,

But they couldn't fight the people with whom they were at odds.

So they gave up their productions, which were sent across the seas,

They sacrificed their plant, chocolate and culture unwillingly.

Other trees were hewn to meet the rising demand,

And so died a large population of the natural woodland.

The cocoa tree grew ill because of the changing conditions,

But the growth was necessary for the businessman's ambitions.

Someone had added sugar to the hardened form of chocolate,

*A Poem for Chocolate*

Vivian McLean

Grade 10

Desert Sands Community School

And used the stolen culture to put money in their pocket.

Constantly, the growing chocolate companies needed more,

And so the cocoa-growing industry reached further shores.

South America, the Caribbean and Africa especially,

Were subjected to this business, which grew corrupt incessantly.

The consumption grew higher and higher, surpassing many expectations,

During the second world war, chocolate became a part of the men's rations.

And after the war, when the cost of sugar decreased,

That's when the industry became truly unleashed.

The companies grew larger and larger, and when more cocoa was needed,

They took the land over, uncaring of their foreign workers as they competed.

They planted cocoa where it wasn't meant to be,

In farms as large and perfect as the eye could see.

And all that the companies could see were the profits these would reap,

Not that the farms were flawed, and the secrets they hid were deep.

It's so much easier to ignore difficult problems,

Than to look at them and inspect the causes.

However, some problems couldn't be overlooked,

As they piled up like great stooks.

Bugs, lack of shade and fungi among other things,

Endangered the industry and its stretched-out limbs.

*A Poem for Chocolate*  
Vivian McLean  
Grade 10  
Desert Sands Community School

And then came pesticides, harsh chemicals that can modify plants,  
Make them grow in soil that they organically can't.  
This is why kids are handy in the chocolate business,  
They won't realize the strange spray is the cause of their dizziness.  
They're numerous and easy to manipulate and overpower,  
Unaware of how much they should be paid by the hour.  
Unaware that the machetes that slice their hands,  
Are illegal for them to possess in most lands.  
But I'm sure they are aware that the beans they haul on their backs,  
Weigh more than they do, as they pile the bags onto trucks in stacks.  
They are well-acquainted with the plants,  
But will never taste the chocolate, never get a chance.  
Because we don't want to pay extra money,  
To ensure that the chocolate we purchase isn't bloody.  
There is a reason that fair trade chocolate exists,  
But the uneducated children in plantations will never know any of this.

*Today, on the Streets of Vancouver*

Vivian McLean

Grade 10

Desert Sands Community School

Today, I spent more money on a shirt

Than I gave away on the streets.

Why did I buy another shirt for myself

And not the man without mattress or sheet?

Today, I could not finish my meal

And so I threw the rest away.

Meanwhile, the people living on the sidewalk

Struggle to nourish themselves every day.

Today, I learned not to give money from my wallet

In case someone grabs it and runs.

Today, I learned to keep change in my pocket

Because those in need mustn't be shunned.

Today, I stepped over a person's possessions

Condensed in a square-foot pile.

Knowing that if I lined all mine up

They may stretch on for a quarter-mile.

Today, I passed by a dilapidated building

And saw people who were living inside.

As I continued walking, I reflected on the place

*Today, on the Streets of Vancouver*

Vivian McLean

Grade 10

Desert Sands Community School

Where I comfortably reside.

Today, I did not see enough support

For people condemned to life on the streets.

Tonight, I will go home and lay in bed

Knowing that I can safely fall asleep.

## Groceries

Come wander through our aisles,

Pick us up and squeeze to see if we're ripe or

Open our egg cartons because lord knows some of us have cracked,

and nobody wants a woman that's cracked, because she'll be leaking ideas of feminism and equality and damn, that's messy.

Some of us are hot but those of us in the frozen section last way longer, because they take longer to thaw and even then

they won't ever be the same as they were when they were fresh.

Make sure you check our labels because if the label says "trans, fat", throw it back on the shelf, and the sodium content had better be less than 15%, because nobody wants a salty girl.

One of the first ingredients listed had better be "compliance".

Do you want any artificial ingredients?

No?

But everything is better when it's not all-natural.

Don't worry, you'll hardly taste the societal pressure used to morph this person into an ideal woman.

No one ever does.



