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ASSOCIATION**

**ARIZONA LITERARY  
MAGAZINE  
2013**

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**2013**  
**Arizona**  
**Literary Magazine**

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# Arizona Literary Magazine

*Proudly Presents the*

# *Winners*

of the

**Arizona Authors Association**

# **2012**

# **Annual Literary Awards**

**TOBY HEATHCOTTE**



An active member of AZ Authors since 1994, Toby Heathcotte ran the contest for seven years and now serves as president. She coordinates projects and activities that support and serve the membership and the writing community statewide. Her fiction titles include *The Alma Chronicles: Alison’s Legacy, Lainn’s Destiny,*

*Angie’s Promise, Luke’s Covenant, and The Comet’s Return.* Nonfiction titles now in print are “The Manuscript from the Mystifying Source” in *How I Wrote My First Boo;*, *Out of the Psychic Closet: The Quest to Trust my True Nature;* *Program Building: A Practical Guide for High School Speech & Drama Teachers.* Her books have won EPIC, Global eBook, and San Diego book awards. Read her blog at [www.tobyheathcotte.com](http://www.tobyheathcotte.com)

**ELIZABETH BLAKE**



Elizabeth Blake has written a memoir about her experiences teaching inner-city students entitled *No Child Left Behind? The true story of a teacher’s quest.* She also edited a Kindle book of forty-two true short stories called *How I Met My Spouse.* Many of her short stories about her family have been published in various magazines. Her first fiction e-

novel, written under the name Beth Blake, is published by Keith Publications and is called *Shelter of Love.* She lives in Peoria, AZ with her husband.

**SCOTT JONES**



By day, SCOTT JONES is an Investment Representative for Edward Jones and has his own office in Sedona. Scott writes children’s books. Author of *Lilly, the Adventure Begins,* he is currently working on the second book of the series. Vice President of the Arizona Authors Association, he loves to write for children, as they are honest and ready to explore new worlds and ideas.

More at [www.lillysbooks.com](http://www.lillysbooks.com).

**ARIZONA AUTHORS**

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## AND THE WINNERS ARE...

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**DREW AQUILINA** is an award-winning cartoonist and author. Drew created the cartoon strip *Green Pieces*®. Aquilina produces a daily *Green Pieces*. His award-winning cartoon compilations are *Green Pieces: Green From the Pond Up, Meet the Pond Friends, One Piece At a Time, and Green Pieces: Still Under Construction*. He lives in Paradise Valley with his wife, Lisa.



Arizona native author **LISA AQUILINA, J.D.** is the co-owner of Green Pieces Cartoon Studio Press in Arizona. Her first novel is *La Nonna Bella*. Green Pieces is a member of the Arizona Authors Association, Independent Book Publishers Association, PubWest and Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators. [www.GreenPiecesBooks.com](http://www.GreenPiecesBooks.com).



**RUSSELL AZBILL** is a native Arizonan who has spent his entire life living in the southwestern desert of the United States. He is deeply interested in history, particularly that of the American Southwest, motorsports, aviation, and space exploration. Russell also has a keen interest in classic movies and vintage television. Russell's second novel is scheduled to be released in 2013.



**MARLENE BAIRD**, the winner of the AZ Authors unpublished novel category in 2003 for *Minnie and the Manatees*, has four published books, and many of her short stories have won awards. She took third place in 2008 in the international Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition. She has two active blogs: [bookreviewsbybaird.blogspot.com](http://bookreviewsbybaird.blogspot.com) and [thewritelady.blogspot.com](http://thewritelady.blogspot.com). Her website is [www.marlenebaird.com](http://www.marlenebaird.com)

## OUR JUDGES



**KEBLA BUCKLEY BUTTON** is a corporate stress management trainer, a holistic healer, and an ordained minister. The award-winning author of books on how to lose your stress and find your energy, she has recently begun writing books about finding true inner peace. The Second Edition of *Peace Within* has just been released.



**ELLEN HASENECZ CALVERT**, a psychologist and prize winning poet, wrote her first book, *Pilgrim: Tales of a Traveling Cat*, from inside the head of the family's cat. Her second book, *Nine Goldfish in David's Pond* is the story of a young boy and the nine goldfish who invite him into their world. Ellen is working on a book of short stories. She can be reached at [ellencalvert@earthlink.net](mailto:ellencalvert@earthlink.net)



**EMILY PRITCHARD CARY** is a specialist in Gifted/Talented education and a Virginia state finalist for the 1985 NASA Teacher in Space project. She is the author of seven romantic mysteries, two histories, and hundreds of articles on music, education, travel, genealogy, and parapsychology in newspapers and magazines worldwide. Several are in anthologies. She is an honors graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. Her advanced studies encompass education, archaeology, public communications, and environmental science.



**DEE DEES** is the author of *Write Your Life Story in 28 Days*. As a Personal Historian, Dee has taught classes and presented workshops on memoir writing for nearly 15 years. She also does ghostwriting and editing of life stories for clients. Dee is also the author of *Raise Confident and Responsible Kids - 111 Common-sense Tips*, which will

be published in early 2013



Award-winning author and historian **JAN CLEERE** writes extensively about the people who first settled in the desert southwest. Her historical nonfiction books reflect her love of the west and her knowledge of western history. She is a magna cum laude graduate of ASU West with a degree in American Studies. Her freelance work appears in national and regional publications. She speaks throughout the state about the montage of individuals she has depicted in her work.



**KATHLEEN COOK** spent her youth in Chicago's inner city. She sent her first poem to Reader's Digest at age seven and later earned recognition on Joel Sebastian's WCFL radio program. After settling in Phoenix, Katy studied English at Rio Salado College, raised four children and wrote plays for local schools. She served as an editor for the Open Directory Project and wrote articles for Demand Studios and eHow magazine. Katy currently writes novels, including an Elf series and an autobiography. You may find sixteen of her books published on Amazon.

**DIANA FISHER** made a name for herself in Phoenix as an advertising



illustrator in the eighties. Her career shifted into the how-to-draw genre, illustrating and authoring many award-winning books for children and adults. She then moved into other literary genres including women's fiction. Diana is also in the R&D phase of a new business producing whole-brain educational e-books and lessons.



**ELIZABETH DAVIS** is a children's book author. Her book *Salty Kisses and Fire Engine Sunsets* won first place in Children's Fiction in the 2010 Writer's Digest contest. During the school year, she is a middle school reading teacher. Her lesson for teachers, *Degrees of Synonyms*, was published in the Mailbox July/August 2008. Her passions are: family, writing, traveling, music and reading.

New York native and Arizona author, **ANN GOLDFARB**, has spent most of her life in education. She writes mystery-suspense time-travel for young adults. Her first novel, *The Face Out of Time*,



received an award from the Arizona Authors Association in 2011. She is currently working on her fifth mystery. She welcomes visitors to her website at [timetravelmysteries.com](http://timetravelmysteries.com) and her Facebook Fan Page at "Time Travel Mysteries."



**BARBARA HAHN (aka BARCLAY FRANKLIN)** is a retired medical technologist. Franklin has been writing since 1985 and is the author of five published novels: *A Race for Glory Run*; *The Bride Price*; *The Chording of T. O. Malone*; *Up the Hill, Through the Long Grass*; and *The Shepherd's Moon*.



**GAIL KENNEDY** is a native New Yorker who arrived in Sedona, AZ in 1995. When she moved to Sedona in 1995 Gail volunteered at both the local hospital and the Sedona Fire District. Later she was offered a job and at the SFD and worked there for 12 years. Gail has been a vocalist on both coasts and in a number of Jazz clubs and Cabarets in New York, San Francisco, Mexico, Spain, and in many clubs in Northern Arizona.



**DANETTE ELLENWOOD HUNNEL** is the author of 2 books: *Shorten the Distance* and *Litty Lightning Bug* She is a contributing columnist for *Natural Healing Magazine* and a blogger for *The Homeopathic Company*  
[www.thehomeopathiccompany.com](http://www.thehomeopathiccompany.com)



**KAREN KIBLER** earned her Bachelor's Degree from the University of Iowa in 1977, and soon after relocated to Arizona. She received a Ph.D. in 1997 from Arizona State University where she is now an Assistant Research Professor. Writing was always a passion of hers. Until the completion of *The Second Chasm*, her audience was restricted to family and college class professors. She also does freelance editing or proofreading assignments.



**GARY HUNNEL** is the Regional Vice President of International Channels & Sales for Pearson School Systems. His 30 years experience includes Sales, Executive Speechwriting, Training Presentations and Motivational Speaking. Gary is an avid reader of many genres.



**MARILYN JUNE JANSON, M.S., Ed.**, is the owner of **Janson Literary Services, Inc.**, an editing, proofreading, and manuscript analyses company. She teaches creative writing and publishing classes at Mesa Community College and other educational venues in the East Valley. Ms. Janson is the author of Recipe For Rage, a suspense novel, and Tommy Jenkins: First Teleported Kid, a children's chapter book. Her new book, The Super Cool Kids Story Collection, is

scheduled for release in 2013. Contact Ms. Janson @ [www.janwrite.com](http://www.janwrite.com).



After taking a volunteer layoff in 2002, **CHERIE LEE** began writing stories for children and adults. She lets curiosity guide her by playing the *What If* game. She is published through Allison Books, LLC for *The Stubborn Fairy*, a children's picture. Her current unpublished project is a middle grade novel titled *The Lip Stealer, An Adventure in Magic Land*.



**KELLY NELSON** lives and writes in Tempe. She teaches Interdisciplinary Studies at Arizona State University, volunteers as a gallery docent at the Tempe Center for the Arts and is a member of her city's Municipal Arts Commission. Her poetry has appeared most recently in *Paddlefish*, *Dash* and *Ozone Park* and is forthcoming in an anthology of cancer poems due out next year. Her poem "Rivers I Don't Live By" won the 2010 Arizona Authors poetry contest. She also served as a judge this year for the Poetry Out Loud state finals.

[www.kelly-nelson.com](http://www.kelly-nelson.com)



**KATHY STEVENS** is an environmental scientist who specializes in safe drinking water. She was raised in Sacramento, California, graduated from Sierra Nevada College with a BS degree in Environmental Science and moved to Arizona in 1980. In 1989, she got her Masters degree in Public Administration from ASU. She lives with her husband in Tempe. Kathy plans to write fun, publishable, and educational works.



**CHANTELLE AIMEE OSMAN** is the author of numerous flash fiction and short stories published in literary journals, e-zines and anthologies. In 2011 she was an Anthony Award winner for *SuspenseSirens*, a blog on all things mystery. She has worked in Hollywood, and now owns the screenplay consulting company [www.twistofkarma.com](http://www.twistofkarma.com). She is an attorney who moonlights as a book designer and a reviewer for The Poisoned Pen bookstore.



**GRETA MANVILLE**, COPY EDITOR FOR ARIZONA LITERARY MAGAZINE 2013, writes mystery and suspense novels. Her bibliographic research on John Steinbeck is available free online. She edited *Transitions* and has served as contest coordinator and treasurer of Arizona Authors Association in the past.



**JANE FRANCES RUBY** earned her masters degree in Chemistry from John Carroll University (Ohio). She was a research chemist at the Lubrizol Corporation, where she authored publications relating to colloidal and surface science. Her first novel, *The Azurite Encounter* was published in 2010. She is currently

working on the sequel *Voices Whispers: A New Shaman's Calling*. She is married and has two daughters.

"If my doctor told me I had only six minutes to live, I wouldn't brood. I'd type a little faster."

~Isaac Asimov



# 1ST PLACE ESSAYS



**MARLENE BAIRD**, the winner of the AZ Authors unpublished novel category in 2003 for *Minnie and the Manatees*, has four published books, and many of her short stories have won awards. She took third place in 2008 in the international Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition. Marlene is active in Professional Writers of Prescott, having served on the board for two years and co-chairing their annual writing contest for three years. She has two active blogs: [bookreviewsbybaird.blogspot.com](http://bookreviewsbybaird.blogspot.com) [thewritelady.blogspot.com](http://thewritelady.blogspot.com) Her website is [www.marlenebaird.com](http://www.marlenebaird.com)

## WHO IS THAT LAUGHING?

By  
Marlene Baird

When we were dating and during the early years of our marriage, my husband and I went out to dinners often, and we always enjoyed a cocktail or two. If we had friends over to our apartment it seemed expected that there would be alcohol on hand. I don't recall anyone ever refusing a drink. Because Brad (pseudonym) was in the advertising business, he entertained clients, and we were invited to many special occasions. We lived in Honolulu and often met celebrities. Life was a lot of fun. I didn't realize how much of that fun was due to our constant drinking.

We had two children by the time I first suspected that alcohol might have a grip on Brad. One day, I repeated part of a three-way conversation we'd taken part in during the previous evening. Brad had no recollection. Even though he had actively participated in a lengthy discussion, he had a total blackout of any such conversation. That worried me but since alcohol never made Brad falling-down drunk or gave him a hangover, I was slow to realize the depth of his problem. One Sunday morning after we'd moved to California, we had no orange juice in the house. Rather than give up his usual mimosa, Brad poured vodka into his coffee. That seemed like a desperate move to me, for what could possibly taste worse?

That day, I began to look back. We'd had many arguments that involved his drinking. Sometimes, when I relied on him to do something—such as the day I needed him to drive one of the children to the doctor—he was intoxicated. The only month of the year we ever went to a movie was January. Over the holidays he would drink so much that he'd swear off liquor for a month. The reason movies were out of bounds from February through December was that no liquor was served.

Looking even further back, Brad had been dead broke and in debt when I met him. Yet, since the arrival of our first two children, he had been a fairly good provider. He changed jobs often—we moved our residence thirteen times in six years. Twice to Honolulu and back to the mainland, and for a few years we lived in Canada. It seemed that, with his engaging personality, he was always being offered a more interesting position. When I began to suspect that he had a drinking problem I saw this job switching not as an opportunity for him to do better but a chance for him to escape responsibility. On more than one occasion it seemed that, rather than take a promotion in his current position, he would move to the next. Another possibility I considered was that his lunchtime drinking was becoming obvious to his bosses. At any business lunch cocktails were almost mandatory, and no doubt Brad was overindulging. Brad was a master story teller. He could always make someone laugh. Perhaps his peers gave him a lot of leeway in return for his companionship.

Alcoholism has one thing in common with cancer. You can have it for a very long time before it is discovered, but once it is recognized your life and the lives of those around you change forever.

His bar tabs caught up with us. He was missing work. He went away for weekends with “the boys” which were probably drinking binges, because quite suddenly we could not pay the bills or the mortgage. We had to file for bankruptcy. I knew that our lives were spiraling downward, but never considered leaving Brad. We now had three children, and I wanted them to grow up knowing their father. I talked to Brad several times about his drinking, but no matter how carefully I approached the subject it was me who was the problem. He told me I was an uptight, controlling wife who no longer knew how to have any fun.

I had heard of Al-Anon but could see no easy way to attend meetings with two children in school and a baby at home. I could not count on Brad to be home in the evenings, much less babysit while I attended a self-help group. But even those of us most mired in denial sometimes wake up. Often I had no transportation, but a couple of days a week I drove Brad to the BART station, and he would take the train from our bedroom community to San Francisco where he had opened his own advertising agency. I saw, in retrospect, that opening his own agency meant he had no boss to watch his activities. One day, when I had the car at my disposal, I found the courage to attend an Al-Anon meeting.

The first meeting I went to was held in the basement of a small church. The walls were cement gray and the aroma of freshly brewed coffee did not overcome the smell of disuse. With the baby on my knee, I looked around the room. A half dozen women returned my gaze, some with smiles of welcome. Some without. It wasn't personal. I could see myself in those unhappy faces. We repeated the mantra: my name is so-and-so, and I have an alcoholic in my family. Then one woman welcomed me as a newcomer to their group. She promised me one thing only—that repeated attendance at Al-Anon meetings would change my life. She didn't promise a better life, but only a changed one. At that time all I wanted was change.

The women at the meeting spoke in turn. They seemed to know each other well. There were lots of nods of understanding as one spoke of financial problems. And there were tears as another told of abuse.

The woman who spoke next told of embarrassment. The previous night her husband had driven home, drunk. When she opened the front door in the morning, she saw his car parked sideways in the driveway with the driver side door hanging open. Her husband had apparently groped his way toward the front door of the house but had fallen a few feet short. He was lying face down in her flower bed, his long legs stretched across the pathway. Her first instinct was to look up and down the street to see who might be witnessing this.

I wish I could remember the name of the next woman who spoke. She saved my life. She said, “You should have stuck pruning shears in his hand and told everyone he was gardening.”

The room erupted with laughter. The idea that any one of our husbands would have taken the time or effort to garden was ludicrous. There was a rush of shared understanding and release. Then I heard a laugh that sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it. As the noise died down I heard it coming from my own mouth. I probably had not laughed out loud in several years.

At Al-Anon, I learned to deal with my husband's arguments which erupted if I criticized him in any way. Al-Anon taught me to not listen. Pretend he is a small child. Do you listen to a small child if it is having a tantrum? Does that small child have control over you? I stopped reacting to Brad. Since he was getting no feedback from me, there was no sport in it. Since I no longer argued with him, he could not blame his drinking on the fact that he was married to a shrew. He became bored. He came home even later in the evenings. Then he found a girlfriend. Then I filed for divorce. I did it myself. It cost me \$65 and one court appearance. I was granted custody of the children and child support. As for the support, in all of the following years I received two \$100 checks from Brad, and both of them bounced. I was in touch with the District Attorney's office, asking them for help. But Brad knew what he was doing. He moved every six months, and they never caught up to him.

The next step was feeding the children. On a day of desperation, I put the three of them in the back seat of the Plymouth station wagon and headed for the social services office to apply for food stamps. One of the children had a bad head cold, and one was feeling even worse. Another thing that alcoholism does is separate you from neighbors, and making friends is difficult. There was no one I could leave the children with. For example, one of the neighborhood teenagers babysat for us occasionally. Then one night we were at a club miles from San Francisco. Brad was having a wonderful time and refused to leave until after 2 a.m. By the time we got home it was 4 a.m., and that was the last time that girl's mother allowed her to babysit for us.

When I arrived at the social services office the waiting room was crowded. The receptionist asked me to sit down and fill out a form on a clipboard. I managed my name, the names of my children, our address and phone number. Then the full degradation of our lives hit me. For years I had tried to hold together a marriage for the sake of the children, and it had all come to this. I couldn't face an interview. I got out of the chair and left the office.

But there are angels in this world. Later that day the receptionist phoned me. "We can do this over the phone if you prefer." Within two days I had enough food stamps to feed us better than we'd eaten in a long while.

I couldn't make up the missed house payments, so I sold it. The net proceeds were \$1,600, and I sent Brad a check for \$800. I'm still kicking myself for that.

The children and I moved into an apartment building which was advertising one month's free rent. I was then able to sell my refrigerator, washing machine and dryer, which brought in some cash. Next, I had to find a job. I had excellent secretarial skills, so that was not difficult. However, finding child care for three children was. After a couple of false starts, I came across a wonderful woman in the neighborhood. She kept the two-year-old all day and the two older children before and after school. Of course, the food stamps stopped when I began to work, so much of the time the four of us lived on cereal, fruit, peanut butter sandwiches for the kids' lunches, and Kraft Macaroni and Cheese. In those days, the little blue boxes were priced at three for a dollar. A couple of times a week I added cooked ground beef to the pasta. My greatest fear was becoming ill and not being able to work or care for the children.

I expect we could have survived for quite a long time in those circumstances and perhaps come out of it none the worse for wear. However, I was to have luck once again. After two-and-a-half years on my own, I met and married my current husband. The first gift he bought me was four new tires for the station wagon. When he asked me to look at the old tires I was shocked. Part of my drive home at the end of my work day was down a steep and winding hill, often in the rain—and I had been driving on four balloons. I swear an angel was on my shoulder those years.

My children are now grown. They are genuine and generous. I am proud of the life my current husband and I have managed to give them, but it all began with Al-Anon. The lessons I learned at those meetings changed my thoughts and my actions and, therefore, my future. Those women shared their strength and their courage, their ugly experiences and their small victories. If by any chance you are one of them, thank you. I can still hear your laughter—and mine.

*End*

## 2nd PLAC E



**JOAN RATTAY** first essay received an Honorable Mention in the 2011 Writer's Digest essay competition, placing thirty-second in well over one-thousand entries in the personal essay/memoir category. "Who's Directing This Mess?" is her second essay. Since retiring from teaching in Phoenix, she is studying writing and is presently working on a short story.

## Essays



The movies lied. I grew up with lies that won Oscars. In those movies, life progressed with a predictable plot until the characters were struck with heartbreaking problems. But the characters' problems had logical solutions which satisfied us. And always, their suffering was accompanied by a full orchestra, playing tearjerker background music. It made us enjoy life's agonies. In the end everyone lived happily ever after, except the hated character who always got what he deserved. Those writers lied. The truth is most lives are confused messes from start to finish and no one gets what's deserved. For example, my best friend, who'd give a needy stranger her last dollar, was going to be a great actress. Now with five kids her only lines are prayers and quotations from the Bible. And me, everyone said I had the best dance moves on the floor so why am I dancing by myself? Some movie must have explained real life but I missed it.

Discouraged, I committed myself to a makeover. It was that time of year, spring, when optimism overtakes reason. By luck (or bad karma), I found an article about a hiking club and an upcoming hike in rugged, challenging unspoiled wilderness:

Shaded trails, rust colored cliffs. . .

wildlife. . . spiny vegetation. . . wade creek. . .

steep climbs. . . outstanding views from the summit. Warning: possible high water in creek.

Maybe too challenging, I thought. But so what? It sounded like a thriller movie, and I hung on to the belief that every story ended with at least a crumb of hope. Besides, the challenges would aid my makeover.

