

The boy: Let me go

BY EMMA REDDEN

Leland and Gray Union High School, Grade 10

*Your eyes are deep pools of love.
They sparkle when you smile,
They ignite when you laugh.*

My eyes tell you secrets I am not yet ready
To divulge.

They smile before anything else.

*The sound of your laughter
is music my ears don't hear often
The aura of light surrounding your body
Illuminates when your lungs fill with giggles.*

Laughing is a gift every person

In this world deserves.

Laughing is a gift you

Deserve.

*When you smile
Two crescent shaped moons
Are born on either side of your
mouth.
Your hair is like a
Robe covering your head.*

It is

My Mother's hair,

My Nana's hair.

*Your skin is like mine,
Darkened from the
Dye of the sun.
Your skin is as beautiful
As a clear summer
River.*

Exploring the intriguing

Wilderness,

Backyard ball,

Has colored my skin.

Presumably reasons

Separate from yours.

*Occasionally
Your eyes behold breathtaking sadness.
Just for a second,
Just for a look
Just for an invisible tear.
I look at you and wonder
What could possibly go wrong
In your flawless life?*

The definition of a flawless

Life

Lies with each onlooker

Each bystander

Each witness.

Why do your eyes cry for help?

I am a witness to the world

And sometimes I find myself

Being able to do nothing.

Once in a while

I let the weight of our world

Rest on my shoulders.

*I am the
Weight of this world...
I am the suffering,
I am the pain
I am the sadness
You can't help but
Carry around with you.*

Why can I live a life

You perceive as flawless,

And you can't live a flawless day?

*There are things that we can all do
For ourselves...
There are things we can all do
For others.
The lifetimes that separate you and I
Can vanish right now.
Give yourself a gift.
Let me go...*

Week 14: The Boy



Lewis Wickes Hine took this photo of a young cotton mill worker named Jo Bodeon at Chace Mill in Burlington in 1909. Students were asked to write a story or narrative poem inspired by this photo. Hine's photos of children at work in mills, mines, factories and farms helped prompt a public outcry and led to reform of child labor laws.



YWP is a grassroots nonprofit that helps students write better and gain an audience for their best work. YWP offers writing ideas, special projects and a safe, interactive Web site, youngwritersproject.org, where students can share their writing, comment on each other's work, participate in group discussions and work on projects.



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Vermont Business Roundtable which is funding the YWP's core work for the second year. To support the work of this project, go to the Web site and click "support."

Jo Bodeon

BY PAIGE STOLEN

Ferrisburgh Central School, Grade 5

Works long but paid low

Obedient

Smells the stink of the mill,

Poorly lit and dirty

The boom of the machines pounds in his ears

He sees the workers running this way and that

No education

He is exhausted Jo Bodeon.

The rag doll

BY CAITLIN BERNARD WOODSTOCK UNION HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 10

It's dawn, and I'm up with the light as always. Usually, I just slide out of bed and wander the gardens in this early hour, to gather my thoughts, but today I feel especially mischievous. The sun is rising quickly, so I must get dressed as fast as I can and be on my way; I cannot let Mother know my secret. Today I have decided that wandering the early morning streets of Burlington sounds much more exciting than taking a stroll in my family's gardens. I hurry and dress very nicely, for Mother says to never enter public without looking your very best. I scramble downstairs and leave, closing the door as silently as possible behind me.

The morning is crisp and beautiful. Vendors have their carts set out already and are preparing to sell their goods. I set off down the streets, thinking how perfect of a day to be skipping through the calmness of this ripe morning. The sun is rising higher, and I know I should turn in the direction of home, and that's when I spot a boy sleeping beside the mill. His clothes are torn and his face is black with soot. His hair is also blackened with the stain of the earth, and I can barely make out that it's supposed to be blond. He sleeps like a crooked man, with a distant expression on his face. Almost unconsciously I reach out to touch him, to see if he's even real. His eyes jut open and become alert. I step back, afraid and cursing myself for my foolishness. The boy relaxes, realizing I am only a small girl. He stands, and when he does it seems to be with a struggle. "Are you broken?" I ask covering my mouth almost immediately. His dreary eyes search for an answer in my face. "Yes," he manages to say with a cold smirk, "but only in my soul." After a few seconds he picks up on my confusion. "What's a proper lady like you doin' wanderin' the streets so early in the mornin'?"

"Nothing. What's a boy like you doing sleeping beside the mill?" His eyes turn away from me, and he sighs.

"This is where I sleep ever' night, ma'am."

"Why?"

"Well, this is my only home I'd have ta say."

"You don't have a family?"