Don't bother looking at the rest of that label;  
nobody pays attention to the vitamins and minerals.

Like Vitamin C for "consent" and

Vitamin A for "attracted to you".

You can ignore that.

Everything has the vitamins listed, even though  
sometimes they're listed as 0%.

You need those, you know. They're important.

But whatever.

Make a stop by the bakery and the deli,

So you can look at the buns and the breasts.

If the goods are on display, obviously

we must love getting feedback, so go ahead and shout

in the middle of the dairy section

about how much you'd love to give us the Vitamin D.

Be careful when you pick us up, because some of us fall easily,

and that's okay but remember

if you break it you buy it.

MacKenzie Sewell

Grade 12

SKSS

*Groceries*

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Maybe you won't keep the one of us you break,  
and I don't blame you.

But if she's broken she won't be for sale anymore,  
and nobody else will keep her either.

If she gets fixed and put back on the shelf,  
they'll make sure she's secure so she can't fall as easily.

Good thing, too.

Nobody wants a broken woman.

Come to the cashier,  
the only place in the entire store where  
we'll check you out.

Now remember, once you take us home,  
there are no returns  
and no exchanges  
even if it seems like the bag you bought is more air than substance,  
or if your Golden Gaytime seems a little queer.

You should know:

any time spent with us is an investment -

MacKenzie Sewell

Grade 12

SKSS

*Groceries*

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and the interest rate gets higher with every

rude thing you say,

unconsented touch,

and horrible action.

Would you like your receipt?

## Valerie

There was a knock at my door.

Jumping up from his bed, my dog Fox, launched a barrage of tiny screeches towards the door believing it would improve the situation. Two whistles emanated sharply from my mouth, telling the tiny dog to stop yapping.

I got up from my chesterfield, leaving the cartoon I had been watching as I stumbled to my door.

The door opened, first revealing the bright sun I hide from so desperately. As my eyes adapted to the brightness, a man standing at my door came into focus. I felt embarrassed in front of him, his tailored suit laughed at my outfit: sweatpants cut into shorts and an oversized muscle shirt.

“Good afternoon sir. I’m he-” he began before I cut him off.

“Look, if you’re here to sell something I’m not interested,” I explained beginning to close the door. The man reacted quickly catching the door with his hand.

“I’m here to talk about your inheritance,” he said as I pulled on the door harder, but his fingers stayed locked in place.

My irritation grew, “No one in my family has died!”

The man was getting desperate, “No Mr. Smithe! I’m talking about the will of Valerie Colt! I’m her lawyer!”

The struggle stopped. I stared at the man in surprise, my brain searching his startling words for meaning.

I let the man in.

He told me that Valerie was dead and had left everything to me. Both of these facts were tough to swallow and yet, I had to comprehend this information.

Valerie Colt was one of my fellow colleagues at Golshock Technologies. One of the only ones I liked. She was smart, friendly and wealthy; it seemed the rest of my colleagues could only embody one of those traits at a time. We would often gossip about our peers and sometimes have lunch together, but nothing more than that. Why would she leave me her savings and house? Why did she not give anything to her close friends and family, (assuming she had any)?

It seemed that the more answers Valerie's lawyer gave me, the more my questions accumulated.

The man left at dusk, leaving me wealthy and confused.

I decided to go to my new house next to find answers and to get out of the dump I call a home.

The drive was long and took me a few hours to get there, way up on the mammoth hills that overlook the city. It was so unlike her to isolate herself from everybody else.

The house was grand, a piece of art, using minimalistic design and abundance of sharp angles to woo the eyes. It stood out of place in the woods.

My eyes stayed glued to the house, giving Fox ample time to jump out the window. The little beast ran wildly towards the house. He apparently loved it, probably because it didn't smell of dirty socks.

I entered the house slowly and cautiously, I knew it was mine, but it still didn't feel right. Fox on the other hand barged in as if it he had always lived there.

The place was nice, but plain. No pictures could be found on the walls and the mantle was a wasteland of untouched dust. No way could the woman I spent so much time with live here, she seemed funny and creative, not bleak and dull. Everything matched the house itself, having sharp angles and no intricate design, leaving me wondering if she had lived there at all.

I proceeded upstairs. Once again, room after room, there was nothing. Soon the only room left was the master bedroom, Valerie's room.