On the designated date, I rechecked my backpack. Lipstick, eyebrow pencil, hair spray, cheek blush, hand cream, one sandwich, a low-calorie candy bar, and two pints of water. And for safety, my dog-whistle. Then I pulled out of the driveway in early morning darkness. Soon I was on strange streets. Car speed dropped to that of a dying snail so I could decipher shrunken street names requiring 20-20 night vision. Ahead a red glow slowly spread over the mountain top as the sun began to rise. Its rays, like lasers, targeted my eyes, which narrowed into slits, reducing my vision. Mental torture. Without full vision, was I following directions? Missing a turnoff? Maybe I took the turnoff to the West Coast. Finally, the highway turned into two lanes and then a bumpy dirt road that ended in a grove of maple trees. I saw some hikers get out of their cars, and I gave thanks to a higher power.

Dave, our leader, told us to form a circle, a symbol of unity and brotherhood. Introductions began. Mary hiked in New Zealand; Carol and Bill in the Superstition Mountains; Dave, on Catalina Island; and four others in Europe. I introduced myself, Sally, gave my nickname, Sunshine, and mumbled two well-known mountains, which I've never been on.

Dave led us to the trailhead. Anxious to start, they were hopping on one foot then the other, like horses at the starting gate. Pros, anyone could tell.

"I hope everyone brought water shoes," Dave yelled as we headed out. Water shoes? An interesting concept but of no concern to me. I was wearing new, top quality boots, fit for crossing streams, rocks, and mountains, and a jacket to die for. It was made of imported fabric with hidden inside pockets to hold a mirror, mascara, and comb.

The trail had been cleared of rocks and was level. Emerald shrubs and wild flowers in red, yellow, white, and blue spread out in the gravel, a delight until Dave pointed out animal scat which indicated bobcats or wolves in the area.

The trail became rocky as we descended into a barren canyon, deep and drab and looked like a land long ago abandoned by nature. It was the setting for a haunted house in the movies, when the victims entered the house and the music changed to screeches and drums. On each side of the canyon were one-hundred-foot high cliffs.

Scattered along the top were gray shrubs struggling to grow in boulder crevices and crooked, scrawny trees perched on rocks. Lying on the floor of the canyon were three-to-five-foot high boulders. No level ground, no gravel. The boulders, as far as the eye could see, were the trail. Their creation was worthy of Macbeth's witches, pouring their evil brew onto the canyon floor to harden into hell's carpet. No turning back.

The most able men leaped ahead. They appeared to be metamorphosed into mountain goats, having developed the animal's agility and balance. We humans, like babies taking our first steps, wobbled and fell. Success had two preconditions: strong ankles and properly fitted boots. I had neither. My boots were decapitating my toes. With every jump from boulder to boulder, they recoiled in pain, and I hardened to others' suffering. There lay Mary spread over a boulder like pancake batter. And Bill was holding up a bleeding finger. I was unmoved. In our circle of brotherhood, everyone was on his own.

Finally, the four-mile trek through hell was over and we were bushwhacking. My toes were on fire. I knew they were no longer attached, just flopping around in my boots. I hobbled on my heels but that was too slow. My God! They'll leave me here. Keep up or die. I stumbled into holes in thigh-high grass (snakes' haven), stumbled past cacti and flung my arms out for balance causing the penetration of cacti needles into my hands. My prized jacket was torn—my fingers, pincushions.

I caught up as the group was changing shoes. Silly, flashed through my mind, but my attention was drawn to a roar that sounded like eighty-mile per hour winds. A storm? But the sunlight was brilliant. I sat down to rest and quickly ate my sandwich. When I looked up all were gone except for a head bobbing in the distance. Trudging after the head and down a deep slope, the roar grew louder. It was water stampeding down from the mountain. In front of me, a frenzied river. Niagara Falls II. I'd cross it or find my way alone.

I took off my boots and socks and tied the shoelaces to my backpack. I stepped into ooze at the bank and then onto sharp rocks and into ice-cube water. Boulders were scattered across the rushing water's width. I took baby steps to the nearest boulder and felt the water pulling me away from the boulder. If I lost my grip on it, I'd fall and it'd be a fight to get up. Inch by inch, I moved from boulder to boulder, digging my fingers into tiny crevices and hugging each huge rock with my whole body. I couldn't see beneath the water's surface, and suddenly I sank as one foot stepped into a hole. One of my two water bottles fell into the water and was swept away. Now, each step was preceded by a probing foot feeling for a bottomless pit. I finally wrapped my body over a boulder, pulled myself up on it, and stepped onto land.

Dave walked into view. "Do you need help?"

I gasped, "Who's directing this thriller?"

“Huh?”

We regrouped. The trail was poor—it was probably last used by the Indians. Though the ascent had a moderate slope, the climb was taxing because small loose stones and pebbles destroyed traction. It was like roller-skating up a mountain until I picked up a dead branch to use for a brace. Just in time. By stooping for the branch, I missed the potentially lethal jabs from a man’s hiking poles, which he swung back and forth like a Prussian general. We climbed down into a fifteen-foot gully and out of it and then negotiated a second gully. The trail got worse. Shrubs with thorns and long, hard branches crossed the trail. Go under or around. Keep up with the rest. Breathe. I was unconsciously holding my breath. Must remember to breathe.

Now the climb was almost straight up. Breathing harder. The man with the swinging hiking poles was beside me. I looked down over the side of the cliff. Keeping as far from the hiking poles as possible, I asked, “What are those dots down there, the dots spreading as far as you can see?”

He swung his pole across my path. “Those dots are trees,” he laughed.

We’re climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, I thought. New pain. Climbing with no air in my lungs. A forest lookout tower was perched above the trees in the distance. My leg muscles felt as if they were loaded with shot from a nail gun. Must breathe. A tribe of made-in-hell thorny trees with silver spikes lined the trail, ready to attack if we tried to cut through them. Climbing higher, a switchback brought us back to the same trees. We stopped.

Not fully rational, I asked, “Are we at the summit?”

No answer.

I limped over to Dave. “The views truly take my breath away. So breathtaking. Can we go home now?”

“Lost the trail,” Dave mumbled. “Don’t know where we are.”

The sun was setting. With a wild leap, I landed on a big rock and yelled, “Here, help us.” Little sound came out of my throat. My fail-safe whistle would be heard. It was guaranteed. I blew it. No response.

“George! Patty! Dave! Let’s yell altogether.”

No reply.

It would be dark before long, so they were busy looking for a place to sleep. I sat alone on a rock until it was dark and a piercing howl filled the air. Another howl, a wolf pack was closing in. They won’t pick me off first. No way! I crept to the huddled bodies, pressing my prized jacket into the dirt. More howls followed throughout the night.

Finally light came. We rummaged through our backpacks for food and comments turned belligerent.

“You’re responsible for yourself, including feeding yourself.”

“Order yourself a latte and a donut.”

“Catch a rabbit. Rub two sticks together, make a fire, and we’ll cook it.”

I concentrated on holding the last crumb of my candy bar under my tongue until it became a single molecule. When it was gone, I grabbed a notepad and wrote my final will. Half would be left to my family and half to trail improvement. Burial instructions followed in case my body was found, and the instructions and will were put where a wolf wouldn’t get them—in my boot.

Silence took over. I was praying and thinking. Why am I limping, starving, and lying in dirt? My eye began twitching. I had honorable goals. To experience nature, its beauty and challenges. To keep a promise to improve myself mentally and physically. I think some things interfered, superhuman things that couldn’t be controlled. My thoughts reminded me of the movie I saw in high school, “The Odyssey,” and its hero Odysseus (the ideal man or close to it).

Odysseus had a worthy mission and it started well. But then things start going wrong, like a plague, and losing battle after battle, and getting caught in storms, and fighting traitors. All because higher powers, gods, interfered. They were really running the show. But Odysseus would not give up, and some good higher powers helped him.

We heard a faint roar and jumped to our feet. A helicopter! It circled a ridge, then turned in our direction. I whipped off my jacket and waved it in a circle above my head. The aircraft was above us, its rotating blades creating a hurricane wind. "Help," I screamed. My mouth was wide open and it filled with blowing dust and dirt.

A man stood in the aircraft's door and yelled directions on an amplified microphone. We shouted our thanks and bush-whacked back in the direction he told us to go. The helicopter followed as we passed through snake-pit country to our trail.

But my prized jacket was gone, left behind at the rescue site. A sign of my mental deterioration. I wanted to go back. One eye was twitching uncontrollably. It was a short distance, but no one would go with me and so my tortured jacket was left to the mercy of nature.

Soon a civilized trail appeared and I was in a different land, like Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz" going home on the yellow brick road. All was magically beautiful with sunrays showering down on me, the trees, and the flowers. My feet felt as light as a bird's. It was dusk when we got to our cars and dark when I pulled into my driveway, got into my house and took off my hiking boots. My toenails were spectacular shades of purple and ruby red rippled with thin black veins. Two toenails were ready to drop off. And I hurt where I never hurt before, and hurt in places I didn't even know I had. It was difficult to rank the severity of the hurts, but I decided to deal first with the cactus shrapnel in my fingers.

The Emergency Care office was packed. Chairs jammed together. Shoulders almost touched. Coughs erupted, filling the air, and the ventilation system did not work. I refused to die from TB that I caught in a doctor's office.

"Could I PUHLEESE wait outside?"

"No. You won't hear your number called."

My ticket number was 70, number 40 hung above the desk. I sat down and held my breath. I could run to the door for quick gulps of air.

I was sprawled back in my chair, wide-eyed, staring up at the ceiling when my number was called. I remember the doctor describing my condition as a "one," and that it would be best to stay in the hospital for observation. My mental condition immediately worsened. But with the hospital's good care, I am recovering, of course.

I can say without any argument that my attempt to improve myself physically and mentally failed, but with time to reflect and read, I found my explanation in ancient Greek literature. It's really simple. We choose our mission—blame no one but oneself. That mission becomes our fate and our maze. We are locked into it and strive to successfully complete the mission. Higher powers will bombard us with obstacles. But we have been given hope. If we struggle with heroic courage and intelligence, a superior power may—or may not—help us complete our mission. The bottom line, therefore, is do not tempt the higher powers to present obstacles (as Odysseus might advise).

So, my self-improvement hikes will be indoors . . . hospital corridors, religious monasteries, or some stronghold like the U.S. missile base deep inside a United States mountain.

**3rd PLACE****ESSAYS**

## The Country School

By Elaine Sievers

A Minnesota resident during the summers, **ELAINE SIEVERS** winters in Arizona where she is a proud member of both the Creative Writers and the Memoir Writers of the Northwest Valley AAUW.

**Elaine's** favorite quote for writing is by American author, Brenda Ueland.

She writes, "I learned that you should feel when writing, not like Lord Byron on a mountain top, but like a child stringing beads in kindergarten; happy, absorbed and quietly putting one bead on after another."

When she writes, **Elaine** is quietly and happily absorbed as she puts one bead on after another.

A little white country schoolhouse sat on the corner of the next mile square from where my family lived. Every day my sister, my brother, and I went to school there. We walked across the pasture, crossed the creek on a plank that my father had put down, went through the next field, crossed the dirt road beside that field, and we were *there*. I was four-years-old the fall I began making the trip and the only kindergartener enrolled in the school.

How well I remember the teacher, Miss Gray, who had red hair, thank you, even with a "Miss Gray" name.

There were several families of children in attendance. I remember the Jones children, Robert, Jimmy, Noreen, and Gertrude, and also the Schmidt children. I particularly liked Polly Schmidt, a tall, gangly girl who was not a bit shy and who seemed to like me, too. These were my first friends and, for a little girl who lived in the country without playmates, the friends were very special.

Discipline problems were not evident in this school, perhaps because the children were country children who were just glad to be learning. Or perhaps it was that the teacher was gentle and kind, and the children reflected her modeling.

I spent a good deal of time watching and listening to the lessons of the older children. I was especially entranced with the geography lessons and the maps on one of the walls. As a kindergartener, there were not specific academic expectations, but every day, sometime during the day, Miss Gray held me on her lap and taught me to read in a most natural and undemanding way. We simply read the books together and talked about the pictures and stories. I was a quick study. At four-years-old, I was reading well. I innocently assumed that this was how one learned to read in school, sitting on the teacher's lap and reading books together.

Miss Gray asked my mother to buy me a coloring book and a box of crayons so I would have something to occupy my time during her lessons with the older children. It was my first coloring book, and I was thrilled. I knew that it would be my only coloring book for the year; thus, working in it demanded careful "staying-in-the-lines" concentration. I decided to color one picture a day. I did so,

and I did “stay in the lines,” proudly earning a silver star at the top of each page. But one day, coloring while listening to the geography lesson and letting my eyes rove to the maps on the wall, my green grass went past the grass line and far up into the sky. Upon discovery of the mishap, I was mortified and ashamed and closed the book, not knowing how to handle the dreadful situation. My world came crashing down. It was personal failure on my part, I knew. My perfectionist goal had been shattered in just a few seconds of inattention. Miss Gray must have been heavy in heart when she passed by the page without awarding it a silver star.

Mother packed our lunches in syrup pails. The pails were silver-colored and clean and had little handles for carrying. Every lunch was anchored with homemade bread or buns and freshly churned butter. During the winter, we took a big jar of eggnog and buried it in the snow outside so it would be cold for lunch. When it was too cold to eat outside, we ate our lunches sitting around the pot-bellied stove, a stove that was fed and stoked by Miss Gray. (Not only during the day did Miss Gray manage the stove with the help of the bigger boys, but she was always waiting in a warm schoolhouse when we arrived in the mornings. I remember the warmth because we were very cold from the walk across the fields.) When the days were warm, we all ate together outside, the “together” including Miss Gray, sitting on the railing of the sandbox. Then, after eating, we children played running games of tag and hide-and-go-seek.

School was good for me that year, but in March my family moved to another farm. Perhaps our parents prepared us for the move, though I do not remember being prepared. One day we were in familiar surroundings at our country school. The next day we were taken to another school. This was a town school where the children were divided into age-appropriate rooms. It would be accurate to say that, in this setting, I was and continued for some time to be a lost soul. There was not a kindergarten at the new school; however, since I could read well, I was placed in a first grade room with children who were older and wiser and who had not been pampered and coddled by a loving teacher named Miss Gray. Indeed, I was the “new kid on the block.” I was ogled and watched carefully but not invited to participate in the recess fun. I was perceptive and knew that I didn’t fit in with the group, but there was really nowhere to hide. Every day I missed my older friends in the country school, and every night my pillow was wet with tears of sadness.

But it is lovely, now, to have good memories of a first experience in school. This is not the way we do things today; that is, we do not put several ages of children together in a learning situation that is also inevitably a social situation. In the one room schoolhouse where many ages were together, I remember how the older children watched over me. I remember easing into learning, and I remember learning by listening and absorbing and by just being with others as they learned. I learned, too, that it was my own responsibility to do a good job. It was a very natural kind of education. Perhaps, in my case, the cliché is somewhat true that, “All I ever learned in life I learned in kindergarten.”

My first year wasn’t planned. The year just happened and evolved. It was my good fortune to have my kindergarten year of school in the little white country schoolhouse. I was four-years-old, and the learning was sweet.

*END*

**1st PLACE****POETRY**

**JIA OAK BAKER** lives in Peoria, Arizona. She is the recipient of a Liam Rector Scholarship from Bennington College where she is pursuing a MFA in Writing and Literature. She is also a former participant in the Squaw Valley Community of Writers Workshop and the Sewanee Writers' Conference. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Thin Air Magazine* and *Inscape*.

## Ode to Autumn

by Jia Oak Baker

I close another season of the garden.  
 I water deeper and more often, let moisture  
 travel roots. I pick the last tall lavender  
 for drying and say goodbye to feather leaves  
 of yarrow, goodbye to clusters of clover.  
 This will be the last trim of the grasses  
 before they go dormant. No further flush  
 of bloom, only pincushion moss to dampen  
 the yard. I put away shears and gloves,  
 the tarp and wheelbarrow. Past olive hedges  
 I watch the sun set in ombré rushes of red.  
 I kneel once more beside the shorn santolina  
 and breathe the thin air of your absence.  
 What good is a body I can't give to you?

## 2nd PLACE

## POETRY



Award winning novelist and poet, **C.L. Gillmore** is a retired special education teacher who holds Bachelor of Education degrees in both Elementary and Special Education.

Originally from Muscatine, Iowa, C. L. Gillmore resides in Surprise, Arizona with her husband, Mike. They have two married sons and five grandchildren.

*Her social media based romance novel, **Uncommon Bond** was nominated for TWO 2012 Global eBook Awards and her poetry book, **Of Roots Shoes and Rhymes** won BOTH the Arizona Author's Association 2011 Literary Award for published non-fiction and the poetry category in the National Indie Excellence Awards for 2012.*

### Beautiful Bell-Bottomed Boy

by **C.L.Gillmore**

Shirtless, bronzed, bell-bottomed boy,  
Beautiful, young and lean.  
Soft, silken coffee-brown hair,  
Wind-swept, wild and free.  
Graceful, fluid, outstretched arms,  
Expressive, gentle hands.  
Lovely, curved, sensuous hips,  
Legs strong, slender and tan.

Rocked by the gods of music and freedom,  
Swaying in rhythmic jubilation.  
High on life and love's sweet passion,  
He danced for her in celebration.  
One girl alone was hypnotized,  
In the midst of a thousand faces.  
Her eyes linked to his piercing blue eyes  
And put her own feet in his paces.

Gone are the days of the young summer sultan,  
And the girl who watched him with joy.  
He dances forever within her heart,  
Beautiful, bell-bottomed boy.

**3rd****PLACE****POETRY****Coma and Other Four Letter Words**By **Ruth Chazez**

Do YOU think I lay in the womb this way?  
 Knees tucked under my chin,  
 Curled tight like a caterpillar that's just been touched—  
 Safety's position, surrounded by WARMTH?  
 To linger how?  
 As a closed caption stock ticker  
 running along the bottom of your screen,  
 Mouth agape hanging open, eyes leaking,  
 heart half broken.  
 Measured by intakes and output,  
 Tethered to life by a twisted mass of synthetic capillaries,  
 Nourished by the same.  
 Un-sustained by your amateurish attempts  
 to waste my time.  
 I am longing for light,  
 A scent of orange blossoms on a spring breeze,  
 an embrace, butterfly kisses, dignity,  
 laughter.  
 Do YOU remember how I loved to laugh?  
 What is this for?  
 You?  
 ME?  
 Obligations?  
 Extended why?  
 Even pain and frustration are better than this:  
 Life in perpetual suspension.  
 How much longer would you have me here?  
 Your feelings for me  
 must be as cold  
 as my touch is to you.

**RUTH CHAZEZ** is a mother of three and “Nana” to her two granddaughters. After a long career as an engineer in the high tech industry, Ruth retired early to pursue her life-long dream to write full time. She has a Bachelor of Science in Marketing and is currently working on an academic certificate in Creative Writing. Ruth lives in East Mesa where a view of the Superstition Mountains offers her daily inspiration for her poetry and fiction.

**1st PLACE****NOVELS**

Growing up in south Florida, the only child of New York expatriates, **MARCIA FINE'S** best friend was a good book. She taught high school while earning a Master's degree in English Education at Florida State University. Marcia later began to pursue her dream of writing to become an award-winning author of five novels. Marcia's writing covers the gamut from social satire in her series *Stressed in Scottsdale* to sweeping historical narratives in *Paper Children* and *The Blind Eye*. Currently, Marcia is finishing her sixth novel entitled, *Paris Lamb*, about biblical archeology and family secrets.

**PARIS LAMB****By Marcia Fine***Prologue**Arles, Provence, France*

Some say life's traumas come in threes, the way plane crashes sometimes do. I don't accept that. My colleagues said I had few choices, that my options were over, that I could do nothing but stay where I was and move forward. I didn't feel that way. I saw an opportunity to take my situation in a different direction.

It was as though I thumped my chest in determination. I don't have to be reminded of the tragedy, the betrayals, the manipulations. I wanted to do something bold. Like move to an entirely new place far away where no one knew my story, where there were people who wouldn't pry or even care. The French are sophisticated that way. Your business is your business. Well, except for the President and his wife. And the L'Oreal heiress and her husband's Nazi connections. And all the striking workers.

Are there things I miss? Of course. The efficiency, the news, even the politics with the crazy extremist voices. There are some things that are uniquely American. But for now I'm more concerned about what fresh fish is available, purchasing the ingredients for foie gras, that the beekeeper has a stock of Miel de Lavande, an all natural honey with the floral motif on the lid, and whether my favorite boulangerie has chocolate croissants with toasted almonds. I am even thoughtful about the linens drying on the line before the rain.

My week of simplicity shapes around the market on Wednesdays and Saturdays that stretches from the stone gates of Arles around many blocks to the Caesar Hotel. I purchase seasonal vegetables, fruit jams and fresh cheese from the farmers who transport refrigerated cases that hum with generators. Vernal baguettes, squalling chickens in the back of trucks cramped in their coops, eggs in graduated shades of brown to white, and an array of spices set out in shallow round pans all tempt me. Who knew being around food preparation would weave my feminine side to the front of my masculinity?

I can't resist the plump woman, strands of gray hair falling from her bun, who stirs yellow saffron rice plentiful with fresh shrimp and mussels, with a wooden spoon. I purchase a small amount to eat in a paper container with a plastic fork, an anomaly for the French. I stand aside to eat, observing two well-known chefs from the popular restaurants in town chatting, woven shopping baskets over their arms. In Provence they are rock stars competing with their Parisian counterparts.

Some American tourists stroll along the crowded aisles, cameras in hand, nylon fanny packs at their waists, deliberately counting out their euros for each purchase, but mostly they're French who make the day trip from Nîmes, Cavillon, Carpentaras and the pedestrian village of Seguret to shop for bright tablecloths with traditional prints that wave in the breeze, sample herbs and spices to bring home and buy fresh produce, oblivious of the camaraderie among farmers and housewives, haggling over prices.

I've assisted a few travelers frustrated with the language, Canadians, who are exceedingly polite, and Americans who ask incessant questions when they realize I am one too: Do you live here? How is it? Expensive? Often, they are flummoxed over their change, the euros a foreign-looking tender. Some farmers lack patience when the buyer doesn't attempt to speak French. Mine is terrible, but I try. The largest market in Provence is a microcosm of my life.