"No, can't say I do." I realize that I've said the wrong thing as his whole body turns away from me.

"I'm truly sorry," I blurt out, "Why don't you come back to my house with me? We can fix you up some food, and maybe put you into some clean clothes." This makes him chuckle and he turns back to me.

"That's a very nice offer, ma'am, but I think I'm gonna have to stay here." He's smiling but his eyes still seem lost. Suddenly, I spot him stroking a little rag doll in his hands.

"What's that?"

"Oh, this thing?" He's cradling it now, "Ah, this was my baby sister's. She played with it almost ever' day. I made it for her, ya know." He looks at me with a shattered expression, and I know why he's lost and alone. "Little Mary was taken from me two years ago; all that was left was her doll."

"You know," I say, "my name is Mary, too."

"Ah, now is it?" His eyes are still fixed on the doll, "I would say you might even look a bit like her."

"I like you," I say again without thinking. He smiles, but this time it's with his eyes.

"Why, thank you. You seem pretty swell yourself." He finally turns his attention from the doll to me, "Will you come visit me tomorrow mornin'? I'm always in need of good company." My whole being lights up with the thought of it.

"Yes, that would be wonderful!" I turn to run home, but I quickly spin around. "What's your name?!" I yell across the street.

"Jo!" he yells back, "My name is Jo!"

"Don't forget! Tomorrow morning I will be here!"

"Ah, Miss Mary, you won't be needin' to worry about me forgettin'!"

The next morning I wake before the sun and scurry out to meet Jo by the mill. However, instead of Jo sitting by the wall, I see a man, and he sits alone. "Where's Jo?" I ask the half asleep ragged man.

"Jo left in the night, miss." His sleepy eyes turn up to look at me. "Whatcha be needin' with my answers?" I felt like screaming.

"Oh, no. Jo told me to be here today — he said he wouldn't forget!"

"Ah, well, miss I think you best be headin' home." He sinks back down to sleep again. "Jo ain't comin' back."

"Where'd he go?"

"Where folks like me go; I guess no one really knows. People like Jo and me, we need to move from place to place, ya know. I guess the poor boy thought it was time to be gettin' up and movin' again. A soul like his couldn't stay in one place for too long, his heart would break too much." I want to say something but I can't, so I turn to go back home. "Wait!" the man yells, "I almost near forgot. Would your name happen to be Mary, miss?"

"Yes, sir."

"Little Jo left this to me to pass on to you." The man holds out a small rag doll. I pick the doll up out of his hands and examine it. Its clothes have been torn and its face distorted, just like Jo's doll. I look up to see the man grinning, "Well, Miss Mary, I would say that old boy Jo didn't forget after all."

The magic man

BY HANNA KINGSTON

Mount Mansfield Union High School

Dear Addie,

The last button on my shirt fell off today when I was playing with Baby Sarah. Mama pinned it together seeing as I had to be going just then, and I left the house to her scolding me for crawling around on the ground with the baby. She said no man crawls on the ground and it's a sin to be getting my trousers all dirty and torn when she's the one who'll have to be patching them up again. I figure, just 'cause I have to go off to work every morning and James and Taylor are still in school, it don't mean I have to be a man all the time like Pa.

As you read this are you wondering what happened to your sweet brother? Well, I'm not complaining really, but I met a man today who put some ideas in my head, and I know it's best not to tell them to Pa cause he ain't as open-minded as you, seeing how he's been around the old ideas a good deal longer. This man I met, I knew he was magic cause he carried this big black contraption and he set it up in the mill, against Mr. Jeffers's protests, and all the time we worked his funny machine kept flashing and lighting up the room. He called it taking pictures. Kevin Ryan, who's barely 8 years old and only been here a week, dropped the spool twice and got the wool tangled till it was ruined 'cause the flashing scared him real good. We all feared Mr. Jeffers would throw him out even though his mother's awful sick and his dad's fighting in the war but magic man just picked up the spool, and then he took a picture of little Kevin and that seemed to scare Mr. Jeffers something awful.

Mr. Jeffers let us out early for once and I planned to run home and tell Ma but the magic man grabbed all of us kids as we left the building and he made us stand real still while he flashed the machine at us.

The man told us his name was Lewis Wickes Hine and his machine was called a camera. He said he was gonna make it so kids couldn't work in the mills, and when Maryanne asked how we were supposed to get the money for our families he started talking about children and school and better jobs and minimum wage and all sorts of amazing ideas. For a second I wondered if this man was an angel and Mr. Jeffers, a devil, but that was a terrible thing to think and I promised never again to have such an idea. Still, Addie, think how Mrs. Pawn cried when you left school for the work houses, and she said both of us had the brains to be politicians. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the magic photos made us more powerful even than Mr. Jeffers? We could travel all over the world. Mr. Hine told me I ought to be a kid sometimes, and I think we should both try it.