The door swung open and a cool draft hit my face. I felt... unnerved, everything was hollow, drained of emotion. I didn't want to be there anymore, but I needed answers. I hastily checked the dresser which only revealed a few pairs of shoes and blankets. Unsatisfied, I went to the closet. The doors opened, and what I saw confused me.

Four outfits. Just four. The only four outfits I had ever seen her wear. The only clothes she seemed to own.

Things were getting too weird; I had to leave. I turned to go when something out of place caught my eye. A painting. It didn't match the house, with its swirling colours and curves. I approached it as if it were dangerous. I grabbed it with trepidation and put it down, as if it were a bomb.

In its place, a hole, about the size of a mailbox, with a slightly smaller metal box inside. I could feel my brow arch as curiosity and hesitation grew inside me. My fingers clamped onto the metal box slowly pulling it off the wall, I tossed it softly on the bed.

Yapping started downstairs...

My fingers swung the lid open. My eyes raced back and forth, taking in all the contents. Inside were multiple passports, they all had Valerie's picture, but with different names.

...Yapping continued downstairs...

As my hands lifted the passports, I started to question who Valerie was, if that was even her actual name. The passport had hidden money, foreign money, more money than I could count. Fear sprouted in my mind, “was I safe”? Valerie had obviously been living a life way beyond me, would I get dragged into it? I wanted to be here no longer.

Yapping accelerated downstairs.

I hastily picked the money up, aiming to leave as quickly as possible. I nearly fell over. My eyes must of lied to me I thought. I took another peek and I felt the blood rush from my body.

Inside the box was a gun.

...Yapping stopped downstairs.

The sound change was abrupt and strange. I checked the window to see if Fox had run outside, instead I found another car in the driveway.

My heart sank as the huge realization kicked into my tiny brain, somebody was downstairs.

## Growing Up

When I was seven I wanted to be fourteen

But when I was fourteen I wanted to be seven

What happened? What changed? Was it me? Or the rest of the world?

Was it because instead of crying over toys, I started to cry over people?

I think now I see the world and the truth hiding from my childhood

That there's people breaking hearts and destroying lives

There are people who are starving and dying

That to live your dreams you've got to work for them

And at times I wanted to give up but now there's a reason I won't

For me to become strong isn't easy, because I had to get hurt first

And every tear that fell out of my eye will make me more steady

Although I might feel like the only one suffering, I know there are others

Looking around, there're people in the same situation, lost

We all fall apart sometimes but then later rise back up

Days like this don't have to make me scared

And even though my nights might be restless

I will one day look back on these moments

Where I realized what it meant to grow up

What it means to become more



**Rain**

My past is like rain

It reminds me of the tears

Shed, to make me grow

## Exhaustion

Something people don't understand is that there's a difference between tired and exhausted.

Being tired is feeling slow even though you slept eight hours every night.

Being exhausted is so much worse.

Being exhausted is passing out while doing your homework, because you can't keep going.

It's hitting your head on the shower wall because you accidentally closed your eyes a second too long.

It's waking up with swollen eyes lined with red.

It's tripping as you get out of bed because everything is *aching*.

It's your heart suddenly beating too fast, and pretending it didn't happen because you just can't care.

It's trying so hard, and feeling hopeless when you can't do it.

It's hating everyone as much as you hate yourself.

It's flinching every time someone makes a motion to throw something in your direction, heart jolting

because *you're terrified*.

It's staying up until 2 am because you don't have the motivation to deal with tomorrow.

It's random full body spasms, and the unease that lingers.

It's realizing that you can't remember what before was like.

It's being mentally drained, because you still have to do everything, but now you can barely move.

It's crying from being overwhelmed.

It's the desire to scream at every idiot who doesn't understand that sleep is essential.

It's your throat closing up when someone says you're being a hypocrite by trying to help them.

It's constant frustration, because *nothing works*.

**It's simply exhausting.**

## Good days

A good day is waking up at my first alarm, shutting off the

Four others, not needing them today.

A good day is making tea to ease my fears of

Falling asleep in class, missing what people say.

A good day is being busy enough that I

Can't think, there's no time.

A good day is getting things done, shoving the

Empty feeling away, if only in the meantime.