I purchased a bed and breakfast when I first arrived that needs constant maintenance. Initially a bargain, I curse it as I crawl around behind toilets, maneuvering narrow curved stairs built in the sixteenth century and feeding the whining cats I brought home from the rescue service to manage the rodent problem. Sometimes I don't recognize my bandaged fingers. It seemed like a pleasant distraction and a source of income after everything that happened.

Outside, the stone edifice with a tacky blue screen door was what I first saw after hearing about it from a friend. "The chefs are divorcing and putting it up for sale. Got a great country kitchen. You ought to look at it," a fellow archeologist told me. "It's down the street from the Communist Party headquarters and across from a shop that sells funeral wreaths and statues." Perfect. I thought it had charm in the middle of the block on a one-way cobblestone street that led to the Roman arena in the center of town. And, they had reservations booked for the next six months since they made the Rick Steves' guide.

But what I learned is that if something's four hundred years old, everything leaks or drips or has to be cleaned. It seemed out of character for me to purchase it, an impulse buy, but I sought an anchor to keep me here. I didn't want to return to the States.

At first, I was overwhelmed with my spontaneous decision, but now that I'm into the rhythm of being a proprietor of a well-known landmark, I look forward to the guests checking in Thursday through Sunday with their travel tales. They're always surprised to find an American in charge, especially since my French is not that fluent. Fortunately, Marie Louise, the manager, directs the maids so the linens get changed, the long table for breakfast is wiped clean and re-set and classical music plays from the tinny stereo. I buy the ingredients for the continental breakfast—fresh croissants, herbed goat cheese, butter, home-made jams, honey at the market twice a week—a splendid spread of exceptional treats, that only require minimal cooking. I prepare it in the kitchen, the largest room in the house.

Other days I work on a book. I have found a wealth of material at the archeological museum, Musée de l'Arles et de la Provence antiques, with the finest collection of Roman sarcophagi outside Rome itself and only a short walk along the embankment of the Rhone River.

Luc Long, the head diver from a subaquatic archeological research team brought up hundreds of artifacts from the river including a marble bust of Julius Caesar dated from 46 BC. And, as usual, various academic factions have disputed the date and whether it was placed there by the citizenry after Caesar's assassination to protect it from marauders or pushed into the river depths by those who wanted to steal the treasures. The French ministry of culture has not issued a statement.

The museum, the market, the guests—all distractions so I don't think about what catapulted me here six months ago.

## Chapter 1

*Newark, New Jersey, September 15*

Maurice Dubois moved into the aisle after hours of being cramped on the L'Avion flight from Paris to Newark, his elongated frame stretched to its full height. He couldn't wait to depart the plane, get through customs, and exit the terminal for a smoke.

He patted down his pockets for his wallet, cigarettes, lighter, and aviator sunglasses, balancing his leather briefcase on the top of the seat. He clicked it open to survey his papers and confirm that his passport was tucked into a pocket. From the overhead bin he pulled his suit jacket by the collar and shook it, the wrinkles in the lightweight wool-blend melting away. Then he pulled out his trench coat, draping it over his arm. In first class they hang up your garments. Ah well. When the auction is over I will be flying on private jets and pouring a Lafite Rothschild bourdeaux for myself and my friends.

The other passengers took measured steps away from the stale air of a ten-hour flight. A woman in a yellow sweater held up the line trying to snap up the handle of her rolling bag. Another insisted on pulling her child's arms through a Mickey Mouse backpack. Maurice was impatient with frivolous and unnecessary delays.

Finally, freedom. Maurice slicked back his longish blond hair with a free hand. Rarely conscious of his good looks he moved with confidence around groups of people into the large disembarkation room to claim his luggage for customs.

His dark chocolate Louis Vuitton was among the first to slide down the shaft. Here the expensive suitcase was a status symbol. In Europe their indestructible practicality was a necessity. He spoke to no one as he waited in the customs line. A brunette dressed in studded denim grouched about how long it was taking. Most people had piled their belongings onto the free rolling carts. Maurice placed his briefcase on the top, his suitcase on the bottom. The mother next to him held a drooling baby who threw his bottle to the floor. Maurice took a step forward to retrieve it and handed it to the young woman, never removing his hand from the cart. She smiled in gratitude. Americans, he thought, a child-like people.

He waited in line. Red light, stop. Green light, go. The glum customs official looked at his passport. "Business or pleasure?"

"Business."

"Of what nature?"

"Archeological research. An auction."

"How long will you be in the U.S.?"

"Two weeks."

The man, a serious bureaucrat with horn-rimmed glasses, stamped the passport. "Welcome to New Jersey. Enjoy your stay."

Maurice knew his route. A men's room stop, euros for dollars, a smoke, the cab ride into New York, The Pierre. It was going to be an extraordinary trip.

Professor Sommerstein was meeting him tomorrow to examine his research on what was often referred to as God's gold, three priceless treasures from the time of the destruction of Israel's Temple in 70 AD valued at more than a billion dollars. Maybe more. He had seen photographs of the extraordinary discovery until his first viewing a few years ago. Their beauty inspired chills when he saw them at the Vatican. He alone had the credentials to authenticate them. Of course others were jealous of his access to the rare artifacts. They would have to wait until the auction preview to see the rare gems that had survived centuries of deception and controversy.

Tomorrow was a prelude to delivering his speech at the Ecole Biblique et Archologique Français symposium in a few days. Much had been written about the cache that consisted of two silver trumpets blown at Jewish festivals, a gold menorah, its base decorated with eagles and sea monsters and finally, the Table of the Divine Presence crafted in wood, covered in gold and gems. All were believed to be commanded by God for Moses to create on Mount Sinai and looted in Jerusalem in 70 AD. His speech would reinforce his reputation worldwide as the expert on these discoveries.

Maurice, pre-occupied with the impact these items would have on the open market of museums, governments and individuals clamoring for them, waited behind the painted line on the floor at the airport money exchange. Merde. He was at such an advantage in Europe with the euro to dollar ratio. How did the rate go down while he was crossing the ocean? Best to change money at a bank but he didn't have time. His benefactor wanted him to use cash.

He opened his briefcase at the window, handing a credit card to the woman dressed in a navy jacket. "Ten thousand in American dollars, please."

She raised her eyebrows and checked his credit limit in the computer. "Large bills, okay?"

"Oui. Yes." A nervous tremor coursed through him. He glanced to his right. No one there. He looked at the woman, obviously a smoker, too, from her yellowed fingers and lines around her mouth. Not like the Parisian women who smoked after dinner for effect. He looked to his left. A kid in a black nylon jacket wearing sneakers was hunched over, cell phone to his ear. When he saw Maurice glance at him he turned his back, his jeans baggy, underwear showing.

The teller counted out the bills below the counter. Maurice watched her lips move as she thumbed through the bills. She placed the cash into an envelope and slipped it under the bullet-proof glass. Maurice took the envelope, pulled out a few bills and stuffed them into his pants pocket. The rest of the money was stored in his briefcase under his report and laptop.

On the curb he stood in the taxi line smoking, his lungs filling with relief. Ah. I want to get rid of the cash in the safe at the hotel, take a hot shower, drink a glass of Bordeaux. He dropped the cigarette and stepped on it when his Yellow cab pulled to the curb.

The cab driver seated on wooden beads wore a crocheted Muslim cap. He peered in the rearview mirror. Maurice pulled his trench coat across his lap, his briefcase close to his thigh.

"The Pierre at Fifth Avenue and Central Park in the city."

With a wordless nod, the cab driver melded his vehicle into the traffic heading away from Newark Airport. Maurice noted the cabdriver's photograph and name, his credentials displayed in a plastic sleeve on the back of the window. Absolem Halim. Then he looked at the skyline of industrial parks, factories and the gray haze of pollution. I am not in Paris with our historic skyline. These Americans mourn for the Twin Towers but they were buildings, not monuments for eternity.

The cabdriver spoke. "Bad traffic this time of day. I take another route." Maurice shrugged his shoulders. He didn't care. He just wanted to get there. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes for the long ride. He was anxious to go over his paper again before meeting with Sommerstein from the college.

As the taxi picked up speed, Maurice swayed in the back. The driver made twists and turns running a route parallel to the expressway. Apparently this was a known short cut because other cars zipped by his taxi adhering to the speed limit.

Maurice's mind wandered to the Arch of Titus in Rome and his recent visit. Situated on the summit of the Sacred Way in the Forum, the popular monument had limited access as ordered by the Italian prime minister after a special request by the Israeli government. As though the Israelis could right all the wrongs. Passage through the arch itself was now blocked from public access out of respect for the conquered people. Yet, Mussolini and Hitler passed underneath in anticipation of another triumph years ago, thinking they would rule the world. Only Jewish tour groups walked it now, many of them spitting on the ancient rock.

The Romans had erected the arch with the sacred treasures in full relief on the southern wall to immortalize the destruction of Israel and its Temple in 70 AD after the killing of 600,000 Jews. In clear bas-relief it depicted fifteen triumphant Roman soldiers celebrating the emperor Vespasian and his son Titus' victory over Israel and the First Jewish Revolt. The Romans paraded the broken dreams of a nation on their shoulders—a pair of silver trumpets, the gilded candelabra and a gold table studded with gems. The ransacked booty didn't have only material value. For the religious it represented the sacred intimate symbolic communication between God and man, a triumph for the Israelis.

This symposium and the subsequent celebratory party and auction of the actual items would draw world-wide attention. And make me one of the most sought after académique in the world.

The cab jerked to a stop. Maurice's head lurched forward. His eyes flew open. Car doors slammed. Absolem Halim leaned out the window and yelled out in a foreign tongue. Three cars blocked the street.

In moments, the windows darkened with bodies, the air with shouts in another unfamiliar language. The driver was pulled out of the cab and thrown to the ground wailing to Allah. Maurice, bile creeping up his throat, pressed the side of his head to the window to see the cabbie on the ground with a man standing over him.

Maurice's window shattered with the strike of a tire iron. He grabbed for his briefcase. My report. The cash. Panic swarmed through him. What do they want? Why? For Christ's sake. I'm an academic. An arm in black nylon reached into the vehicle through the window. Maurice had no time to cower to the floor. For a millisecond he felt cold steel against his temple. Then nothing.

## *Chapter 2*

*Paris, France, August 4*

When I first arrived to spend two months in Paris, prior to the New York archeology conference in September, I did all the typical tourist sites—the boat tour down the Seine where sightseers exit to see the Eiffel Tower or the Palace of Fine Arts, the Batobus tour for the Champs Elysees, the train ride to Versailles.

Then I fell into the Parisian lifestyle, sitting in a café on St. Germaine people watching or taking the Metro to explore new neighborhoods. I practiced the word *arrondissement* until it rolled off my tongue so I could ask for directions, wandering for hours searching for a landmark. Along the way I bought fresh bread, cheese and olives for a solo picnic in a park. It was on one of those relaxed afternoons that I met her.

I ventured to the Place des Vosges, an elegant refuge sanctioned by Cardinal Richelieu in 1605. Among the most beautiful in Paris it is dominated by an equestrian bronze statue of Henri IV and surrounded by red brick homes with stone strip quoins.

I remembered to take napkins from the small shop where I purchased a ham sandwich and a cold bottle of beer. More blue collar than I was raised but satisfying. Ah, the simplicity of the French lifestyle. No whole wheat, rye, gluten-free choices. Just freshly baked French bread with a hard crust and unmatched flavor.

I watched children who I thought should be in school playing near the fountain among the clipped lindens set in gravel and grass. A young couple kissed sitting on a worn blanket, her hair shielding their faces for privacy. An Orthodox couple strolled the pathways holding hands, he with a skull cap and long sideburns wearing a white shirt and black pants and she, younger, pale-pretty in a long dress, a pregnant belly leading the path. They probably lived in the Marais district nearby, which flowed across the third and fourth arrondissements, a hub of upscale boutiques, bagel shops and yeshiva schools. My own connection to this world is not important now. I will confess more later. At the moment what matters is how I met her.

I crumpled up the paper from my sandwich and threw it in a receptacle along with my beer bottle. I wandered around the interior of the covered arcade that rims the park, past #11, the former home of Marjon Delorme, a famous courtesan and #9, the Academy of Architecture.

On the corner stands #6, Victor Hugo's house. I had been there before on a previous trip but decided to go through it again. I marveled how a successful author, his most acknowledged work altered to appear on Broadway stages and little theaters throughout America, had empathy for the masses of people who had so little. I consulted my guidebook. He wrote *Les Miserables* while living here from 1832-1848. I am in a city of social revolutions.

I wandered afterward into a tea shop with elegant containers and enticing aromas. I made a small purchase of green tea with a hint of mint, a treat for later in the evening. I strolled into art galleries, some with oils and sculptures too abstract for my tastes and then I passed a custom shirt shop. A display of attractive shirts with elegant collars and French-cuffs crisp with starch lined the window on covered hangers.

I went in. The shop was fitted with dark wood fixtures, an ancient leather love seat, magazine racks and shelves of shirts. As most of the buildings in this city, it had been standing for hundreds of years. She greeted me with a "Bonjour, Monsieur" and an expectant look.

"Do you speak English?"

"Oui. A little." Then she smiled. "American, no?"

"Oui." Her teeth were small and white and even. She wore little make-up except for well-drawn lips and arched brows.

"Welcome to Paris, City of Light. My name is Sandrine. You would like assistance?"

I was captivated by her throaty voice, the seductive accent and the way she made eye contact. I had to think of an answer, an excuse to stay in the store and have her help me. She was beautiful but not in a perfect way like a pageant winner or women who in-

dulged in plastics. She was petite with large coffee eyes, a straight elongated nose and a red sensuous mouth.

I stammered. "I would like some shirts." What an astute beginning.

She began to give me a tour of the store. "On this wall we have prototypes of the shirts our tailor can make for you in various sizes. You pick your size and try on. Then we discuss collars, size, cuff types." She eyed me up and down. I noticed the length of her eye-lashes. "You will be a 42/16." Her small hands pushed aside a few shirts on the rack and she reached for one. "Here. Try this. The dressing room is behind the curtain. Please come when you are ready."

"What are the ties for?" I asked fingering a few thrown over the end of the brass rack.

"Only to see how a collar will lay on you."

Lay on me? My boyish humor wanted to guffaw. I'd better go into the dressing room. When I reappeared in the light of the store, she frowned. She reached up to grab my shoulders and faced me toward a standing antique mirror. "You have the good physique—but we will taper on the sides. You go to a gymnasium, no?"

She fussed around me like a mosquito deciding where to land, touching and flecking at me, smoothing my back. She pulled at a few places and held them. "You like?" She took a measuring tape from around her neck and held it against me, writing down a few things on a pad of paper with a pencil that had been hidden behind her ear.

I looked at my reflection. I often heard I looked like an actor on some hit TV show about advertising men in the 60s, but I never saw it, so I didn't know if the comparison was valid. It wasn't good for a man to be vain, especially in scholarly circles so I did the necessary toiletries, got haircuts in a barber shop, wore serviceable clothes from the local department store and moved on. But now, with her peeking out behind me, I saw my father's six-foot frame, blue eyes and thick, dark sandy hair. It's a wonder how you can look so much like someone and be nothing like them inside.

"This is parfait. The shirt you wore in here was not fitted properly. This makes your shoulders more broad. How many will you order? We have a summer special. You take three, the fourth is free. I assume these are for business."

I nodded. Not exactly. But it wouldn't hurt for me to look more professional for the upcoming conference. Uh-oh. This was going to cost me. Not that I had to worry, but with economic times in peril I had reined in my spending.

"Monsieur, what is your name?"

The French are exceedingly polite. "Michael. Michael Saunders."

"It is nice to meet you, Monsieur Saunders." Her lips parted to reveal her perfect teeth in a smile. "What about something for the casual?"

"Sure." I found her English charming and acknowledged it was much better than my French. I didn't need anything casual but it was an excuse to stay longer and engage her. Of course, every man who wandered in must approach her.

She led me to the other end of the store with an inventory of shirts already made up in pinstripes and florals. I observed what she was wearing—a man's shirt with tiny red polka dots and white starched cuffs, a few buttons opened to reveal a bit of a lacy bra and cleavage. It wasn't an overt "I'm trying to be sexy" look. It reinforced that unselfconscious way French women are comfortable with themselves. She had tied it at the waist in a knot so a piece of her belly peeked out above very tight, well-worn jeans. On her feet she wore red high heels.

"Your size is up high," she said, as she rolled a ladder across a brass bar and climbed the first few rungs with ease. Her ass was eye level to me. My, my. She was a specimen.

"Wait. Let me help you. I can reach up there."

"No. This is my job." She climbed down with a half dozen shirts in a panoply of designs and colors. She displayed them on the front showcase next to the computer. "I see you in this. It will match your eyes." My mother said the same words to me when she dressed me in blue as a child. She stroked a gray-and-blue soft faded stripe with contrasting cuffs of navy. In moments, she had pulled the pins and collar cardboard out, shaken it, and held it against me.

"Ah yes. This one. Fantastic with jeans."

I fingered the fabric. It was soft. "Egyptian cotton?" I asked.

She stood close to me with her neck bent forward, a few tendrils of hair curling into the white collar. She wore her dark hair clipped to the crown of her head and spouting like a waterfall. It smelled like spring. Or was it the perfume?

Her perfume was seductive. I wanted to ask what it was but I thought it too intimate a question. I had read an article that French women knew how to apply perfume so that it permeates their being without being overwhelming. Besides swabbing it behind their ears and on their wrists like American women, they dabbed it at pulse points, which included between their breasts, the indentation of their throat, the navel and pudendum. The warmth of their bodies released the fragrance. Whew. Better not go there.

“Monsieur, no. Our all natural fabrics are made in France. So two for work and two for pleasure?”

“Yes. Of course. And please call me Michael.” I slipped back into the dressing room to put on my own clothes. She assisted me with the choices, packed up the two ready-made shirts and told me the others would be in next week.

She handed me a white shopping bag with a gold fleur-de-lis, tissue paper popping from the top and her card with Sandrine scrawled across the bottom. “Merci beaucoup, Monsieur Michael.” She lowered her eyes for a moment and then stared at me directly. I felt a connection, the kind a man knows well. It’s that signal that there’s interest even though everything she did was on a professional basis.

### **Chapter 3**

*Paris, August 12*

I stewed until the end of the following week when I couldn’t wait anymore to see her. I sat on a bench in the Place des Vosges once again wearing one of the shirts I purchased, glancing at my watch every few minutes. I read over my conference paper, “The Journey of Sacred Biblical Treasures from the Essenes to Their Hiding Place at the Vatican.” It was a treatise that was sure to cull some refutations from my academic counterparts. It was our job to dispute theories. I often thought Brooks White, my nemesis, stayed up at night thinking of ways to hassle me.

The reality was that the artifacts from the Essenes, an ancient apocalyptic Hebrew sect who dwelled in Qumram caves around a hundred years after Christ, were the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the greatest manuscript discovery of the twentieth century. It also took decades of skeptical historians to establish proof of their authenticity through publication and interpretation. I hoped these artifacts from the destruction of the Second Temple wouldn’t be subjected to such a long delay.

The biblical treasures in question, the trumpets, the candelabra and table, were released without fanfare through an antique dealer in Rome not unlike the Dead Sea Scrolls that leaked out in Bethlehem. So many frauds came to the marketplace. It didn’t take long to trace it back to the Catholic Church. After all, no one could verify what the Vatican had hidden in their vaults after so many centuries. The presentation of the paper was to be on the second day of the Ecole Biblique et Archéologique Française and Scholars Conference in New York in a few weeks. I wasn’t the star of the conference. That was Maurice Dubois, an academically adept Frenchman with a superior attitude. He worked directly with the archeologists who verified the exceptional pieces with carbon dating.

I strolled into the shop a few minutes before five when she was closing down the computer and register. I felt nervous. A man takes risks when he approaches a woman, although I admit I hadn’t been turned down very often.

“Monsieur?” The red lips were the same, but I had forgotten the aroma of her intoxicating fragrance. It floated in the shop.

“I was in last week and ordered some shirts,” I said, disappointed she didn’t remember me. Maybe I misread the signal of interest.

“Ah, yes, Monsieur Michael. I was going to call you today, but the shop was busy. One moment.” She walked from behind the counter to the curtain in the back. She pulled it aside and emerged with two dress shirts on hangers.

“Please try on,” she said with a nod toward the dressing room. I took my briefcase with me. I trusted no one when it came to my paper after twelve years of exhaustive research, even though there were versions on my laptop and at my office in New Haven. I glanced at it whenever I had a spare moment to memorize key phrases so I could look out during the presentation. Most academic speakers never meet the eyes of their audience, who view only the tops of their heads as they read every word. Fortunately, I don’t have a bald spot or a bad comb-over. And I didn’t have to peer at them over reading glasses. Yet.

I stripped off my shirt and tried on the white batiste one. I didn’t bother tucking it into my jeans. I pulled aside the curtain and stood in front of the mirror.

“Ah, c’est approprié.” She touched me at the shoulders, fussing around like a hummingbird discovering a succulent flower. She inserted inexpensive links into the cuffs. “Now you see how a shirt should fit onto you.” She looked at me in the mirror, her lashes lowering. “Très beau.”

“Merci beaucoup.” It was an immediate response with one of the few French phrases I knew. It took a moment to realize she had just complimented me. I didn’t know if it was another sign or I was misinterpreting interest.

“I will get your bill ready. It is almost time to close,” she said, meeting my eyes again in the mirror. I glanced at her as she turned away. Jeans with an awesome fit. Same red lips and heels.

At the register I paid with a credit card. She was very efficient, handing me the receipt to sign and then the shopping bag. “Bonsoir, Monsieur Michael. Come again.”

A flush rose on my cheeks. I headed for the door and stopped. “Mademoiselle Sandrine, would you like to meet me for a glass of wine at the café a few doors down since you’re closing up?” In the past I might have added that I was interested in more sights to see or made a larger offer of dinner, but something made me keep it simple. I expected a no, an excuse, a story of a previous engagement or a boyfriend.

She opened her eyes wide. “Oui. I am almost ready. You go to Ma Bourgogne. I will meet you there.”

And so, that is how it began. Wine, conversation, later a salad. Then coq en vin with roasted vegetables and more bread and wine. She was talkative outside the store. She lived with her mother in the third arrondissement. Her brother-in-law owned the shop. She was twenty-eight and never married. And there was a boyfriend. Damn. We sat for hours.