Your enlightened and loving brother,

Jo Bodeon

Working at the mill

BY ISABELLE SHARP

Shelburne Community School, Grade 5

Click, clank the wheel turns as the day goes on, From 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. we work our backs off. We only get a break from 12 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Then click, clack back to the mill we go. Doing the same work each day is not that fun at all. Ever gone to work when you're 6 years old? Well Ma and Pa would make you. The mill never ever allowed kids 14 years old and younger, but Ma and Pa would try to sneak you in. The mill wouldn't mind if you were younger than you said you were, it's just that you got hidden. The mill inspector wouldn't want to see us so he would stop in, smoke his pipe and wait to let us hide from him until he left the building. That's the story of how to work a mill.

Jo Bodeon's old, tattered shirt

BY TYLER W. PROULX,

Ferrisburgh Central School, Grade 5

A young boy about 10 years old, dressed so light, I wonder if he's cold. Working hard day and night, in the cotton mill is where he burns daylight. There he stood in an old, tattered shirt, I wonder if he ever got hurt, in the cotton mill in that old, tattered shirt. That is where he would work. In the mule room of the cotton mill, will his dreams ever be fulfilled? Maybe make some money to buy a new shirt, instead of the one he's wearing, that old, tattered shirt. Make a few pennies every day, that would be his only pay. Maybe he got hurt that could be the reason it's an old, tattered shirt.

Proud boy

BY SAMANTHA BURNS

Fairfield Center School, Grade 8

He wakes up each morning with a heart swelled with pride For today he shall work to keep his family alive He is a band boy Who works for so little Barely enough to put food on the table. The mill is a horrid place to work With diseases that hide in every cranny and crook But the boy keeps that single thought in his mind That tonight with chicken and rice, his family will dine.

The clicking noise

BY BAXTER BARBER

Shelburne Community School, Grade 5

Late at night
The machines are running
The clicking noise
Lingers in the ears
Fills the mind
Consumes the soul
The clicking noise stops
The night shift is over
The day shift starts
More clicking begins
It never stops
It never ends
It always lingers in the room
The clicking of the machines
To the clicking of the shoes
It will continue
On and on and on
It never stops
It never ends

Strong enough

BY NINA MCCAARTHY

Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

Dust on my face
And frostbite on my nose,
Covering my back are my ripped, tattered clothes.
This is where I live,
This is my home,
Every day I work to the bone.
To raise money for the farm,
For my baby sister in my mother's arms,
The money I earn saves them from harm.
I gave up my life,
I gave up my friends,
I'm gonna keep working until the very end.
I see the bones through my skin
And the dangerous machines spin,
The morning is colder than it's ever been.
I am strong enough for this
I will keep trying,
Hiding the tears I have been crying.

Good old days

BY MICHELLE BALLOU

Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

Poor Jo Bodeon
Photo: reminder of past
Sadness, pain, hurt.

The mill

BY HANNAH-MOLLIE WEST

Rochester High School, Grade 9

Today's a new day,
But it feels like the others.
I get up to go to the mill.
The second youngest of seven.
Parents, brothers and sisters all toil with the machines.
Working on the machine my mind wonders
What is it like in other parts of the world?
Do the children work?
Do they stand there wondering about me?
Or are their lives ruled by noisy dangerous looms?
I hope tomorrow brings a new day.
A world without whistles,
A life without rules;
But as dawn approaches,
My world is the same.
An unchanged future.

My story

BY SARAH FELTEN

Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

My name is Jo Bodeon. I am a "back-roper" in the mule room at the Chace Cotton Mill in Burlington. I have forgotten what age I am. But people say I am not old enough to work, but that I do. Every morning at 5 o'clock I am summoned into the mule room. I stay there until 6 o'clock in the afternoon, and often later. I get paid 40 cents a day. They say I am one of 20 child workers. But that don't mean anything to me. If I talk during work hours, I get five cents taken away for each time. Before I got here, I was a trouble maker at my school, Or at least that's what they told my ma and my pa. I got into a lot of fights, and I didn't do too well in school. My pa kept threatening me by telling me I would go to "work," just like him. And then I would know what it felt like. I never thought he would actually go through with it. Until one day at school I threw something at my teacher, and once again was called into the principal's office with my parents. My pa said it was the last straw. Ma tried to convince pa not to send me to "work." But he said he had enough of my childish behavior and I should start to grow up. I never really realized what he meant when he said "work" but I sure do wish I had.