A good day shouldn't be when my head hurts just enough to

Numb the things I don't like.

A good day shouldn't be when things go

Okay, when it feels less like a jagged spike.

A good day isn't real, because a good day isn't supposed to be

Distracting yourself until you can't anymore.

A good day isn't real, because a good day isn't supposed to be when

Everything's a bit easier to ignore.

A good day isn't a good day.

A good day makes everything worse.

## Fallen Stars

I stand before him, my legs trembling beneath the weight of my heart - growing at an alarming rate. As it fills the entirety of the cavity that is my chest, my slender frame is no longer able to contain the rhythmic pounding of drums that perform within. "Please," I plead as I fall into a set of awaiting arms sheathed in worn leather. He smiles knowingly, and I come to the sudden realization that the balloon inflating inside, pushing up against my rib cage, has been popped. Leaving behind a cavernous hollow. A gasp dies in my throat, as I stumble backward - overcome with a newfound emptiness.

With my palms now pressed upon rough gravel, I force my gaze to meet with he whose laughter now echoes around the room. "W-who are you?" My voice wavers in a pitiful attempt to form the question; a question that I only wish I didn't know the answer to.

He crouches down beside my head, brushing the cold metal of his gun against the side of my face, and, attempting to sweep away the damp curls that hide my grimace, whispers hoarsely in my ear, "I have a job for you, Inara. And you *will* do as I request."

I inhale, and his breath, heavy with tobacco, sears the insides of my nostrils. Fighting the urge to cough, and using all the energy I can muster, I counter, "Why would I do that?"

I blink, only to behold a small child - a girl with too-tight French braids hanging over a canary pinafore dress - offering a ripe orange carrying a pungent citrus scent. With one whiff, I am transported.

“Inara, you know you want it...” my sister giggles playfully, before commencing a spritely sprint across our lush California lawn.

“Wait up, Addy!” I shout back. I can already taste its sweet juices dancing on my tongue, my heart higher than the orange blossoms above our heads.

Stopping in her tracks, Adella turns toward me with an unfamiliar glint in her eye. “All you have to do is ask.”

Then, she is gone, and an all too familiar ache for the sister I once held close grips me with force. “Adella...”

“All you have to do is ask.” This time, the words met my ears with another hoarse whisper.

“What do you want, and how do you know about my sister?”

His figure, flickering haphazardly between a grizzly looking man and a child, lily-white, causes my mind to double back and trip over itself. My dear Adella’s dulcet tones ring sweetly in my ears, but these words are delivered by someone much more rugged. “I need you to blaze.”

“I-I can’t,” I strained, pulling my hands back in towards myself, conscious of their power.

“Oh, but you will...” Suddenly, a thick mass adorned with cold scales begins to slither through one ear and out the other, snaking through my brain. I slowly lose grip on my sense of reality, my brain reaching out into the night only to let the stars slip through its fingers. Scheming whispers are quick to cloud my consciousness, moulding my mind into something I no longer recognize... until only one thing remains clear: *he cannot win*. I can feel the heat of his body hovering close to mine, and, feigning total loss of control, I stumble into him. My hand slides

into place, wrapping around the grip of his pistol, and, my own temperature rising, I raise the barrel to his temple.

“No. I won’t.”

The scent of orange, once again, inhabits my nasal cavity, but, instead of lowering my weapon and being carried away to a far-off place, I let out a small laugh and fire begins to spark from my fingertips.

For a moment, he is mesmerized, my fallen stars flickering in his eyes as he hungrily commits their flames to memory. “Beautiful.”

Fallen from his reverie, now aware that his old weapons have become useless, the man begins to plead with me, “Inara, you-you don’t have to do this...”

“Oh, but I do...” I reply reflecting the sick smile that adorned his own face only moments ago. Even so, a tenderness underlay the burning hellfire in my gaze, as I finish, “for Adella.”

A shot rings through the air.

## ***Perfection***

It had been a bad day. An atrocious day. It started off bright and sunny, with the perfect tasting coffee, and good songs on the radio. It was perfect.

But perfection doesn't exist, does it? It always has cracks. Faults. Sometimes imperceptible, but always there. Perfection is ignoring the imperfections.