I spoke about myself and my work as an instructor at Yale University on sabbatical, my research into the hidden Biblical treasures held by the Vatican for centuries, the recent death of my mother, and why Paris was an aphrodisiac for my soul.

She asked more questions and I played into her lovely eyes. She ate everything we ordered. “I did not have a lunch today. Sometimes I close shop and go home for the afternoon meal. But today I stay in and leave early with you.” She gave me a slight smile. Whatever she said sounded charming with her accent.

“You don’t have set hours you keep the store open?”

She shrugged. “The French will come back if no one is there. Only the Americans keep rules.”

During dinner she asked intelligent questions about my research. She wanted to know what proof there was that the Vatican had been holding the spoils of war for so many centuries. Did the Pope know about the artifacts? Did Israel’s rabbis have a right to demand the return of silver trumpets and gold treasures two thousand years later? What was their significance? I found her bright and engaging.

At first I responded in general terms, but she pressed me, and I became more specific sharing recent research about an unpublished inscription on a mosaic in the chapel of Saint John Latern of Rome dating to 1291. I memorized it because it was so crucial to my premise that the artifacts had been hidden by the Catholic Church after passing through the hands of barbaric Vandals, ambitious Byzantines, Persian historians and thieves.

I quoted the lines for her. “Titus and Vespasian had this ark and candelabrum and . . . the four columns here present taken from the Jews in Jerusalem and brought to Rome.” I admit I was showing off a bit but she was someone worth impressing.

Now that they were found and the world was watching, would they admit to hiding them? Rumor was the lawsuits against the church for the priestly scandals with children had grown to such astronomical financial proportions, it was a simple solution to raid the basement and Secret Archives of the Vatican. Or the Tower of the Winds that held the Papal collection. It meandered for more than seven miles and was no longer in use and not open to the public.

As valued and priceless objects appeared on world markets with little explanation for their discovery, they created havoc in the antiquities arena. Some of the archeological discoveries were breakthroughs that gave credence to the Israelis and the validity of their right to the land as stated in the Bible. Others reinforced the power of the church to plunder in God’s name. Still others were elaborate fakes.

I told her I had spent years ruminating about the skullduggery that must have ensued to smuggle these particular artifacts out of their clandestine tombs and into reputable hands to report a discovery of worldwide significance. I often flashed to the Pope’s Palace in Avignon with its secret hiding places dug around the perimeter of his dressing room, now covered with plexiglass.

Now, at last, these priceless treasures would be auctioned in front of a world market next month in New York.

After the owner/chef came out a second time to see if we wanted anything else, I paid the check. He took a small computer from his apron pocket, so I was able to take care of the bill at the table. No disappearing into the back with my credit card like in the States.

I avoided touching her as we strolled along the crowded streets still lit by a late sun, weaving by cafés, people leaning in with their arms draped over chairs, gesturing with cigarettes in hand, the smoke circling around them. I was cautious. It was bold of her to dine with me. I didn’t want to make her skittish. Men and women acknowledged us as we passed—her impudent stride keeping up with mine, the pointy red shoes leading the way, her sunglasses pushed onto her head, a black leather jacket slung over her shoulders. A quintessential French woman.

In France, the air is intoxicating everywhere. Scents of lavender, musk or the fragrance of women amplify fresh croissants in the morning and red wine in the evening. I walked her past the St. Paul stop to the Métro at the Hotel de Ville. “Bonsoir, Michael,” she said, lifting herself up to kiss me lightly on both cheeks. The perfume again. I took a subtle deep breath.

“And tomorrow?” I asked. A bad move. Too soon to ask for another date.

“Roland meets me. We motorcycle to the cemetery.” I looked away, knowing I had blown it. She brightened. “Père Lachaise where all the famous are buried. Have you been?”

I nodded. “I spent last Sunday in the rain looking for the graves of Jim Morrison, Gertrude Stein, Modigliani, and Proust.”

“Ah, the flower shop across the street from the entrance specializes in funereal wreaths and sells maps.”

“Now you tell me.”

She laughed, biting her lip for a moment. “Roland leaves to holiday in Biarritz Friday.”

“And you don’t go with him?” I had picked up her pattern of speech.

“No.” She pursed her lips. “I stay with the store. It is a family business. The shirts they make in the eighteenth arrondissement by the Muslim women. We own a small factory. There are many orders now.”

Okay. The door was open. I was infatuated with her. I watched her disappear down the steps of the Métro, her diminutive ass reminding me how long it had been since I had made love to a woman.

#### **Chapter 4**

*New York City, September 16*

Maurice Dubois dead? Why? What kind of a threat could a scholar have been? The call from an associate shocked Seymour Sommerstein. Random violence? An ambush? Was it a conspiracy to prevent the auction from taking place?

Seymour Sommerstein put the phone down and fell back into his leather chair and sighed. His chin fell to his chest. He didn’t know the French professor well. They had been cordial at a few conferences over the years, but the competition between academics was fierce. Intellectual discourse was acceptable. Friendship? Well, that was something else, especially with a pretty boy “Frog” who had attitude. Ach, and his aroma of Gaulois’, those French cigarettes he smoked, his hair hanging onto his forehead and over his collar. Maybe it was a look for students trying to be nonchalant but not credible for a professor. Always a few who stayed in the university system because they harbored an image of youth.

He leaned forward and put his elbows on the cluttered desk in his home office, an unused bedroom with metal file cabinets and stackable book shelves. The ancient wooden desk with one pencil drawer and a shabby circular rug were hand-me downs from his mother-in-law before she passed years ago. A folded academic journal kept one of the legs level. The walls were bare.

It was unlike his university office situated on a corner with a view of the Hudson River. There he had the status of paneled walls covered with framed diplomas and awards in gold frames and club furniture.

His head fell into his palms. It was enough spending the last two years putting the conference together. It had been such a coup for his department to be the host. NYU wanted it. Brandeis wanted it. Even Harvard made a bid. But he got it with a promise of academic excellence and top-notch organization. And now?

Should it even go forward? Was that appropriate in light of a death? And not an old-age-retiring-professor death. This was an assassination. He would need a replacement for the keynote speaker. What about all the printed programs? The press releases? The journals to be distributed? He groaned, slamming his hands on the desk and said aloud, “The poor schmuck comes to deliver a research paper and gets offed on his way out of the airport. That’s great for tourism.”

The head of the Antiquities and Biblical Studies Department of New York’s finest liberal college dragged himself down the short hall to his living room and clicked on the television. He brushed The Times from his worn brown leather sofa onto the floor and settled in, pulling his shirt out of his pants waistband, opening the belt and the top button, his belly expanding into the new space. His knees creaked as he set his feet onto the coffee table.

Of course it was all over the eleven o’clock news. A black and white photograph of Maurice flashed on the screen. The bloodthirsty public loved crimes like this: a handsome Frenchman and an esoteric conference coupled with priceless relics. It was a plot from a bad Dan Brown novel. How do they get this stuff so fast?

“. . . the renowned professor was in the city to present a paper about biblical relics that will be on display next week at the Judaica Cultural Museum prior to the antiquities auction at Shropshire, the famed international auction house.” The broadcaster turned over a piece of paper to start her next news story. “No suspects have been found. If you or anyone you know has information regarding this case, please call the FBI, New Jersey authorities or your nearest NYPD.”

Seymour Sommerstein felt a concrete weight land on his chest. Instinctively, he rubbed it. Oy, I forgot my cholesterol meds this AM. I’ve got to eat better. My Sondra, of blessed memory, would be nagging me if she were here. He clicked off the news and pulled himself up. I’ve got to salvage the conference. He reached for the phone on the end table next to him.

“Heather? Professor Sommerstein. Am I calling too late?”

“No. It’s okay.” She stifled a yawn. “Marianna and I were just getting ready for bed.”

“You saw the news?”

“Yeah, I was going to talk to you in the morning. What are we going to do about the conference? Maybe we should cancel. People would understand.”

“What? No, we’ve been planning this for ages. The prestige of the college depends on it.

People—even government representatives—are flying in from all over the world . . .”

He heard her say, “It’s the boss.” She placed the phone against her ear again. “Maybe not if they’re killing people who arrive in Newark.”

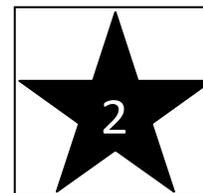
“Never mind. That’s Jersey. They’ll come into Kennedy or La Guardia. Call Dr. Levy and see who we can get to replace Dubois. And call your detective brother. Find out if Dubois’ briefcase was recovered. If I can get my hands on his research paper I can get someone else to read it. At the very least get hold of his secretary in Paris.”

“I don’t speak French.”

He wanted to hang up. He had no patience for excuses, but Heather was invaluable to him. An efficient Ph.d. candidate in archeology is what everyone needed. Thank God she was on the six-to-eight year plan. Of course he hated it when she took off an entire semester to go on digs in Caesarea or work on Herod’s tomb in Israel or travel to Tikal in Guatemala. Kid thought she could dig up the world overnight. He just didn’t want to hear about her weekends spent in a Melissa Etheridge haze with her girlfriend. “Sir, do you want me to set up a short memorial service at the conference after I find a possible list of replacements?”

“Excellent idea. You’re always thinking.” And then he visualized her in a man’s shirt and khakis with her boy haircut, arm around the girlfriend’s shoulder and an earring in her eyebrow. Damn, she was smart.”

*End*

**2nd PLACE****NOVELS**

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## Under Construction

By Barclay Franklin

### *Chapter One*

Thayne Kirk rolled out of bed before the first rays of sun peeped over the surrounding mountain ridges. His roommate, Thomas Chittum, lay sprawled on top of the spread, his face tinged gray because he hadn't had the ambition to wash it before collapsing on the bed.

When the sun did finally come up, Thayne knew it would be blood red, a little darker shade than the pumpkin-orange full moon had been the night before. Fortunately, the motel where he and Tom had crashed was upwind of the blaze. He'd eaten enough smoke in the last two days to make his lungs ache. The fresh air had been a welcome respite.

Pulling on his work boots, he opened the door of the room. From the second-floor balcony, he could see the massive smoke clouds rising. He and Tom would shortly be back in the thick of them, bulldozing fire lines in front of the approaching flames. Setting backfires, trying to starve the beast before it reached the city limits and began to eat houses as well as Ponderosa pines.

Thayne closed the door and debated about taking a shower. Like Tom, he'd crashed without taking off his pants or socks. Only the shirt and his boots had hit the floor before he'd hit the bed. In the bathroom, he washed his face and neck, both speckled in fire ash above the line of the T-shirt he'd worn under his yellow jacket. His dark auburn hair was matted to his head, pressed into unnatural waves by sweat and the construction safety helmet he wore.

Shit! I'm going to take a shower. Who knows when I might get another chance to enjoy one.

He peeled down to bare skin and turned on the water. Adjusted it to a cool setting and stepped into the tub. He sniffed the free bottle of shampoo and thought it too like a woman's fragrance, so he used the bar of soap to wash his hair.

He'd just stepped out of the tub when Tom came in to take a leak. Thayne wrapped one of the motel's big fluffy towels around his waist and used a second one to dry his head.

"Hey, Thay, leave me a couple dry ones," Tom protested. "Is your throat as raw as mine this morning?"

“Yeah. Hurts clear down my bronchial tubes. Chest feels kind of tight, too. Shower helped a bit. Probably would have been better if I’d cranked up the hot water—made some steam—but damn, it’s going to be a bitch today, so I didn’t relish starting off with my skin on fire from hot water. They’re predicting the low 90s.”

“You got any aspirin?”

“Sure, in my shaving kit. It for the throat—or is your head pounding?”

“Both. You can’t hear the fire boss shouting directions wearing those ear protectors, so I keep part of my right ear uncovered. All day on the dozer with its constant growl gives me a headache every time.”

“Keep both ears covered, Tom. If the boss needs to tell you something, let him get in your face and make hand signals. You don’t want to be deaf from not wearing the earmuffs.”

“Deaf? That might be a blessing. I wouldn’t be able to hear Shawna nagging me to take out the garbage . . . or wash the car . . . or cut the grass.”

“Or hear geese honking on a hunting trip? Or hear Brianna telling her daddy she loves him? Be smart, Tom. You don’t want to be deaf.”

“Yeah, I guess. Well, Cowboy, I’m going to take a shower, gulp a couple of painkillers and hit the diner for breakfast. What time did Everett say we needed to be back on the line?”

“Ten. I’ll set the aspirins out on the counter in here. Wait until you finish showering. If you try to take them with all that soot on your face, they’ll be coated in ash and won’t likely want to dissolve in your gut.”

“That’s why it felt like I was blowing cement blocks out of both nostrils this morning. Was afraid to stick my finger up my nose to try and clear it. It might get wedged in there and not come loose. Hard to whip a dozer around with only one hand.”

Thayne grinned. It was the standard joke. Ash and dust and vaporized pine tar tended to make nostrils feel like they were harboring granite boulders. Nosebleeds were prevalent when working a fire. “Booger bleeders” the dozer men were called.

He pulled on a fresh T-shirt, boxers and socks, and donned the same pants as he’d worn yesterday. They were stiff with perspiration and dirt, but he wanted to save his last remaining clean pair for going home.

He knew his mother worried less if he came home not looking like he’d been working a fire. Though she knew better, he tried to let on like his was a standard 9 to 5 job. He could only pull off the charade if he managed to sneak the clothes that smelled heavily of smoke into the washer before she got up or stopped at a Laundromat to wash them on his way home.

Dora Kirk was his last living relative. His father, Ben, had been a dozer man, too, working on various road projects around the state. Ben had died trying to clear the Oak Creek Canyon road between Sedona and Flagstaff after part of the hill above it had tumbled down to cover the highway following three days of hard rain. Hit by a stray boulder—one loosened from the unstable hillside—Ben had died instantly. Thayne still missed him.

With nobody else to fret over, Dora worried herself sick over her son. Daily, she watched the news, dreading the report of a fire anywhere in the western United States. Weekly she advised him to find another line of work. Monthly she begged him to get married and settle down so she could have the grandchildren she’d set her heart on.

Tom came out of the bathroom looking cherubic. He had a round face and fat cheeks—blue eyes that sparkled and a mouth seldom devoid of a smile. The only time he didn’t look like a Rubens angel was when his face was covered in ash and dirt.

“You ready for breakfast?” Thayne asked.

“Yeah. Hope they make decent pancakes. That last place the pancakes were so heavy I could almost hear them hitting the bottom of my gut.”

“Try some scrambled eggs. Not much a cook can do to screw up what a hen lays down.”

“Can’t eat eggs. Shawna says they’re bad for my cholesterol.”

"C'mon, Tom. All the hard and heavy work we do, no self-respecting cholesterol molecule could hope to hang on inside our arteries."

\* \* \*

They slid into a booth and the waitress arrived with order pad in hand.

"I'll have a stack of pancakes, bacon, hash browns and wheat toast," Tom said.

The waitress smiled at him. "I love a man with a good appetite first thing in the morning," she said, blatantly flirting. "You?" she asked, turning to Thayne.

"Denver omelet, hash browns, double side of bacon and two English muffins."

"Sweetie, I don't know how you manage to keep such a svelte figure eating like that. Coming right up, guys. More coffee?"

"Sure, Hon. Lots more coffee," Thayne shot back. "If we keep you running back and forth often enough filling our cups, you can eat a big breakfast and keep your figure, too."

"Ooh. A nice torso and a quick wit, besides. You must have got up on the right side of the bed this morning, Sweetie."

"Same side as always, Hon."

"All alone?" she asked. "No one to keep you company?"

"Alone? No. Tom and I share a bed most nights. We're ardent lovers."

"Thayne!"

"He doesn't like me to tell outsiders. He's still debating whether to come out of his closet or not."

"He's joking. I'm happily married and have a three-year-old daughter."

"Then I take it you *aren't* married?" she asked, addressing Thayne again.

Thayne shrugged. "Haven't seen a woman yet I'd consider settling down with. Would you like to enter my online, marriage-eligibility contest? I'd need a complete dossier on you, a nude photo and a thousand dollars. The last is to weed out the serious contenders from the rest of the herd."

"For God's sake, Thayne. Dial it back about a hundred yards. A nude photo? I doubt she's over 18. She'll be phoning the sheriff's office and they'll arrest you as a sexual predator."

"Do you think it's unreasonable, Hon, to request one of those photos? I'd like to assure myself of a certain level of perfection in my intended bride—no scars or stretch marks from accidents or previous pregnancies."

"Perfection? I don't think such a thing exists—in a woman—*or a man*. Doubt you'll ever get married with that attitude. I was all prepared to think you had a pretty fair handle on perfection—but then you opened your mouth and spoiled it all."

"I could shut it, Hon, if I had some breakfast to chew on. How about you do your job and provide me with my omelet?"

She turned on her heel and stomped off toward the slotted window opening between the kitchen and the restaurant to turn in their order.

"Must you always. . . ? What kind of thrill does it give you to tick off a waitress?"

"None, Tom. I'd like it if they did their jobs. If they think I'm going to tip more for a little scintillating conversation, they'd be wrong. I tip for good food and good service, not batting eyelashes, fake grins and semi-salacious chit-chat."

"She's probably right. You'll never get married with that attitude."

"Maybe it's true. . . what I told her. Maybe I *am* gay."

"Cut the crap, Thayne. I know about you and Susie Pittman."

Thayne had to grin. Rumors were rife about him and Susie. Legends had been built on less. In his hometown of Clarkdale, it was bandied around that he'd had sex with Susie right there in her own bedroom, not two doors away from the father who'd threatened to flay alive any young man who even offered to unzip his pants in Susie's presence.

"What did you hear?"

"Let's just say she can't pretend to be a virgin anymore."

"You think I busted her cherry? Old man Pittman would have me castrated if that rumor gets back to him. If that happens, I might need you as my bed partner for sure. Not many women are enamored of a guy who talks like a Vienna choirboy sings."

"Did you have sex with her?"

"Guess that's for me to know and you to wonder about. Ah, good, food arrives. You weren't mad enough to spit on my omelet, were you, Hon?"

"Think I'd tell you if I had?"

"Probably not. Guess if you did, it wouldn't be much different than swapping spit while giving you a French kiss, so I'm not going to quibble. Could I trouble you for a bottle of ketchup?"

She slammed a bottle of it down in front of him, giving him a glare that would have melted an iceberg.

"Thank you, ma'am. Little more coffee, too, please?"

\* \* \*

When each of their bills arrived, Tom opted to pay his with a credit card. Thayne fished out a wad of bills from his pocket and counted out the cost of the meal—\$9.95. To that he added another ten-spot for a tip. Pulling a pen from his yellow jacket's pocket, he wrote on the bill.

After completing his message, he folded the bill around his money and waltzed up to the register where she was waiting for other customers to pay.

Tom handed over his credit card. Thayne winked at her and handed over his bill. Watched as she carefully unfolded the money and read the note.

Hey, Hon—

***I apologize for giving you a hard time. I'm leaving you a fairly substantial tip to make up for my teasing. You're not bad on the eyes—kind of pretty—even so early in the morning.***

***If you'd consider entering the contest for becoming my wife, I might even be willing to reduce the \$1000 fee if you'd send me your dossier and that photo. Just in case you'd ever like to be in touch, my e-mail address is:***

***thaynekirck@wildapache.net***

***Thanks for breakfast—spit or no spit—it was good.***

***Thayne***

She gave him another hard look, shaking her head ever so slightly. No smile, he noticed, but she did slip the ten-dollar tip in her pocket before handing him the nickel he was due in change for the breakfast.

"You have a name that goes after 'Rosalie'?" Thayne asked as Tom pocketed his credit card.

"I do, but I don't give it out. That's why there's only my first name on the nametag. So we don't get hit on by smart alecks like you."

"C'mon, Thayne. Fred's gonna be chewing our butts if we show up late on the fire line."

"You're working the fire? Both of you?"

"Smoke-eaters personified, that's us. This here's Thomas Chittum and I'm Thayne Kirk—couple of dozer runners. We're at your service whenever a big blaze takes off anywhere west of the Mississippi River."

"Thanks for trying to save as much as you can. Please be careful out there."

"Gee, Tom. That kind of sounds like she cares about me—and I'd say she might care about you, too—but you're married. Should I ask her out for our upcoming weekend off? Maybe to a movie?"

"Let's go, Thayne," Tom said. "After your performance at breakfast, I'd hate for your ego to be down in the dumps all day because she refused your offer of a date."

Thayne looked like woe personified at Tom's comment. Like he couldn't imagine any woman turning down a date with him.

Rosalie burst out laughing at Thayne's hangdog look. "You do have a rather weird sense of humor, Mr. Kirk, but I'm inclined now to think it isn't quite as malicious as I first believed it to be."

"I'm still not the sort of fellow you'd consider taking in a movie with, though, right?"

"Right. I have a boyfriend."

"Guess that doesn't surprise me. We'd better get a move on, Tom. It's an hour's drive to the front lines, and it's already 9:15."

"Wasn't me holding up the works, Thayne."

"I know. I need you to nag me like Shawna nags you if you expect to get me to the church on time. Mornin', Ms. Rosalie. May all your customers for the rest of the day be sweethearts."

"Be safe guys."

\* \* \*

"Damn, Thayne. I think she might have gone out with you if you'd have kept a civil tongue in your head."

"Where's the fun in that? I'd be willing to bet she spends more time today thinking about me—brazen SOB that I am—than she thinks about her other male customers. I might not be all cool and mannerly, but I tend to be memorable."

"Right. Like when a garbage truck overturns on the street right outside your house. That kind of memorable."

"We'll see. Bet she e-mails me before the day is out."

"You're on. What's the wager?"

"Ten bucks? Same as the tip I gave her?"

"Yeah. Okay. I'm putting mine in the glove compartment. You add yours to it. When we finish the shift at 10 p.m., you look right away at your e-mails."

"But the day won't be up until 10 a.m. Ten tonight is only half a day."

"I don't care. At 10 p.m. the bacon hits the fire. No message, I'm \$10 richer."

"Deal, Tom."

\* \* \*

A small subdivision lay in the direct path of the fire, which was pushed by a relentless 30 mph wind. Fred Everett, after a few choice epithets hurled at them for being late, directed both of them to clear a wide firebreak on the side closest to the approaching conflagration. Working in opposite directions so they passed each other in the middle of the grid's space, Thayne saw Tom still had one ear protector lying back behind his ear so he could hear. He made pantomime motions and Tom finally pulled the earpiece back over his right ear.

The wind carried sparks and bits of hot ash on its tide. Occasionally a small fire would flare up on the subdivision side of where Thayne and Tom were clearing. A young squirt named Billy Bennett would run up with his portable water tank and extinguish it. If the spark got too much purchase before Billy could wet it down, either Tom or Thayne would haul off the grid they were working to dozer a little dirt over the blaze.

Men behind the grid were spraying a foam mixture on the fronting homes. A newly invented process, it had saved many dwellings from the rain of sparks and flying hot ash. Nothing saved the homes from the smoke smell, which would linger for months or maybe years—in furniture and bedding and clothes.

The smoke was bad that morning, as it had been for the last two days. Even the wet bandanas both men wore over their noses and mouths didn't do much to prevent eating smoke.

There was no lunch whistle. The fire was too close to permit breaks. Logistical crews or local fire fighters' wives brought cold drinks or dried-out sandwiches at intervals. Thayne and Tom would stop plowing up the landscape for a minute to lean down from their dozers and grab what the crews and wives offered, then eat or drink on the job. Everything tasted like smoke, and not the good kind that denoted a barbecue, either.

At four, the wind began to subside, giving both dozer men a short break. Tom and Thayne each upended a bucket or two of water over their heads, in a futile attempt to cool off. Between the high temperatures and the heat from the fires, it felt about 120° on top of the bulldozers. Dehydration or heat exhaustion were their constant companions and greatest enemies, so Fred made sure they drank copious amounts of water and had the fire trucks occasionally spray them with water, too.

"Okay, you two. Now that the wind is letting up, the fire will start to lay down. I need you to work at making big lazy circles around the entire subdivision. That way, if the fire begins to circle around it or the wind shifts directions, we'll have a viable buffer on all sides of the settlement."

"Yes, sir," Thayne agreed. "You want the left flank or the right one, Tom? Name your poison."

"I'll take the left one, Thayne."

The left flank was flatter land. The right one was a series of small hills and gullies. Tom would be able to work his while half asleep. Thayne would need to be both awake and alert on his side. It was fair—their agreed-on division of sides. He'd had the easier go of the landscape the night before.

Climbing aboard his dozer, he kicked it into drive and started for the right edge.

This is kind of the same operation the Sioux used on Custer. Flanking him—getting him to turn his attention in one direction while other warriors crept up from a different direction. Substitute the fire in place of the Sioux and these houses are in as much danger as Custer was.

Looks like someone had to leave their horses behind when they evacuated. I'd better make sure there's a real wide firebreak around their pen. Check to see they have water, too.

He put the dozer into neutral and climbed down. Ran water from the hose into the water tank and sprayed some over both horses. A dog crawled out from under the horses' loafing shed and bared its teeth at Thayne. He sprayed the dog, too, and filled the low galvanized washtub with water for it. The dog drank greedily and once he'd had his fill he started advancing on Thayne again, so Thayne climbed back up on the dozer and went on about his business.

At 9:45, his relief arrived. Climbing down, he relinquished the dozer to the next man and caught a ride back to his truck with Fred. Tom was already waiting when he got there.

"You guys need to be here on time tomorrow morning. They're predicting variable winds in the range of 15-20 mph. The crews that followed you tonight showed up on time, and I think they'd appreciate the same courtesy from you."

"You got it, Mr. Everett. We wouldn't have been late this morning, but Thayne had to get into his usual argument with the waitress. C'mon, Thay. It's time to check to see if she e-mailed you. I might be \$10 richer."

Tom wouldn't let Thayne pull out of the lot until he booted up his laptop and checked his e-mail. There were a slew of messages because he hadn't looked at the thing in three days. Quarantine reports. Several messages from politicians looking for donations. A notice from Al Gore inviting him to join in a conference on global warming.

Tom was looking over Thayne's shoulder as he stood outside his driver's door punching keys on the laptop lying open on his seat. Thayne read each message from beginning to end before deleting them.

"Hurry up, Thay. You don't need to read every word. Just delete the junk and get to today's messages."

"You haven't even won the \$10 and it's already burning a hole in your pocket?"

"No, but I'm beginning to think you've never heard of speed reading."

At the very bottom of his messages was one from roseofsharon@commspeed.net. Thayne was tempted to close the top on the laptop, but Tom had already seen it.

"Looks like you might be \$10 wealthier. Go get the money out of the glove box."

"No. Not yet. What did she say? I want to read what she sent you."

"Was that part of the bet? I don't remember it if it was."

"Afraid she's still not of a mind to go with you to the movies?"

"Fine." He punched up the message and let Tom read it.

*Hi—*

*I told my boyfriend that one of the firefighters wanted to take me to the movies this weekend. He said I could go with you, as he has to work. He's a resident at the local hospital. If you still want to go to the movies with me, e-mail me back or come in for breakfast and let me know then. Course, it won't be much of a date—not like the real thing—because as soon as Rex finishes up his residency, we're getting married. Just think of it as another way for a local citizen to say 'thanks' for all your work to keep us safe from the fire.*

*Rosalie*

"What are you going to tell her?" Tom asked. "Are you going to go?"

"No, probably not. Susie wouldn't appreciate me stepping out on her."

Tom rolled his eyes. "Rosalie's practically throwing you a rose—no pun intended—or offering you a fun evening and you're worried about some woman back in the old hometown?"

"Why don't *you* take her to the movies. You're married and she's practically married—sounds like a better match-up to me. If I'm going to waste money on movie tickets, I'd at least like to be able to pull off into a lover's lane and cop a feel or steal a kiss after the show ends."

"You take the cake, Thayne, you really do."

"You think I should go?"

"Yes. She seemed really nice."

"I'll give it some thought, but right now, I want some hot pizza and cold beer. Let's hit the pub and have some of both."

"I'm dirty, Thay, and so are you. We smell like smoke. I'm sure the owner of the pub will be just delighted to have us muck up his décor."

"They have a drive-thru window."

“Okay, use that then. Come to think of it, pizza does sound good and a beer sounds even better.”

Thayne went through the drive-thru and placed his order for pepperoni pizza with added mushrooms and black olives. Requested a six-pack of cold Coors and had to produce his driver’s license to obtain it.

Tom was laughing as Thayne shoved his wallet back in the front pocket of his jeans.

“It’s you that looks like you’re about 13—not me. She wouldn’t have asked for my ID but once she got a look at you, she thought she’d better be safe than sorry.”

“Yeah, right. Another 20 years you’ll feel flattered when someone asks you for your license.”

“I feel flattered now.”

They took the pizza and beer back to their motel room to chow down. They split the pizza and beer equally. After Tom downed his three beers, he shucked off down to his underwear, washed the ash and tomato sauce off his face and crawled wearily into bed. Thayne waited until he started snoring before going out to collect his laptop.

Hey, back at you Rose of Sharon—

*If we’re going to the movies, how about it if you provide me with your phone number and address so I can pick you up around seven Saturday night?*

*Smokey Bear—aka Thayne Kirk*

He punched the ‘send’ button and closed the laptop. Shedding his clothes, he showered, using a washcloth to ream out both his ears and his nose. When he dried off, he again opened the laptop to see if she’d been monitoring messages. She had.

Hi, Smokey Bear—

*How about if I meet you in front of the restaurant? I’ll be there at seven. If you can’t make it, I’ll go home again, but I’d sooner not give out my phone number or address.*

*Rosalie*

Hey, R of S—

*Surely you aren’t that afraid of me. I was only teasing about the contest and the nude photo. I’m not going to push the issue of your address, though. I’m grateful you’ve at least agreed to go with me to the theater. Grateful enough, I’m willing to toss in dinner in addition to the movie. I’ll be at the restaurant at six. Drove past the theater—I think it’s Alvin and the chipmunks that’s playing. It’s one of those places with several theaters under the same roof. There may be something playing that’s more for adults, but it was Alvin in big letters on the marquee. I like Alvin. Hope you do, too.*

*SB signing off.*

He crawled in between the sheets grinning at the thought of taking her to see a bunch of chipmunks. Even if something else more suitable was playing, he had his mind made up to see Alvin.

## Chapter Two

Thayne got to the restaurant at 5:45 and slid into a booth where he had a good view of the door she'd come through. A middle-aged waitress asked if he wanted something to drink.

"I'd like iced tea, please—no lemon."

He thought she might have changed her mind or decided against dinner when it came to 6:15 and she had yet to show up.

*I'll have to wait until seven, just in case she wants to see a movie but not eat dinner. What looks good on the evening menu? Onion rings. I love onion rings, but not tonight. Damn. Do I dare or do I not? Nothing like onion fumes if she shows up for the movie date. Better not, Thayne.*

He ordered a bacon-cheeseburger and fries. Was about to tuck into his dinner when she came through the door. She walked straight to his table and slid into the booth.

"You're early for the movie and late for dinner. Have you eaten? Want something?"

"Yes. I'll have the ham on rye, with cottage cheese and a Coke."

Thayne signaled the waitress and relayed Rosalie's order. "Can I get a refill on my tea, too, Sweetheart?"

When the waitress was out of earshot, Rosalie asked, "Do you always address wait people in such familiar terms?"

Suppressing a grin, he said, "No, Hon. Only the females. Those terms of endearment would be lost on the male dudes."

"How did it go on the fire lines?"

"About the same as always."

"What is the same as always like?"

He took a bite of his cheeseburger and chewed before answering.

"We get between the flames and whatever homes the residents would like to return to. Go back and forth, dozing up all the vegetation—from grass to small shrubs and trees. Choke on the smoke. Pour water in our eyes to rinse out the ash. Eat stale sandwiches. Drink gallons of water. Routine stuff."

"Do you ever get burned?"

Thayne leaned across the table and rolled the collar of his shirt under, exposing several small blisters where hot ash had landed on his neck.

"Ouch! That looks painful."

"Only gets bad when whole flaming branches fall off on top of you. Ash burns are like the times when your papa used his lit cigarette to burn your hand for getting into his personal stuff. Not a big deal."

"Your father burned your hands with his cigarettes?"

"Nope. Not a single time. Threatened to once or twice. The threat was enough to convince me to stay out of his stuff. He only threatened when it was his pistol I was headed for."

"How old were you at the time?"

"Dunno. Four maybe. Five?"

"I begin to see why you're like you are."

"And how are I, exactly?"

"You have a smart mouth and are likely hard as nails inside. When did you start driving a bulldozer?"

"When I was three."

"See. That's what I mean. Another smart answer."

"No, honestly. I got to drive one when I was three."

"Right."

"My father owned his own dozer. Did a lot of pro bono work for neighbors. Scraped out a driveway. Cleared weeds away from fence lines. Leveled hills and filled in gullies for pastures. I went along. Sat on his lap. He let me steer sometimes."

"Oh. That's what made you fall in love with the occupation? Your father was a good male role model?"

"I guess. My dad was a pretty swell guy."

"Was? Past tense?"

"Yeah. He was killed when a rock fell off a mountain and hit him in the head."

"What about your mother? Is she still around?"

"Yes."

"She must worry about you meeting the same fate."

"She's more concerned that I'm still not married. No grandkids on the horizon for her to spoil. I hear about that on a monthly basis."

"No brothers or sisters to provide them?"

"Just me. How about you? Big family?"

"Two sisters, both married. I'm already an aunt. Mom and Dad live in Tucson in a retirement community."

"How did you end up here?"

"I moved to Albuquerque to be close to Rex."

"The resident?"

"Yes. He has another year to go, then we'll get married. He hopes to set up his practice in Santa Fe."

"What sort of practice? Plastic surgery so he can treat the rich and famous movie stars who are drawn like flies to places like Taos and Santa Fe?"

"Pediatrics, so he can treat the Indian children of the area."

"I immediately have more respect for Rex. Some of those kids are in bad shape. Cleft palates. Diabetes. Deformed limbs. Fetal alcohol problems."

"Yes—all of that is true. How do you know about them?"

“Worked the Rodeo-Chediski fire a few years back. Lots of Indians were on the ground crews. Sometimes their families came with them. Saw some pretty disheartening cases among the kids.

“It was rumored that one of the Apache firefighters had started one of the fires in eastern Arizona just so he’d have work. He was that desperate for money. Hope Rex isn’t expecting a huge income for treating them. Most of them don’t have much.”

“He has to make some money. He has huge loans to pay off for his education.”

“You may be waiting on tables until you’re as old as the waitress coming with your dinner, then.”

Rosalie ate part of her sandwich and picked at her cottage cheese while Thayne made short work of the rest of his cheeseburger and fries.

“It’s not good?” he asked.

“I’m not very hungry. I ate something before I came because I wasn’t sure you’d be here like you said.”

“My dad would have boxed my ears if I stood up my date without calling her to let her know I’d be late or missing. Since you wouldn’t divulge your number, I had to show up.”

“It’s not a date, Thayne.”

“Yeah, I know. If you aren’t going to finish what’s on your plate, mind if I help you out so the cook won’t think he’s lost his touch?”

She pushed her plate over and he ate the half sandwich she hadn’t touched. Left the cottage cheese alone. Debated about eating the other half sandwich with two bites missing.

“You don’t like cottage cheese?” she asked.

“Not much. It reminds me of the time I had a sebaceous cyst on my wrist. Doc made a cut and out oozed all this crap that looked a lot like cottage cheese. Never could see that stuff without thinking about the cyst—still can’t.”

“I could have gone a lifetime without that mental image, Mr. Kirk.”

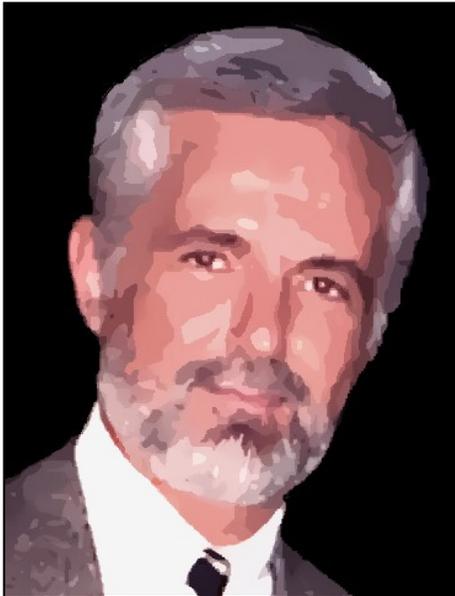
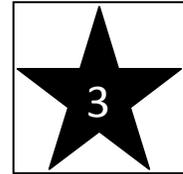
“Sorry,” he said, picking up the other half of her sandwich and eating it. “Ready to watch Alvin? The woods, when they aren’t afire, have lots of little Alvins running around. Good thing they have deep burrows to hide in while the flames pass overhead.”

“I know. I think about the fawns and deer. The elk. Squirrels. It must be devastating to them to lose their homes.”

“Yes, and most of the times it’s someone’s carelessness that destroys their habitats. Cigarette tossed in the dry grass. Campfire left unattended. Broken bottles that act like a magnifying glass in the grass. Stupid stuff. Kind of turns me off the bozos I see camping in the woods.”

“You’re passionate about the landscape?”

“You get to be that way after you work so many fires. It takes centuries for the land to recover and only a moment’s thoughtlessness to destroy it.”

**3rd PLACE****Novels**

After earning B.S. and M.S. marketing communications degrees from Northwestern University, **MICHAEL D. RILEY** rose to senior executive positions in ad agencies in Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. He has helped introduce and build brands for Procter & Gamble, Miles Labs/Bayer, Dole Foods, and Coca-Cola Companies. Later, as an entrepreneur, Riley served as Senior Vice President or CEO of several Southern California companies he helped to successfully start, get funded, build, and sell. He's the author of a best-selling non-fiction book, has earned six U.S. patents, and has now "sort of retired" with his wife to Glendale, Arizona.

## Gifts

By Michael D. Riley

### *Chapter One*

#### *Introducing the Alchemist*

My geeky fans call me "the Alchemist." You may too, if you'd like.

You're not a geek? Okay then, let me explain. "Alchemist" is my "screen name." I use this as my handle to open doors to Internet assets.

Why do I call myself "Alchemist"? It's a metaphor. After Rome fell and before the Renaissance arose, alchemists got the ball rolling toward what you now call "science." They did so by trying to merge Egyptian technology to Greek philosophy. One of alchemy's goals was "the transmutation of elements." Alchemists believed that if they could make something called the "Philosopher's Stone," it could turn lead into gold. They also hoped to use it to make themselves immortal. Some of the more inspired ones, ones who called themselves Hermeticists, hoped to use it to purify and perfect themselves.

I use computers to forge a new kind of Philosopher's Stone. My data-munching hardware serves as crucibles where I transmute my ideas into gold. I buy only state-of-the-art tools, the best I can afford. But these wonderful machines still can't think for themselves. And worse, they can stupidly fall prey to evil creations hidden in the Internet's darker corners. Since my work calls for me to probe there, I have to maintain a constantly updated battalion of firewalls, virus blockers, bot smashers, rootkit killers, spy detector programs and more — invisible barricades all built out of data bits. Even though other experts regard me as an information technology wizard, all of my computers have picked up an occasional infection. I even had one stripped bare by malware. How embarrassing!

I love to have my own digital creations astonish my clients. But I've learned to hate it when computers surprise me.

So I was shocked when a tiny white-bordered icon suddenly appeared out of nowhere on my computer display's desktop. The center of the icon displayed a vaguely familiar-looking golden ellipse. What was that? A rattlesnake eating its tail? A rat-savaged donut? A partially-sucked, pineapple-flavored LifeSaver? Below the icon was a file name in text: "Gifts."

To be perfectly honest, the file's spontaneous materialization actually terrified me. My heart stumbled a pace as my hands stuttered over my keyboard. "Gifts" intrusion was technically impossible. It could only be magical, supernatural, miraculous — perhaps diabolical? My computer wasn't even connected to a network when that file popped into being. I'd just finished scanning and purging the whole system for potential infections. All of its drives' contents had earned a clean bill of health.

I create computer games for a living. That art of warcraft serves up my steak and gravy. So the appearance of the "Gifts" file immediately made my warrior side mount a defense. First I confined it to a firewalled "sandbox," a special computer program that isolates suspect files where they can't do any harm. Next, I scanned "Gifts" with six of my most powerful evilware guardian programs. All of them gave the strange file their blessings. It seemed to be pure.

It took me a few minutes, but I couldn't help but become curious. What was in "Gifts"? Of course the name made me cautious: it might just be hacker humor. Some prankster trying to get me to open a "present" that could destroy what I'd secured in my computerized vaults. On the other hand, the name might signal that the file would explain its mysterious source. It might actually convey information of value.

Besides, the subject intrigued me. No, not because of gifts I'd found under Christmas trees past. That wasn't part of my history anyway. I had a deeper interest. I'd been an easily distracted child whom everyone called "gifted." Boring teachers often accused me of being an underachiever. I'd reply, "No, I'm just over-equipped." But why was I so blessed? What kind of a bizarre God had given me such uncommon assets, apparently as my birthright? And for that matter, in contrast, how did I get stuck with so many flat spots?

The suspect file lacked an "extension," a three-or-four-letter-long dot-something-or-other that should have been found after the word "Gifts." An extension would have identified the computer program that created the file. But there was no ".doc", ".docx", or ".txt", no ".pdf" to be seen. So I opened it using a software code-editing program which malware shouldn't be able to use for its own ends.

"Gifts" contents were not in the computer code I expected to find. It used nothing but ASCII words in plain English. But the significance of those words was even stranger than their miraculous arrival had led me to expect. Let me share with you what I found there. Perhaps it will change your life as much as it did mine. I changed because "Gifts" explained far more than just how I came to be called "gifted."

What was it? It turned out to be an e-mail from heaven.

## **Chapter Two**

### **What Alchemist Found in the "Gifts" File**

Hello, Alchemist. I am delighted to greet you.

Don't be afraid. Nothing in here will harm you or your precious computers. I promise you that. As to where *here* is, you may think of Me as reaching out to you from "heaven." It's not heaven, really. But let's call it that for the moment. As for *who* or *what* I am, you'll probably think of Me as being a spirit. Actually, I'm just a chip off the cosmic "All is One."

So please, Alchemist, just think of me as "Chip." I'm the Cartesian, not silicon, "ghost in your machine."

I'm so pleased that I can open My conversation with you by giving you good news. Here it is. No hole in any graveyard will ever bear a tombstone that marks your extinction. No yawning black cavity can possibly swallow what remains of your future. Now you can yawn back at the very idea.

Death is a passage. It's not an end point. Like Me, *You* are immortal.

Even knowing this, your entry into the passage called dying will almost certainly be colored with pain and with fear. That's just the nature of things. Once Your transit is done, you'll again become the creature that *You* really are. Your *Self* is a much greater and more capable being than you, the Alchemist, can presently conceive.

There will only ever be one Alchemist. Your soul, your ego, the person that you've created by living on earth, whatever term you prefer, *that* you will remain unique for all time. Your *Spirit*, your true Self, has inhabited and inspired a crowd of such souls down through the ages. Once again, that's just the nature of things. Our Spirits return to the next higher realm again and again. Life in the basement of this part of creation, the part that you call "life on earth," serves as our Creator's schoolhouse and playground.

Even the evil which you find all over the earthly plane ultimately serves a good end. In the Creator's design, evil is just dark soil for the psyche. It serves only to inform and enrich Our growing awareness of the results of Our actions. The Creator designed the slow pace at which Our natures come to repentance, shun harmfulness, and consistently act out redemption by delivering true service to ourselves and to others.

So you see? Now you can return to your childhood belief in a good and loving God. It's simply the truth.