The day got worse from there. Classes were long and stressful. A test was most likely failed. Work was tense, with many patrons getting upset. On her break, Claire received a phone call telling her that her grandmother was very ill. Her work seemed heavier after that.

The bad things of the day stacked up, higher and higher. Tossing the good things out of balance. Claire began to let the weight of that hit her when her shift ended. It was the kind of day that you felt in your heart, and your soul. The kind of day that made walking hard, and your posture slump downwards. A heavy day.

But Claire refused to let it stop her. Not until she was home, safe behind a locked door. And when that deadbolt slid home with a click, the weight crushed her. She leaned her head against the inside of the door, placing her hands on either side, to make some effort to stay upright. After a few moments of quiet, she slipped out of her shoes, placed her bags on the ground, and began inching towards the couch, which she deemed more acceptable to lay on than the floor. The small clunk of her possessions reaching the ground drew Claire's boyfriend from their bedroom.

"Claire?" He called, as if it could've been someone else.

### ***Perfection***

“Yeah.” Claire responded, forcing her voice to take on a happier note. She stopped her progress towards the couch as Justin appeared in the doorway. Claire was still facing away from him, but she could feel his tension from across the room.

“Can we talk?” He asked. Tentative. Apprehensive. She knew what he was about to say. Of course she did. It had been something that they had both ignored for months. Putting it off, and off, and off. To a day that would never come. Until it had. Because this too, was perfect. There was a long pause.

“No.” She said it quietly, but in the silence of the room it seemed to sit, almost tangible. Another too long pause.

“No?” Justin asked. It was near confusion, but it also held understanding. “No.” Claire repeated it. Louder in the muffling silence. “No. Not tonight. No.”

“Claire, we have to talk, you can’t just-” He began, but was cut off by her weak pleads.

“Please, Justin.” She finally turned to face him. There were the streaks of silent tears down her face. Tears she was doing her best to hold in.

“Why?” He asked. Quieter this time. Concerned.

“Because I know what you’re going to say. You want to break up. You’re in love with the redhead that lives across the park from us. I saw it. We always saw it. But not tonight.” She pauses, takes a shaky breath that doesn’t hide the anguish. He doesn’t say anything. “It has been a bad day. A very bad day. So much has happened. So much-” Her voice breaks. She puts her hands across her face, covering up the tears that she had been so desperately hanging onto.



### *Perfection*

“Claire...”

“Tomorrow.” She moves her hands enough that her voice is clear. “Tomorrow, we can talk. We can yell and scream if you want. We can do all the things we’re supposed to. I’ll even help you pack up your stuff! Just please, not tonight.” She moves her hands away from her face completely, and looks at him. The weight is crushing her. It hurts to breathe. She gasps out what she can before the tsunami of tears crashes down. “Not tonight. Please, just... give me tonight.”

“Okay.” Justin whispers into the room, as he watches the woman in front of him shatter. She clutches her arms around her middle as if it will somehow hold her together. He knows it won’t be enough. He knows her. So he steps forward and wraps his arms around her too. Holds her tight, as if he would never let go, even if they both know better.

The morning wasn’t heavy. It was stiff. Hard to move not because you were being crushed, but because you had survived too much.

Claire kept her word. They talked. She helped Justin pack everything and listened as he rambled about the girl he was in love with. The one that wasn’t her. She put on such a brave face that he couldn’t see the pain.

And pain it was. Like a wound, growing, slashing outwards. Her stomach, her back, her arms. They felt like they were on fire, lit by the joyful words dripping from his mouth. She let the invisible blood stain the floor and paint everything she touched red.

### ***Perfection***

When he said goodbye, she smiled and waved. Painted happy lips onto her face with her own blood, until he was no longer in sight.

For the second day in the row, she slid the deadbolt home and let the day abuse her. She let the weight of the world fall on her shoulders. She let the last of yesterday's heaviness sink into her feet, holding her to the floor like cement. She let today's pain seep into the rest of her. And she finally let herself cry. Not the holding back cry from yesterday, where she was trying to hold herself together. No, this was the cry of someone long gone. Of someone who had bled out so long ago it was hard to remember, and yet they kept moving, even as the blood pooled. This was the cry of someone strong.

Claire let it all crush her. Let it flatten her to the floor just inside her door. Let it pool around her in a great, red, invisible, lake.

She let it.