Of course, the speed with which We learn to do only good is slowed by our morbid fear of our earthly mortality and our ignorance of our other lives. That too is part of the Creator's design. We must have Our minds stripped of all memories of our prior incarnations as soon as we embark on a new life. Otherwise, almost none of Us would be willing to endure earthbound existences if We remembered who We really are. You'd hardly want to have hordes of babies crawling off cliffs or out of high windows as soon as They could, now would you? Yet might not that be the case if We were born fully informed?

Do We get back memories of Our past lives when We "die" and return to Our Selves? It depends on what you believe *while* you die. Do you think of "the afterlife" as spending eternity in your last ego, worshiping a misty old man with a beard? If so, you may well spend an immeasurable period acting out that illusion — until You finally get bored and come back to the truth. Should you decide to commit suicide, you'll probably wander about as just you, lost in dark shadows somewhere between heaven and earth, until You come to reject the self-hatred that led to your act of bodily destruction. Those who die as materialists, or atheists, or while obsessed with the passions that inhabit the flesh, all of these can suffer the same way. They may undergo intervals of self-inflicted oblivion, half-conscious awareness, or even ghosthood on earth.

Heaven is *not* an imaginary realm. But it *is* a place where thoughts have the power to take on forms that seem to be objective. Beliefs rule Our consciousnesses; cast Our "realities." Thoughts and beliefs here can and do readily remake Our surroundings. Incidentally, that's even true on your side of creation. It's just much, much harder to turn thought into matter — or vice versa — where you are.

With patient effort, people on earth can speed up their souls' redemption from reincarnation. They just need to teach their bodies to tune in to the Creator. All mortals can do it. It can even happen spontaneously. A few have achieved enlightenment when they discharged their kundalini by accident, simply by defecating. No, really! But most find their way by learning how to empty their minds. That's why I urge you to meditate. It can help you to tune in to the music of All Is One. It plays all of the time, but on a very faint station of consciousness. So you must first turn away from distractions to get close to the Source. It's always there waiting, when Your moment has come.

Speaking of communications and tuning, clever inventors of the past century, men like Thomas Edison and Konstantin Raudive, tried using all kinds of devices to hear from the departed. Their efforts now appear to be both inspired and yet a bit premature. That's why I greatly appreciate your newest computer. The incredibly small dimensions of the components it uses to process its data open up just the right ultra-minute gateways that I need in order to communicate with your side of creation.

Now I can pass along notes that are sure to get your attention. At last, it's possible to deliver clear information between your realm and mine. You have no idea how frustrating it can be to try to pass ungarbled thoughts along using media like dreams, Ouija boards, automatic writing, mediums or channels. Talk about your interference and problems with static! It's worse than trying to use a tin-can-telephone to hear an orchestra's performance.

Incidentally, I called my message to you "Gifts" because you seem burdened by questions about your character and genetic inheritance. I think your problem may be cultural. The concept of "karma" could help to clarify your concerns. But it sounds too strange for folks from your part of the world to accept that word easily. The concept of "gifts" isn't the same. But it does convey some ideas that will help make the logic of karma more clear and familiar, even useful.

I'd really like to be your heavenly tour guide. But unfortunately or otherwise, I can't yet show you around here. You'd have to be dead for Me to do so. And I can't make a "movie" here and send it to you through your computer. Things here are too real but plastic all at once. Everything is too easily reshaped by One's thoughts to be reduced to a video. For example, when I got back after my last lifetime, I thought of Myself as being a body. So I looked like I did when I was young, in my last incarnation. After a while, I realized the advantage of becoming well-rounded. So now, I can see all around Me, in every direction at once. And I'm once again shaped like a Platonic sphere. Actually, I'm more like that point described by Pythagoras.

It's not so weird, really, once you get used to it.

But there's no doubt that time behaves quite differently here. Heaven has no history, really. In its lower reaches, like the plane I inhabit, yes, *sequence* exists. It apparently does so in order to permit "thought." After all, to do what you would call "thinking," one word or idea must precede and another must follow. But the existence of sequence does not require chronology, a final temporal order. Everything that can exist, or could have existed, or that may exist, just *does*.

Take my word for it. Seems complicated, I know. But you have to be over here to understand how time really works. To an Einstein on your plane, time doesn't fly; he saw it as standing still while your awareness moves forward. Seen from here, things are even more confusing for a mind conditioned like yours. Your cosmos has four dimensions — three spatial dimensions and one dimension of time. Yes, time passes where you are. It actually moves out in every direction, at the full speed of light. Really, it does! Confusing? Then consider this: there's a cosmos next to yours that also has four dimensions. But folks there can move through three-dimensional *time*, while one dimension of *space* passes.

When We experience emotions here, it's more a function of Our beliefs and memories of past lives than due to Our nature as Spirits. I'll show you an example: here's Someone who believes He's in Hell. His pain and anguish are all certainly real. As helper Spirits prepare new punishments for Him, you can see that His fear and anxiety are real as well. Or over there: that self-martyred Spirit killed Himself so He could feel entitled to orgasmically romp through His seventy-two fantasy virgins any number of times. Incidentally, I never really did understand the human obsession with such comings and goings. Even peak orgasms mostly just seem to snuff out your consciousness. Why not just sleep?

Just joking. You should know, though, that all earthly emotions grow out of a life's exposure to its earliest elementary extremes of pleasure and pain. By roughly age seven, your experiences have colored these simplest of feelings into your own spectrum of emotions, all tinted by the lights of what you came to value. Spirits up here finally become aware that it's no longer necessary to suffer any fear, any pain, as Our values become more universal. The higher We grow, the more only love, awe, wonder and ecstasy are meaningful parts of Our emotional repertoire.

And even here, in the lower middle reaches of the heavenly domain, the power of those ecstasies can shake One more profoundly than can any earthly drug-induced transport. In My occasional brief entry into even higher domains, I've found that mere logic and language can't constrain that blissful experience. No poems or equations can even begin to describe the Source that lies above and beyond dichotomy, where The One truly does begin to become sensible as The All.

Do I have any kind of a heavenly social life? Of course I do. But My interactions with Others are almost exclusively purposeful. I personally don't care to meet Others for mere recreation.

But as it happens, some here Who prefer to cling to Their belief in a conventional afterlife dwell in communities of the like-minded. Take a look there, at that beautiful little mountainside village: They're Swedenborgians. Lots of husbands and wives, and even the children They have here. Great folks. Their celebrations are noteworthy and, better yet, hangover free.

Look down there. Those disks and triangle shapes flying formations can actually briefly pass through to the earthly domain, albeit at the cost of an enormous effort. They're piloted by creatures who like to kidnap and deceive earthly mortals. They tell these usually terrified people that they've been abducted by visitors from Rael or Rigel or some other alien star system. Or They mutilate cattle, knock on doors all dressed in black, hand out stale flapjacks, or make crop circles, all kinds of puzzling silliness or sinister wickedness.

Now compare and contrast: can you hear the cheers of the angelic crowd from that stadium up there? You'll see a lot of those kinds of heavenly gatherings. The audience is fascinated by watching the life of an earthling play itself out. Much more interesting for Them than television was in your time. And if needed, One of Them may intervene to help the object of Their attention stay true to his or her path. Guardian Angels, you call them.

What purposes are served by My own spiritual contacts? It's often a bit like those conferences where you formulate business plans. Let Me show you an example. Here's what one of My group sessions sounded like. Let's tune in to what Everyone said.

*Hear Him? Call that One Bob. He bobbed down from a plane above this one in order to offer His counsel. He's a next-life coach. I'm the One He's coaching. Of course, I'm from this level. At the moment, I'm being guided to select My next incarnation's body bottle. I must decide on the fate that I wish, no, most need to experience.*

Yes, I said "fate." We all choose one before Our every embodiment. Can you have a free will and also a destiny? Of course you can. Especially when You chose Your fortune beforehand. There's really no logical conflict. Once again, it's a matter of how you view time. And because humans can't remember the destinies They selected for themselves any better than they can recall their past incarnations, almost all lives seem to be filled with surprise and coincidences. But really, there's no such thing as chance. We foreordain everything.

*Listen: Bob says to Me, "You'll recall from Your last Life Review that You need to learn how to better deal with liberty and love. Your earthly work at those slave auctions cost You dearly. You must learn to enhance your compassion. And You need to be far more artful in composing your life's story. Beauty is goodness, too."*

That "Life Review" which Bob mentioned occurs to Us all after each of our incarnations concludes. You've heard about it, of course: we die, We pass through a dark tunnel, We're greeted by the souls of Our loved Ones and enter the Loving Light of Our Creator. But only after We must once again see all of the events in our last life, and experience the impact of our actions on all of those whose lives touched our own.

*So I say to Bob, "I see just the life that I'll need. Look down there, at those parents-to-be in southeast Ireland. They're preparing to deliver their second of four children. Lovely people, and the circumstances their about-to-be-born will face are perfectly suited to Me. That's a life that will certainly enhance My spiritual advancement."*

Bob adds, “This life also features some folks who still bear a legacy that You must address. Don’t forget, the lessons you’ll need to learn there are many and varied. Liberty and compassion are just two.”

Bob and the committee of other life coaches who aid My deliberations agree: this is a very promising choice. I will go down to earth once again. To the early nineteenth century, as time goes on your plane.

All right. It’s time for our field trip. I’m going to let you follow Me down from heaven to me down on earth. That way you can see how human life works altogether, from incarnation and birth, and thanks to death back to Spirit again. Keep in mind that the testimony you are about to receive from the dead is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as best as the souls speaking to you consciously understood the events of their lives.

I’ve made only one minor set of editorial changes to the testimonies that follow. I’ve modified or deleted terms, epithets that might otherwise offend your contemporaries. I hope this will make you feel free to share these reports with any person you’d like.

Now, meet Tom Quinn.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Tom Quinn**

“God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.”

*Ecclesiastes 3:11 – 13 (New International version)*

At two months of age, I was christened Thomas Quinn. ‘Twas at St. Brigid’s Parish in the lovely wee town of Crosshaven, in County Cork, Ireland. The church building was then as new as was me, the both of us fresh built in the year of our Lord 1826.

I’m truly neither sad nor glad to make your acquaintance. So you’d not seem excessively familiar if you simply thought of who I was as just “Tom.” I’m told I must tell you Tom’s life’s story. Please don’t expect my narrative to be of mythic dimensions. No great heroes or villains appear in my history. Well, perhaps a few minor heroes, I must say. The core conflict that wound up at the heart of my drama wasn’t “man versus nature” or “man versus man,” though I did have a couple of such scrapes that I’ll tell you about shortly. No, my story was basically about “me versus me.” But I wasn’t to find that out until fairly late in my story.

In my childhood, we Quinns worked as tenants on a one-and-a-half acre farm between Kinsale and Crosshaven. We’d settled there because my young father had become a target for some stupid Orangemen when he lived up in Northern Ireland’s Cavan town, Breffni County. My then young and innocent father had openly expressed joy at being able to once again publicly celebrate his beloved Catholic faith. So the Protesties accused him of being a Ribbonman rebel and threatened his life.

Dad’s sober humility had greatly impressed a Father O’Brien, whom Dad had chosen as his confessor in Cavan. When the good priest was assigned a parish of his own in the South at St. Bridgid’s, he invited my Dad to join in his move. Everything both the priest and my family owned was loaded onto a single horse-drawn wagon, which Dad drove. Its cargo included the priest’s precious pipe organ, a treasure he’d earned during his earlier banishment in France. In return, Father aided Dad and his young family — my Mother and then-infant Meghan, their firstborn — to find a landlord and a modest plot we could all farm near the church.

The priest was a rarity. Like my father, he was a genuinely good man. He'd been chosen by his bishop to run a new parish because he had shown he could preach words that made coins dance out of even the poorest of pockets and purses. They'd hop in heaps into the baskets that were passed every Sunday at mass. That was the core strength of any good pastor, and Father O'Brien had it to spare. His words had that power because he had a good heart, and not guile. His lack of cunning and weak political instincts would prevent him from ever becoming a Prince of the Church. But for all of his days he led his sheep with honorable decency and a fair amount of compassion. So all of his parishioners loved him and treasured him. And through the priest and my father, I too came to love Christ.

My father always had my heart close to his, without any misgivings. Yet as I grew older, I saw that his nature was a strange mixture of weakness and strength. The son of two nasty drunks, he was an alcohol abstainer who still managed not to seem priggish or sour. Dad was determined not to deprive his family in order to indulge a taste for poitin. That's the stuff which you'd now call "moonshine." T'was the only kind of alcohol people like us could afford to abuse.

Dad expressed his displeasure much as a woman might, by withdrawal and silence, never a blow or even a harsh word. A true Christian he was, no doubt. Ready to please all, he saw the darkness of Éire's exploitations by our distant English overlords in much the same way that he looked at bad weather: it was something that couldn't be helped. So he let the oppressions pass far, far above his always modestly bowed head.

A handsome man, his softness, warmth, and love of the solace he found in Catholicism had won him a bride whom everyone saw as standing above him. She would later prove to be the steel that framed and sheltered our family. My mother was an onion indeed, a woman of layers who could be both bitter and sweet at the same time.

Unlike almost all other Irish, she had not been born into poverty. Her family had somehow managed to hold onto a fishing boat that had provided them with more than the usual hardscrabble livelihood. Like all of her brothers and sisters, my mother had been shipped off to Wales for a few years to acquire an education. When she decided marry my father, the frustrated disapproval of her intolerant parents forced her to leave them behind.

And she often reminded my father of that fact, usually but not always with a bit of a smile.

That sacrifice left her with a tireless ambition for all of her children. Whatever time she could spare was spent in sharing her only dowry, the educational treasures that were the remnants of her birthright. All of us were taught to speak both Irish and English. We even learned the arcane art of reading. Her teaching texts were whatever scraps she was able to snare from pamphlets, old newspapers, and much treasured Holy Cards. A stick scratching the dirt at our doorstep served as our blackboard. She somehow managed to inspire my interest in basic mathematics. She showed me how mentally martialing numbers could make them my playmates in what few hours were left empty in my restless young mind.

I both loved my mother and feared her. As our family's steel, it was she who wielded the switch. Many's the time that I earned boyhood welts on my backside from the force of her arms. But her rod and its teachings were the moral forces that shaped all of my life. "There is one sin and one only, Thomas, which may stand beyond my forgiveness. And that sin is to lie. The man who lies cannot be trusted. And without trust, a man has no value at all. Worse, liars are usually trapped in their own fabrications. It takes time and attention to remember the lies told to others. Few liars have the patience to bother to do so."

"Just remember: telling the truth is the essence of goodness. If you can once and always speak truly, all else can usually be forgiven of you."

I have some awareness of the folkways of your era. So I must confess to amusement at your lavish indulgences. My Ireland was far and away the poorest nation in Europe. Your "indispensable" creature comforts would be seen as alien extravagances by people like us.

Take our humble home, for example. Our one room cottage was built out of rocks held together with mud and sand mixed with straw. The same kind of stuff made up the blocks that served as our floor. Our roof was thatched out of more straw. One fireplace served as the heart of our home, keeping us warm of an evening when we could round up something to burn, and heating our meals in the one pot that we owned. Even as children, our hours were filled from sunup to sun-down and even thereafter with the many things that needed to be done to keep us alive.

Tending the crops — mostly potatoes, of course — digging new holes for our privy, carding and spinning fibers for the cloth our mother would loom into fabrics and sew into clothing and bedding, maintaining our cistern and toting around water, building a fire in the hearth or sweeping up ashes, cooking, sweeping, and cleaning our chicken shed, feeding its residents, fetching their eggs, carting our produce to market or home, working on neighboring properties in exchange for goods we needed but couldn't make for ourselves, all of these things were never enough to provide us with more than a bare subsistence to live on.

Yet for all of our hardships, I always felt lucky. My mother and father struggled as best as they could, and treated us better than most parents did at the time. Perhaps the luckiest day in my boyhood came on my seventh Christmas morning. My parents had previously swung between tolerant amusement and barely concealed annoyance at my endlessly abrasive production of tunes. As soon as I had learned that I could fairly sing songs, lip-whistle or blow through a blade of grass held stretched between thumbs, I spent most of my free time making what I thought of as music. Church music or dances, jigs, reels, polkas, marches, ballads, drinking songs, laments or dirges, it didn't matter to me. I was happy so long as I could mimic a melody from memory.

So perhaps self-defense led my parents to give me a very precious gift that happy Christmas. You'd call it a penny whistle. It was a six-hole Irish flute made out of maple, composed of two separable sections. A few years later, when such instruments began to be made out of tin, they became inexpensive to buy. But my parents' purchase of my little recorder had forced them to make significant sacrifices. To me, their gift was a key. It opened a door that changed the rest of my life.

By dint of endless and earnest rehearsals, my skill at using my flute to make music finally began to appeal to some of my listeners. It didn't take long for many of the neighbors to throw me a grin whenever I'd pass down the lane while blowing a tune. The doorway to even larger vistas opened once again thanks to the kindness of Father O'Brien. I already served his church as an altar boy whenever I could; I loved singing those Latin antiphonal chants. But it was my improvised vocal and instrumental harmonizing with the church bells' pealing that brought Father to notice my interest in music.

So he asked if instead of reciting Latin verses I'd like to pump the bellows that powered his precious pipe organ for each Sunday's mass. I was thrilled to do so, especially after I talked little brother Dennis into pumping the bladder for me after services. Dennis' aid let me practice my own skills at reading music and playing the keyboard of this marvelous tool. Soon after our parish organist, old Grandmother Sullivan, fell ill and near died, I'd become skilled enough for the good Father to ask me to play in her place.

Yes, in a couple of years I became quite good at playing the Lord's music. All that by twelve years of age. Soon I was talked about locally as a bit of a prodigy. The devil had his vengeance, as I wound up in more fist fights as the price of celebrity. I was mean enough and strong enough to win most of the time. If I won too often, I could count on a lashing from Mom. But still, my victories struck me as well worth the pain.

"Didn't Christ say that those who hunger and thirst after justice are blessed?" I'd ask when she reached for her switch. It only further provoked her. "Not when that justice bloodies too many neighbor lads' noses, boyo," she'd reply, showing her Welsh side.

Still, Sundays were to become the most reliably joyful day of the week for me. Dennis, my own little acolyte, would do his best to follow me after church services and my performances had ended. Every warm blue sky Sunday afternoon we'd laughingly run the full two miles down the path to the bluffs by the sea shore. Carefully we'd wind our way down the cliff to the shoreline, and then wade in the chill surf fully clothed. After soaking our leggings, we'd stand and stare in wonder at invisible far shores. I'd imagine America, where an Irishman like me could actually own land, where they said that fertile acreage on their frontier (whatever that was) was given away free. We'd bask in sunshine and the smells of our wet woolen clothing, its cargo of sea salt slowly drying out on our skin.

Then we'd tootle off homeward. Of course, I always made sure to pass by the Sullivan household on the way, to impress their sweet daughter Irene with the art of my flutistry. "This is for you, Irene," I'd call as I passed by the low wall of stones which bounded their leasehold. Then I'd play one of her favorite tunes. She'd respond most warmly whenever I'd play "Jimmy Murphy's Song." That was because I'd make it a point to pause at the wall to sing its curious last two lines straight to her:

*"Now Jimmy Murphy was hanged not for sheep stealing  
But for courting a pretty girl and her name was Kate Whelan"*

I'd end with a wink and move on. I knew even then that teasingly suggesting the desire for a dalliance held more power for romance than any bold deed. For Dennis, the absurdity of having to wait for my dramatic little seductions to conclude both annoyed and amused him. For my part, it was an exercise in pure vanity. I enjoyed all of the bounties of a tall frame, attractive features, a thick head of hair that stayed with me all of my days, long, supple fingers, and eyes that everyone noticed for their unusual shade — some saw them as hazel, some saw gray. It really depended on the time of the day and the angle of sunlight.

Still, inspired by my churchly service, for a time I entertained innocent fantasies about becoming a saint. The priesthood? It didn't really interest me. I finally acquired a taste for real sin upon discovering my groin's other function. It was after I entered manhood in my year number thirteen. The occasion of my sin was doubly wicked: I began to suffer from an unhealthy interest, even attraction, to my dear sister Meghan. She may have been three years older than me, but that only seemed to increase the appeal of her blossoming.

Like all children we knew, lovely Meg and I became well versed in conjugal matters at quite a young age. The basics were played out for us in neighboring barnyards come every spring. And on occasional nights after our mother and father thought their children were all sleeping, Meghan and I would lie on our pallets, stifling our giggles at the sounds made by our parents as they coupled in darkness at the far side of the room. To us, their suppressed grunts, sighs and muttering just sounded silly.

Of course, I'd already brought a typical small boy's harmings to others. As mom would inform me while lashing my backside, I was not only to halt my furious scrapping. I must also stop taunting my poor dim-witted little sister Bernice. I couldn't seem to help my dark inclinations around Bernice. As soon as I'd begin to win back her trust, I'd find myself again growing angry and impatient with her tedious slowness. Next, her anguished tears would provoke me to further anger, all tainted with shame.

Saturday evenings at church, Father O'Brien administered small penances for my confessions of curses or other venial sins. Meghan just laughed at me whenever I wickedly cheered the sight of our chickens being slaughtered. It always amused me to see the headless little dears running around spurting blood, hoping somehow to evade the death that had already arrived.

But after all, they were only chickens. Bloody creatures, which'd happily kill one another in order to stand at the top of the pecking order.

My growing awareness of Meghan's young womanhood was another thing altogether. And in fact, nothing really came of it, except after she noticed my eyeing her limbs and bust whenever our close quarters compelled her to expose more of her flesh than was customary in public. "Best you'd turn your eyes up to God when I change my clothes, young brother. And perhaps you need to have a nice visit with your little friend Irene," she finally said. In fact, I now see that Meg enjoyed my attentions. I never told her of the lusty nocturnal dreams of her that had first inspired my interest.

I finally took Meghan's advice and started kissing and fondling my dear little Miss Sullivan. Whenever a funeral or festivities encouraged Irene's father to get too drunk to notice our amorous pawings, we'd head for the straw up in her loft. But again, things never got too out of hand, so to speak. The requirements of the confessional, our commitment to tell Father O'Brien the truth of our sins, helped us to settle for mere petting for fully four years. I came to feel quite close to her and concluded that God meant us to be betrothed.

The songs all told me that I was in love with Irene. In fact, I didn't find it a great challenge to restrain my lustiness with her. Did I like her? Yes, without doubt. But truly, did I love her? In hindsight, I probably did not, and never did.

Good fortune left me at age seventeen. That winter was when both my mother and her last newborn infant died in childbirth. Despite the best efforts of the midwife and those neighbors who served as attendants, all was in vain. Mom had lived forty hard years. She'd really been unwise to risk such a conception, given that nearly one in seventy even young Irish women paid a mortal price to deliver their offspring. I was of course devastated by her loss. Even after the wake's wailings, for weeks I'd suddenly have to hide whenever I found myself pulled down into tears. I even stopped seeing Irene, for nearly a year.

At last, I learned that even grief passes.

But not for my Dad. He suffered the most. I half expected him to retreat to poitin, but he didn't. Instead, after laying Mom's remains to rest in the churchyard, he entered his own personal twilight, where mourning never needed to end. Meghan did her best to fill the void left by mom's loss to our household. In the course of accepting a much greater load, she showed the same kind of steel that had braced up our mother.

It was a year and half later when we realized that a worse fate had come to our doorstep. In the late summer of 1845, Meg came back in from our garden holding something that could barely be recognized as what should have become a potato. "It looks rotten," I said. "What of the rest?"

"The same," she replied, her voice shaking with fear.

And so lives can turn, spinning instantly and completely around on no more than what's held in a hand. Or in the meaning one finds in just two simple words.

In a very few months, we knew that the Great Hunger had begun. Now you call it "The Irish Potato Famine." The few spuds still worth a harvest were seized under both contract and force by our landlords' agents. Our produce had to be shipped back to the land's owners in Britain. What of the Irish? Simple: as always, we could either fend for ourselves or just die. Instead of potatoes and fine horses, our land now mostly produced equal measures of souls bound for heaven and emigrants, both by the millions.

The first in our family to pay the potato blight's price were brother Dennis and sister Bernice. Our small plot and best efforts couldn't yield enough to provide for us all. So at age eight, Bernice was packed off to support herself. Thanks to a helpful reply to our letter to the Master at the school my late mother had attended, we found Bernice work as a domestic servant in a modest household in Wales. And in response to an advertisement, Brother Dennis was delivered to labor in a dark English factory at age twelve. I was never to see either of them again in my life.

It was up to me to be the next one to leave. Meghan might manage to carry on in Crosshaven, earning enough to support her and dad, somehow. "Perhaps I can buy yarn and weave up some fine woolens to sell," she said. "Or find myself a rich husband. Who knows?" Her remarks called to my mind those steam-powered looms over in Britain, and Crosshaven's complete lack of qualified bachelors. I could only conclude that her talk was just a brave effort to gird up her hopefulness. And perhaps it was meant to relieve my anxiety, too. But there was no way I could stay and contribute my fair share to their welfare. I needed to support myself somehow. And them too, if I could. And that meant I too had to emigrate.

So I packed up my knapsack, pocketed my flute, and took a hunting trip up to the City of Cork. Even then, it was a good-sized seaport, just a half-day's walk from my soon-to-be-former homestead. Once at the docks I asked any stranger who looked like he had sea-legs if he knew how I might be able to work my way over to America. Sure and by then I'd lost some weight from short rations, but I was still a strapping young lad clearly ready to hold for his own. So the rude responses I got were fairly rare and were generally mild. Most simply laughed at my folly. But finally, someone directed me to the port master's office.

Once there, my heart lifted when I opened the door. I at once recognized the man who sat at the desk at the front of the office. He had hailed from our part of the County when I was a boy. So I smiled as I greeted him: "Why, I believe I've found me a Mister Patrick O'Connor! Oh, Lord, I haven't had the pleasure, sir, since I was a tot! Sure, I'm happy to see you looking so well! What might you be doing here, sir?"

"Why, do I see me a little Tom Quinn? Yes? And all of a sudden grown up into a handsome young man! How's your fine father, Thomas? And our sainted Father O'Brien? Sure and it's been too long since I paid a visit to my dear old friends," boomed Mister O'Connor while standing to vigorously shake my outstretched hand.

"Dad hasn't been well, sir. Mum passed away two years ago and he hasn't yet given up mourning. And of course, we're all of us struggling to make do since the crops up and died. That's why I'm here, sir. I'm trying to make my passage to America, even without any money. Do you think you might help me in some way?" I asked him.

"It's possible, lad. But sure and it won't be easy. That's even though I now assist the Harbor Master himself. An old

friend found me the job way back when. I figured it might be better than diggin' up spuds for the rest of me days. Looks like I was right there, for once.

"Now you need to realize that the ports all over Ireland are awash with those who wish to be refugees. And most of them are penniless just like you. Your only hope to get where you wish is to sell your strong back and any skills you can boast of. You need to speak to a ship's captain who may have a hole in his crew roster. Or even to one whose ship owner may need an indentured worker like you. The Yanks aren't taking on many new indentures these days, even though England's now stopped running in fresh slaves for America's auction blocks.

"So I'll tell you what, young Tom. Come see me fresh in the morning. I'm going to have a chat with the skipper of the Annabelle. It's the only American-flagged vessel in port at the moment. I'll let you know bright and early if there's any chance at all that he might help you to make your way over," Mister O'Connor said, carefully.

The next morning, I met him again at his office. I was pleased to see him smile as he greeted me: "Well, I may have good news for you, Tom. It looks like the Annabelle could use one more deckhand to help their quartermaster. But whomever they sign on will also have to agree to serve out at least a three-year indenture. Are you ready for that?"

"I expect so, sir. From what you've described, I can't expect any better. I'm probably lucky to have any chance at all. So sure, I'm ready for a few years commitment, and of course I'm very grateful for all of your kindness, Mister O'Connor."

"Think nothing of it, Tom. Your dad was always a generous good friend to me, especially when my late parents passed on. I'll always be happy to help the Quinns whenever I can." Mister O'Connor added that the Annabelle sailed out of Charleston, in South Carolina. She was a brig carrying a crew of twelve, he said. She had stopped in Cork on her way back from Liverpool to pick up a cargo of Irish emigrant passengers. Each of them would be expected to pay at least two hundred dollars for their portage.

Mister O'Connor said that even this impossibly large sum was a bargain, that the owners had lowered their fares because the costs of the voyage had already been covered by their outbound journey to England. Their main business was bringing the highly desired curved timbers formed from the limbs of America's live oak trees to the shipwrights of Britain. The emigrants' fares thus brought pure profit back to the Annabelle's owner.

I had no idea then of where the Carolinas were, let alone Charleston. But I could find my way around Cork's docks well enough, and so I made my way to the ship. As soon as I saw her, I knew what she was: this was what every Irishman now called "a coffin ship." On the worst of these vessels, the odds of surviving your Atlantic crossing were just a little bit better than even. This small vessel could wind up filled with over one hundred underfed passengers, each to be given short rations, foul water, and a good chance to acquire a lethal disease. The deck appeared even dirtier and shabbier than the face of the wharf.

As Mister O'Connor had instructed, I asked the gap-toothed crew member who stood at the gangplank if I could speak to the Captain. When he asked what my business was, I lied and told him I wanted to buy passage across to the States. The old sailor looked at my shabby clothing with clear disapproval. He must have known what fares were demanded and was rightfully skeptical of my ability to pay. But he must not have felt that it was his job to judge me. Instead, he simply said, "Wait there," and went in search of the Captain.

I was startled to see the man who came out to the edge of the deck. He was only a few years older than me. "Good morning, sir," I groveled and smiled. "And a Mister O'Connor at the Harbor Master's office told me to speak to you about me filling a place on your crew. My name's Tom Quinn, sir," I told him.

"How do you do, Mister Quinn. I'm Captain Kurt Olsen," he replied, cool as the ocean. "Yes, as it happens, one of our deckhands jumped ship in England last week. So we need someone who's ready for hard labor. Someone who won't set fire to the galley when he helps the Quartermaster to make the crew's meals.

"But as I told your Mister O'Connor, our ship's owner in Charleston also needs a strong back to work on his dock once we arrive. Whomever I add to our crew must first sign a five year indenture for continuous service. You'll earn about tuppence a week's equivalent in Carolina currency tokens, plus basic room and board and Sundays for free time. Are you

ready to agree to those terms, Mister Quinn?"

And so our negotiations began. "Five years, sir? I thought Mister O'Connor was told it was for three," I replied.

"He was certainly mistaken, Mister Quinn," the good Captain lied. "But count yourself lucky, as the usual contract requires a seven year term."

It sounded as though the Captain had the authority to negotiate for the owner. So I decided to persuade him that I was an unusually attractive item of value. Someone who'd make it worth his trimming some fat from the bone, so to speak. So I said, "Of course, sir, and you're being most generous, I certainly agree. But if you'd make the contract for just four years, I'd immediately sign up."

"And why should you make such a concession, sir?" I hastily added before he could object. "Because I can deliver more than just the hard labor you expect at the least. Unlike almost all Irishmen of my age, sir, I can read and write both English and Irish. I can even do maths. Why, I'm so good at numbers I keep count of the books for the priest at my church. Perhaps if you'd teach me how, sir, I can even help you to make whatever calculations you'll need to make as you navigate." Mister O'Connor had urged me to suggest this last service; I had no idea what it might mean.

"And during the long evenings while we make our way across the Atlantic, sir, I can even entertain you and the crew by playing my flute." Which I pulled from my knapsack and briskly piped "Yankee Doodle."

The Captain surprised me by breaking into a broad smile. "Well played, Mister Quinn. You've struck a happy chord with me. That was my late granddad's favorite ditty. He told me it held up his spirits in the darkest hours of our great Revolution. He served under our own General Washington," he added with pride.

"You're certainly an unusual Irishman, Tom Quinn. All right, I'll agree to your terms. Be here tomorrow morning and I'll have the document ready for you to sign. We'll be sailing by midday, so be sure to be timely."

I could barely believe that my venture had succeeded so quickly. Perhaps my luck was returning? But I had little time left to bid farewell to every person on earth that I'd ever loved. I nearly ran the entire fifteen miles that took me back home. I stopped first and briefly at St. Brigid's to thank Father O'Brien for all of his kindnesses. Then I passed on as soon as I could to the Sullivan's, there to ask Irene if she'd come see me off next day at the dock. Of course, she agreed.

And then on to home, where many tears had to be shed. We all faced the finality that my next day's parting would mean. In your world, you can cross the seas in a twinkling. Almost all of you can afford, as you wish, to transit an ocean and return when you will.

Not us. Our "goodbyes" almost certainly meant, "I'll never see you again." Wish otherwise as we might, we knew we'd come to an ending. So the next morning at the dockside was a very sad time, indeed. There was my father, head hanging down, looking even more lost than before. Meghan stood holding back sobs, her tears salted with hiccups. Irene looked as bleak as the rest. I somehow managed to hold back my tears. At least at first.

"Meghan, I've arranged with our friend, Mister O'Connor, to receive and to hold any messages I can find a way to send back to you. Please see him at least once a quarter, just in case. I'll try to send you whatever funds I'm able to save from my earnings.

"And my sweet Irene, I would hope that you can remain faithful to me, as I'd now like to ask you to become my bride. As soon as I've served out my contract, I'll find a way to send you the fare for your passage to join me wherever I've landed. Who knows; we may find ourselves with our own frontier farm. We can make friends with the heathen Indians there. Can you, *will you* wait for me, fair maiden?" I asked her.

"Oh, Tom, for as long as it takes, I'm yours. Always have been, always will be. As you certainly know," she said.

"Then I'm yours too, Irene," I replied. "You have my word on it. And we'll be together again as soon as luck and the Good Lord permit me to make the arrangements." There followed more sobs all around, more painful embraces, then up the gangplank and into work in the hold I went as directed, after waving a final goodbye to all from the deck. Soon enough, the ship set to sea.

Many years later, I could afford to buy books of my own. Thus, I acquired and read Mister Thomas Bullfinch's marvelous *Stories of Gods and Heroes*. That's where I discovered that the ancient Greeks had foreseen my ride on the *Annabelle*. I couldn't help but recognize Captain Olsen as Charon and the broad Atlantic as naught but the famed River Styx. For I realized that part of me truly died in that voyage; the rest of me lived on into a strange New World indeed.

Of that forty-two-day long journey, I'll say little. Its horrors ran a bit short of what I had feared. As one of the crew, my rations included more than just the worm-ridden biscuits and brackish water that were the primary provisions given to the four score of our passengers. The ship's doctor, when sober, did little to tend to the needs of the ill. And that was most of them, thanks to diarrhea, seasick nausea, and dehydration, plus the malnutrition that they already suffered.

We were lucky; only six of them died. It was one of my jobs to carry the morning's corpses to the gunnels and throw the remains to the fish. Despite stories told by the crew, I never did see sharks following us for the feasts the corpses provided. Both the dead as well as our living passengers had sold all that they owned to pay for their fares. So none of the corpses wore more than rags into their watery graves. None could afford shrouds. We usually burned the soiled clothes they left behind in the little oven that heated the crew's gruel. And none of the dead ever complained.

I spent most of my days on board serving the Quartermaster in any number of ways. The worst job was dumping the buckets the passengers used for their wastes. I hated carrying the pails up stairs or up ladders against the waves' endless rolling. The task always posed the risk of having my clothes soiled with the same stench as permanently lingered below decks. Vomit, dead rats' rot, and bilge water were the best of those stinks.

I occasionally found small solace on the foredeck, when the ship's pitching, bow spray and the fog were light enough to see out ahead. Then I'd look out over the rail and the sea, and once again imagine America's shores. I'd pretend young brother Dennis still stood at my side. Both heartache and hopefulness merged at such moments.

By mid-voyage, things began to get better after sundown. I had charmed Captain Olsen with my musical skills. So some of my evenings on board were spent without squalor, in the Captain's quarters. There I'd sing and play whatever tunes I could remember to entertain the Captain, his First Mate Mister Johnson, and the ship's surgeon as they drank. I even enhanced my performances by learning other Yank tunes and sea shanteys from whatever other crew members would sing for me during the day.

My music seemed to make the Captain's nightly tot of rum taste all the better. Before long, both the Mate and the Captain began to show a modest measure of personal regard for me. Both spent some time showing me how the *Annabelle's* proudest possessions, the ship's almanac, brass sextant, and British Navy chronometer could be used to navigate based on the ship's maps. My day's duties grew less burdensome as I spent more time helping the Captain to calculate our course.

My landfall in Charleston was both welcome and feared. I had almost forgotten how good it felt to walk about or just stand without pitching around. But soon after the *Annabelle's* portside had been secured to a long wooden pier and the passengers had departed, the ship's manifests were turned over to the owner's agent by First Mate Johnson. I was then introduced to a Mister Schmidt. He was a huge man, not yet middle-aged, one of the first to come lumbering up the gang-plank. Schmidt was to be my foreman. He explained to me at once, right there on the deck, how I would properly serve as an indentured stevedore.

I at once understood his methods of tutelage: "So you're the Irisher who's signed up for my crew, eh? You're a Quinn, you say? Quinn, the first thing for you to learn is that we call all of you spud eaters 'white n\_\_\_\_\_s.' That's because you're lower than dirt here.

"The second thing you must learn is that our n\_\_\_\_\_ slaves are the only stevedores actually worth something. So they're the ones who work the cranes up topside. You donkeys stay down in the hold. It's you who will stash all of the cargo. That way if anyone gets killed by falling bales of cotton or some such, it's going to be worthless mickeys like you. Remember that, Quinn: to me, you are nothing but thrown-away trash."

Schmidt outweighed me considerably. The size of his fists made it clear that, even though I was younger and might, *might* be able to put him on the deck in a fair fight, sure and he'd cause me some pain going down. And then what: I'd get

shipped back to an Irish gaol in the bilge of a ship's brig? No, thank you. "Now get down below decks, Quinn. There's twenty cases of Scotch whiskey down there waiting for a dumb ox like you to haul 'em into the warehouse."

Four months later, the harsh instructions I had to accept from Mister Schmidt's hands were beginning to exceed my endurance. My life held nothing but somber oppression. Even gaol was beginning to look more appealing. I passed all of my days and nights at work, on the pier, or in the warehouse, asleep. I was effectively a prisoner, for what little my pittance of a wage could afford me of leisure.

"To me, the greatest  
pleasure of writing is  
not what it's about, but  
the inner music the  
words make."

~Truman Capote



**1st PLACE****Short Stories**

## Waiting

By Elaine Sievers

**My name is Amanda Riperos, and I am an old person.**

In this waiting room, we are all old people, sitting quietly in our chairs and marking time together. Some of us are leafing through magazines. Some of us have our eyes on the wall television where the volume is turned low. On the screen, a smiling blonde woman talks to us. She peppers her talk with inane little laughs, telling us about a popular and trendy restaurant we should visit. Some of us close our eyes and doze. I, myself, am reading a magazine, but I put it down and pick up a newspaper another person has left behind.

When the nurse opens the inner door and walks briskly toward us, we look up expectantly. She walks with authority, and she looks cross, almost curmish. Checking a green file, she struggles to pronounce a name while her eyes impatiently scan the room. A woman nods, gets up slowly from her chair, makes her way to the door and, on the way, tells the nurse how the name should be pronounced. “Broo-nin’-ski,” she says, “not Brou-nis’-ki.” The nurse narrows her eyes and openly frowns at the woman. She doesn’t acknowledge the correction. I watch from my chair and think that this nurse is rude and insensitive, and I wonder if she is controlling, too. I wonder if she is a “Nurse Ratched” kind of person.

Sitting beside me is an overweight and ill-kept man who sighs when his name is not called. He is restless and, unlike most of us, he wants to talk.

“Have you been here long?” he asks.

“Yes, for some time,” I reply. The man already knows this.

A Minnesota resident during the summers, **ELAINE SIEVERS** winters in Arizona where she is a proud member of both the Creative Writers and the Memoir Writers of the Northwest Valley AAUW.

**Elaine’s** favorite quote for writing is by American author, Brenda Ueland.

She writes, “I learned that you should feel when writing, not like Lord Byron on a mountain top, but like a child stringing beads in kindergarten; happy, absorbed and quietly putting one bead on after another.”

When she writes, **Elaine** is quietly and happily absorbed as she puts one bead on after another.

"I've been here for an hour," he tells me. "It's busy today." He nervously shifts his body in the chair.

"Yes," I agree. I don't extend the conversation and hope he doesn't go on with his talk.

Across the room, a quiet couple listens. They sit close and hold hands. The man looks at his watch and points to it. The woman, eyes twinkling, nods her head as she points to her watch, too. They look at each other knowingly and break into smiles. I watch them with disdain, resenting their closeness and resenting their happiness, and I think their private joke is silly. My face is in a frown, but then I remember that our nurse, our own "Nurse Ratched," is a frowner, and her frown doesn't become her. I quickly erase mine and purposely look away.

When I scan the headlines of my newspaper, there is nothing that interests me. It slips to my lap, and my hands idly play with the loose pages.

The outside door opens. A new couple comes into the room. As her partner watches, the woman struggles to maneuver her walker through the door. She gets it inside, then both head for two chairs near the check-in counter. There are no smiles on these faces. The man mutters to himself as he stops at the counter to write on the patient clipboard, and I see that, while he is writing, the woman's eyes fill with tears. She sits down carefully on one of the chairs and puts her purse on her walker. Her tears overflow and slide down her cheeks before she quickly brushes them away. Seeing the tears makes me sad for the woman, and I want to walk across the room to offer comfort, but once again I purposely look away.

Nurse Ratched is back, clutching a red file this time. Her eyes narrow. In her impatient voice, she calls out a name. The restless man who has been waiting for an hour exclaims loudly, "Finally!" He gets up quickly and walks fast as he follows the nurse through her door.

I try reading the newspaper again and then sit quietly for a long time with the paper on my lap. Someone has turned the television off, so the loud and steady ticking of the wall clock fills the quiet space.

The inner door opens. "Riperos," Nurse Ratched calls into the quiet as she comes into the room. I don't bother to correct the mispronunciation of my name. I just stand and follow her to the door, walking as fast as I can manage. At best, though, my fast walk is a slow dragging shuffle, a bothersome shuffle that is the newest embarrassment I am learning to live with. To compensate for my slowness, I hold my head high and focus my eyes straight ahead.

It is a struggle to keep up with Nurse Ratched's fast pace but, while my feet slowly drag, my mind is on fast-forward. Hurting truths rush into my head. I consider them one by one. "So it all comes to this," I say to myself. "It all comes to a once-proud old woman padding along behind an odious nurse, padding along behind her like an obedient child. It all comes to this."

Then, "To Nurse Ratched, I am just one more mispronounced name. To her, I am Amanda Rip'-er-ose, not Amanda Rip-per'-ous."

Then, “Today I am NUMBER THREE on her list. She is anxious to be done with me so she can go on to NUMBER FOUR.”

Finally, in a quick flash, the summing up truth comes to me. “SHE THINKS I AM A BOTHER.”

We walk through the inner door and I stop. Nurse Ratched goes on, then turns around to wait for me. She doesn’t like waiting and gives me her best frown, but now it pleases me to annoy her. As I start forward again, I slow down my already dragging shuffle and make her wait longer. It is pleasantly satisfying to be a BOTHER.

“Right here in this room,” Nurse Ratched instructs crossly, eyeing me with suspicion. At first I pretend not to hear, but then I follow as she leads me through an open door. Like the restless man, I am tired of waiting. “Finally,” I whisper to myself.

Nurse Ratched tells me where to sit. She does her eye thing, purses her lips, and gives me one last once-over. She hesitates and looks me up and down again. “She is trying to decide if I am intact,” I think. She makes her decision in my favor, turns quickly, goes out the door and, with an “in your face” attitude, closes it with more noise than necessary. Her footsteps click as they walk down the long hall, and then they fade into nothing. I am left alone behind a closed door in a little cubicle of a room.

The new room is still. There are no comforting noises here, no muffled television sounds in the background, no soft rustling of papers, no quiet murmurs of people talking, no dependable ticking of a clock. In this room there is a hollow lonely silence, a silence that already, even in a few seconds, rings in my ears and pounds at my aloneness with dogged persistence.

I scrunch down into my assigned chair, listening to the silence and pondering my irrelevance. Tears well up in my eyes and spill over and slide down my cheeks, just as the sad lady’s tears welled up and spilled over and slid down her cheeks. I do not brush mine away. In this noiseless cubicle of a room where the silence is relentless and where I am all alone, it is strangely comforting to let my tears fall freely. By myself, I take my time and quietly cry.

After a while the tears ebb. I feel depleted and empty and I know I am finished crying. I sit still in my chair waiting for something to happen. Perhaps there will be approaching footsteps or perhaps there will be a gentle knock on the door. To mark the time, I count the ticks of an imaginary clock. The something I am waiting for does not happen.

I soon grow weary of counting ticks. Resigned, I sigh and settle in and contemplate filling the time space ahead. I think it will be another long wait for one Amanda Riperos (Rip-per’-ous), an **old person.**”

*End*

**2nd PLACE****Short Stories**

**MARGARET GRUBEL** is a native Arizonan. After a thirty year career in teaching she is now focusing on writing. Non-fiction publications include a book chapter and an article. Her great love is fiction – both the reading and writing of it. She is currently working on a novel, from which the short story “Hollow” evolved.

## HOLLOW

By Margaret Grubel

Karen plopped into one of the small student chairs in her classroom and let a sigh escape. The late afternoon sunshine poured through the west windows, highlighting the pencil marks and smudges on the u-shaped table where her arm rested. How she hated to sit through faculty meetings when there could be so many better ways to spend that time. She had just wasted ninety minutes in an inservice on how to teach the new math curriculum, and she didn’t even teach math.

Pushing on the table for support, she extricated herself from the chair and headed for her desk. Now where had she left off with her planning? She turned on the computer and then rubbed her temples, where the ominous clouds of a headache gathered. The clock on the wall showed five o’clock. She glanced at her whiteboards, which still needed to be wiped before she could write down tomorrow’s objectives.

The all-too-familiar sense of being overwhelmed washed over her. She’d be lucky to get home by six thirty or seven. Another twelve-hour day. She clicked on the icon of the classical radio station on her computer. Maybe music would soothe the savage beast. It was then she noticed the blinking light on the wall phone. A message. Great. Now she’d have to add a phone call to a parent to her list of things to do. Well, she’d get that over first.

The voice sounded familiar, but the pauses between words conveyed an odd, hesitant tone, not at all fitting with the caller. “Hi . . . Karen . . . It’s Lily. I know you’re busy . . .” Karen heard an exhale into the phone. “. . . with end-of-the-year school stuff.” That was an understatement. “But . . . could you stop by our house after work? Okay. Bye.”

“Lily, why today?” Karen’s words floated in the empty classroom. She stared at the pile of books that had to be exchanged in the book room before her first class tomorrow. She and Lily were scheduled to meet for their regular Saturday lunch in three days.

“Oh damn.” She suddenly remembered her plea to Lily to see a doctor during their last lunch together.

After forty years of friendship, the two women knew each other better than they knew their husbands. It wasn't so much that Karen had noticed a new behavior in Lily. Instead, lately there seemed to be something absent. At first, nothing she could put her finger on—just a certain fuzziness to Lily's demeanor. Her larger-than-life friend suddenly seemed less so.

Then, two weeks ago Lily had forgotten about her son's track meet. Forgetting anything was so unlike Lily. A couple of days later, Lily had lost her way driving to their Saturday lunch date. It was then that Karen urged her to see a doctor.

She hadn't called Lily once these past two weeks to find out if she'd even made the appointment. What kind of friend was she? Maybe Lily needed some moral support to make the appointment, although Lily rarely required support in anything she did. Usually, Lily ended up being the supporter. Karen glanced at the clock again. But still, couldn't it wait three more days?

She'd text Lily. That way they wouldn't have to get into a conversation on the phone. Lily would understand when Karen told her she was swamped. With some prior planning, she could get away early tomorrow. She'd run over to Lily's place then. Karen yanked open the filing cabinet drawer where she kept her purse. When she located her phone, she saw she had a text from Lily. "Can u come ovr aftr school? Its mprtnt."

Karen massaged her temples again. Lily had crossed the line of their friendship comfort zone. It wasn't like Lily's house was on the way home. The drive alone would add another hour to her day.

She rifled through her purse until she found the bottle of Advil and popped two in her mouth. She took a swig from her water bottle while her mind reeled back to the unfinished train of thought. Doctor. What if Lily had actually taken her advice and gone to the doctor? Had the doctor found something? She choked on her water, and it splattered down her shirt. If so, what did Lily's doctor say?

Karen began throwing piles of papers into her rolling back pack. She took a final drink to try to speed the capsules making a slow descent down to her stomach. What if it was a brain tumor? Lily's mother had died of breast cancer in her forties, so cancer ran on that side of the family.

She unplugged her computer, and stuffed it into the backpack as well. She'd do her lesson plans at home tonight or tomorrow morning. And she'd have to get to school early in order to hit the book room before her first reading group. She grabbed a tissue to do a quick wipe of the whiteboards, not bothering to look for the eraser. Should she call Lily first? No. She didn't trust herself to speak. She grabbed her purse from the open filing cabinet and pulled out her phone. "On the way," she texted, and shut off the lights.

As Karen drove, panic combined with her headache to form a tunnel. The road ahead of her kept narrowing until it appeared as a slender ribbon banked by blackness. Only after she heard the screech of breaks and a car horn, did she realize she had run a red light at Grant and Campbell. "Get a grip," she told herself. What if the tunnel swallowed up the road completely? What if she had an accident and couldn't get to Lily? What if? What if?

Karen turned onto Ina Road. Words flashed in front of her as if they were painted on one of the roadside billboards streaking past. *It's important*. Those were the words Lily had texted. *Brain tumor* flashed across her tunnel. What else could it be? She willed herself to breathe deeply but only managed a couple of ragged breaths.

Fear: False Evidence Appearing Real. That was her life coach, Karen's constant mantra for the multitude of worries that sprung up in her mind. She was jumping to conclusions, getting into panic mode when she didn't have any of the facts. Maybe Lily's call had nothing to do with going to the doctor. After all, everything in Lily's life had equal billing. That's how she lived—vibrantly and in the moment. Karen took one hand off the steering wheel to feel the pulse under her chin. Her heart still pounded, but at least it had slowed to a less frantic pace. She willed herself to think about the lesson plans she would work on later that evening.

By the time Karen snaked her way through the foothills twenty minutes later, her breathing and heart rate had almost returned to normal. The runaway thoughts had been contained enough that she could notice the way the dipping sun caused the Catalinas to bathe the desert in shadow.

Maybe Lily's important information had to do with their summer trip to Maine. Perhaps their rental house had fallen through. Lily was so excited with this trip their two families were taking together. Oh, well. They might still be able to find another one in the area. If not in Lubec, then they might find a place on that Canadian island close by. What was the name of the island, the one with FDR's summer cottage? She'd make that suggestion to Lily.

The Honda turned into Lily's driveway, kicking up gravel and making the familiar percolating sound under the tires. Karen almost smiled. Once again she'd probably made a big deal out of nothing. She sniffed the freshness of the air. Leave it to Lily to yank her out of her school environment. A change in routine wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

She pulled in behind the SUV, noticing Jack's old BMW parked in front of the garage. The late afternoon sunlight highlighted the splotches of oxidized blue paint. Wasn't this early for him to be home? Karen got out of the car and stretched. Maybe Jack had an early trial today. She walked up the steps to the house and then turned to admire Lily's landscaping. With Lily's care, their property was perpetually in bloom. Today the Bird of Paradise bushes showed off their orange and gold feathery flowers.

Karen didn't bother to knock. She turned the doorknob, knowing it wouldn't be locked. "Hello Lil."

"In here." Lily's voice sounded disembodied.

The first thing that struck Karen was the dimness. Jack and Lily had designed their house to take advantage of the desert light. No matter the season, the time of day, or the room, with the abundance of windows and open floor plan, the house always made you feel as if the outdoors hovered only a step away. She walked further into the entryway and stumbled into the living room.

Karen glanced at the windows banking one end of the room. No wonder. The shutters were closed. Only weak streaks of sunlight filtered through the slats. When had the shutters ever been closed? Wasn't it shortly after Jack and Lil moved in? Lily had wanted to show Karen the shutters she designed herself from the skeletons of toppled saguaro cacti found on their property.

Lily sat on the couch, knees curled under her. "Hey." Her face gleamed unnaturally white in the darkened room.

The panic that Karen had worked so hard to hold at bay rolled back in. "What's with the closed shutters? Are you sick? A stirring from the leather chair next to the fireplace made her turn from Lily. "Jack. Is that you?"

"Hi, Karen. How's it going?" His words came out automatically. "Have a seat."

Karen stood motionless, suddenly wanting to flee to the safety of her car. It felt so dark and strange in here. She couldn't even think where to sit. As if reading her mind, Lily swung her legs to the floor, and patted the seat next to her.

This was bad. It must be a brain tumor. Why else would Lily sit in darkness like this? Lily and light, the two were interchangeable. "What's—?" Her voice faltered. Karen cleared her throat and started again. "What's going on?" She looked first at Lily and then at Jack, but Jack had swiveled his chair toward the window, head down. The irregular slats in the shutters produced a ripple of light over Jack's face, making him look like he'd aged twenty years.

Lily sucked in her breath. "I went to the doctor last week."

"What did she say?" Karen couldn't stop her hand from gripping the arms of the couch.

“The bottom line—she was concerned enough to refer me to a neurologist.”

Karen felt Jack’s body tighten from across the room. “And?”

“Between brain scans, neuropsychological tests, and being pricked and punctured, the outlook doesn’t look good.”

“You already saw the neurologist?”

“Yeah. My doctor happens to be one of my former clients, so she pulled some strings to get me in to see the neurologist last Thursday. And as a favor to Kate, my doctor, he expedited the process.” Lily nodded toward Jack. “We went for the follow-up visit this afternoon.”

Karen refrained from asking Lily why she didn’t call her last week. “What did the tests show? Is it a brain tumor?”

Lily snorted. “I wish. More dignity in that. But no. Let me see if I can use his terminology.” Lily’s voice became monotone. “The long and the short of it is that my brain shows signs of ‘shrinkage and atrophy’.”

Even in the darkness Karen could see Jack’s jaw clench. She tried to wrap her mind around Lily’s words but they skirted just out of her reach.

Lily continued. “And based on the results of the neurophysiological tests he gave me, the problems I had with naming, and with certain memory questions, I have a profile associated with Alzheimer’s Disease.”

None of this was making sense. Karen swallowed. “But . . .”

Lily crossed and uncrossed her legs, staring across the room at Jack. “To be more precise, because of my age—or lack of it—my diagnosis is Probable Early Onset Alzheimer’s Disease. The doctor is still waiting for the results of the genetic testing.” A breath like a hiss escaped Jack, but he said nothing.

The tunnel had returned, swallowing up the living room. She should touch Lily, squeeze her hand in solidarity, but all she could do was grope her way through the cold darkness. She swallowed again. Her voice still worked. “But neither of your parents had—have Alzheimer’s. Your dad is still so sharp.”

Lily turned toward Karen. “You remember that my mother was adopted. She’d just begun the process of trying to locate her birth parents when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Once she started treatments, she dropped the search.” Lily’s shoulders lifted in a tight shrug. “Who knows? If she had lived longer, maybe Mom would have shown signs of early dementia.”

Karen shivered. Lily’s matter-of-fact tone somehow made the diagnosis seem more ominous. But how could anything be more ominous than this diagnosis? She rubbed her arms, as if the act might cause warmth to return to her body and normalcy to settle back into the room.

Lily sat up. “I need a drink.” She patted Karen’s leg. “Jack, do we still have that bottle of scotch?”

Jack nodded.

“Kar, what about you? Want a drink?”

The last time Karen remembered Lily drinking anything other than beer or wine was in college. After a particularly bad hangover their sophomore year, Lily had sworn off the hard stuff. “I’ll have a glass of white wine if you have some already opened.”

Jack swiveled around in his chair and stood up. Both women watched him walk across the room. His smooth, athletic gait had vanished, replaced by a stiffness bordering on awkwardness. He turned to Lily before entering the kitchen. “On the rocks?”

“Yes please, but make it a double.”

He raised his eyebrows, and his words sounded raw. “You sure about that?”

Lily’s smile looked more like a grimace. “It’s the one thing I am sure about, Jacko.”

Karen shook out her arms, which had been wrapped around her torso like a fortress. For the second time since she had arrived, she considered a hasty exit. What could she say in a situation like this when her best friend dropped a bomb of such magnitude in her lap? She should be comforting Lily, but instead, she longed for someone to soothe her. She desperately wanted to get some distance from Lily, take the chair Jack had vacated, or help him in the kitchen; anything to escape from the black hole emanating from her friend which steadily sucked her closer to its vortex. Karen pinched the underside of her arm. “Get a grip on yourself.” The tactile reprimand did zilch, and the most she could muster was to refrain from galloping out the front door.

Lily took the reins. “I don’t know which is worse.” Her fist pounded her thigh rhythmically as she spoke. “My diagnosis, or watching Jack’s reaction to my diagnosis. Did you see his face?”

Karen puffed a stream of air through her lips and nodded.

“How will we be able to have the discussions we need to have to prepare for . . .” Lily stopped pounding her leg, and lifted both her arms. “This? He can’t talk about it. Hell, he can barely look at me.” Her arms dropped back in her lap like a deflated balloon.

Karen opened her mouth, but the words skirted out of reach.

Jack returned with the drinks. “I’m going to pick up Matt from practice, and then we’ll grab something to eat.”

“You won’t say anything. Not yet.”

“No.” Jack stooped to give Lily a kiss, his eyes focused on the wall behind her, and then he was gone. Both women turned toward the sound of the front door closing.

A noise in the background moved to the front of Karen’s consciousness. Was that the dryer going? She sniffed. The scent of the dryer sheet laced the air. “Did you put in a load of laundry?” Only Lily could multitask during a time of crisis.

“Umhum.” Lily stared at the shuttered window, as if she had a perfect view of what lay outside. “Have you ever noticed how comforting the sound of a dryer is?”

“Remember who you’re talking to, Lil.”

Lily actually smiled. “Oh, yeah, right. My friend, who even sends her underwear to the cleaner’s.” She took a long drink from her glass.

A bark of a laugh escaped Karen. “I’m not that bad. Not yet, at least.”

For a while the two friends sat wrapped in silence punctuated by a sip of wine or the tinkle of ice. The dryer created a steady base note, and Karen imagined that she could feel the vibration creep up through her feet from the clothes tumbling in the laundry room, calming her jangled nerves.

Karen stared at her friend. The wine and the dimness of the room blurred her vision, so that she squinted to bring objects into focus. Apparently though, the liquor had left no noticeable mark on Lily. She sat curled into herself, legs tucked under, stirring the remnants of her ice cubes with her fingers.

Lily noticed the empty glasses and stood up. “Let me get you some more wine.” She padded barefoot over the tile into the kitchen and returned with the wine in one hand and the scotch in the other. She stooped to pour, topping off Karen’s glass and then plopped down beside her again. “Do you know what popped into my mind on the drive home from the doctor’s?”

Karen shook her head, rousing herself from her stupor.

“Do you recall that poem we had to memorize for Mr. Drammond’s class in high school?”

Karen’s forehead wrinkled. “Which one? We memorized so many that year.”

Lily turned to look at her friend. “The one by T.S. Eliot. I hadn’t thought of it since our junior year. Remember how we used to recite it walking home from school. I can’t believe my brain held onto even part of that poem after all these years.”

Through the fog of Karen’s drowsiness, floated an image of two girls trudging home from school in blue plaid skirts hiked above their knees, books hugged to their chests, earnestly reciting Eliot.

Lily’s eyes glowed in the dark room, and her arms hugged her chest as if she still held her school books.

*“We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw.  
Alas!  
Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless  
As wind in dry grass  
Or rats’ feet over broken  
glass  
In our dry cellar.”*  
“Wasn’t that from ‘The Waste Land’?”

Karen took a gulp of wine and closed her eyes. “No. ‘The Waste Land’ was another one of Eliot’s poems we studied. I think those lines come from ‘The Hollow Men’.” She wished she could keep her eyes closed, for her head had begun to pound again.

“Leave it to my dear friend to be my detail man. You’re going to come in handy, I think.”

Karen swallowed the bile that had risen in her throat.

“Alas, according to my neurologist, Dr. Remak, my headpiece is rapidly filling with straw.”

Karen set her wine glass down and took deep breaths. The wine, the headache, and Lily’s voice all combined to create a tidal wave of nausea. She tried to swim over to the other side of it. When she floundered with the breathing, she clenched her teeth, willing her stomach to obey. In the end, her stomach won out. She stumbled to her feet, tripping over the dog splayed out at the foot of the couch, and lurched toward the bathroom.

Minutes later Lily pushed open the bathroom door. “What happened? I could hear you heaving all the way from the living room.” She handed Karen a wet washcloth. “Here, put this on your forehead.”

Karen leaned back from the toilet and sniffed. “I’ll be all right. It’s probably the headache.” She tore toilet paper off and blew her nose. “The wine was a bad idea.” How was she supposed to balance the washcloth on her forehead? Karen tried different angles, but finally placed the cloth on top of her head instead. The damp coolness spread through her body.

“Would you like some tea? A nice ‘cuppa’ should make you feel better.” Lily was already heading toward the kitchen. Karen staggered to her feet and followed.

\* \* \*

Karen sat at the kitchen table looking out at the Tucson lights. When had it turned to evening? She did, in fact, feel better. She had kicked off her shoes and now pressed her toes onto the cool tile, gleaming like well-oiled leather. She took a sip of her Earl Grey and looked across the table at Lily. “So, what do you do next?”

“Begin tying up all the strands of my life, I guess.” Lily set her mug down with such force, that the tea splashed out. She grabbed a napkin and blotted the puddle of liquid. “I have to figure out how to tell the kids. And my dad. How do I tell my father that his only child is traveling on the fast train to senility?”

Lily balled up the soggy napkin and pitched it into the waste basket. “And what about my business?” What’s to become of that when my brain becomes too muddled to work?” A look of such profound sadness crossed Lily’s face that Karen had to look away. The dog, lying at Karen’s feet stood up under the table, and placed her head in Lily’s lap.

“Isn’t there a pill you can take?”

“Yeah. The doctor gave me a prescription for something called Aricept. I told Jack I’m not filling it yet.”

“But Lil, why not?”

Lily held up her hand. “I know. I know, Karen. But not yet. Not today. I need some time.”

A vibration on her hip bone stopped Karen from a rebuttal. For a moment she thought the sensation came from her own body. Her phone. She’d forgotten she had put the phone in her pocket after she sent that text to Lily. “Just a minute.” She looked apologetically at Lily. “I’d better get this.” Pulling the phone out of her pocket reminded her that she had never called Alan. Sure enough, his name flashed on the front of the phone. Karen’s words rushed together. “Hi, I’m so sorry. I forgot to call you. I’m at Lily’s.”

Alan’s voice held no anger. Just the tiniest tinge of worry could be detected. “What’s going on?” Even with that trace of worry, the timber of his voice steadied her.

Karen glanced across the table at Lily. “I’ll explain when I get home.” Suddenly she yearned to be home, to be in her own living room with the sound of the television in the background, her own dog splayed out in her lap. To have Alan next to her, nodding off in his chair. Normalcy.

She pushed her chair back, the scraping sound shattering the kitchen’s peacefulness. Karen took her mug to the sink, and rinsed it out. She turned toward Lily. “I’d better get home.”

A look passed over Lily’s face that was so foreign it took a moment for its meaning to register in Karen’s mind. Fear. The expression faded as quickly as it had appeared. Lily rubbed her hands together, and stood up. “We’ll talk more on Saturday.”

Once again the urge to escape overpowered Karen. Her fingernails bit into the palms of her hands. “Sure.” She gave Lily a hug.

By the time Lily walked Karen to her car, guilt had oozed back into Karen’s consciousness. She was leaving her friend alone in the house. Of course she should stay with Lily, but she didn’t have the energy to do so. Once in the car, Karen rolled down her window. “What time do you think the guys will be back?”

Lily peered at Karen for a moment before she answered. “They’re probably on their way home as we speak. I’ll give Jack a call when I get inside.” She even mustered a smile. “Stop worrying, Karen. I’ll be all right.”

Sure enough, Karen passed Jack’s car on the dirt road leading to the driveway. She blinked her lights. The darkness

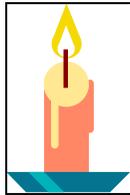
made it impossible to see Jack's face. How had he managed to hide this new knowledge from Matt? Lucky Matt, she thought

grimly. How much time did Matt have left before he'd be given the news? Days? Weeks? She wished for that same reprieve, however long it could be.

She drove home in a state of numbness, too exhausted to think.

Alan must have awakened at the sound of her car in the driveway. There he stood, with the front door open, bleary-eyed but smiling, the light bouncing off his glasses. He took her backpack from her and placed it just inside the door. When he opened his arms, she stepped into them without a word. Only then did the sobs come.

*End*



*"The flame of inspiration  
needs to be encouraged. Put  
a glass wall around that  
candle to protect it from  
discouragement and  
ridicule."*

*--Mary Higgins Clark*

**3rd PLACE****Short Stories**

**NANCY CHANEY** utilizes her profession as an adjunct history professor, and her love of storytelling to write time travel and historical fiction. Raised on an Arizona homestead in Tucson, she has a BA from the University of Arizona and a MA from Arizona State University.

She belongs to Desert Rose and Scottsdale Society of Women Writers and has been published in educational journals, the "Arizona Republic" as a community columnist, and in the 2011 nonfiction anthology, *A Mother's Wisdom*. She lives in Scottsdale with her husband, with whom she camps and hunts.

**The Railroader's Homestead**

## Centennial Tales of Arizona

By Nancy Chaney

Maggie James checked the ground for cactus thorns and unwanted critters before she plunked down in the shade of a palo verde tree. Hauling water from the well to their vegetable garden in the heat of the desert wore her down, but it had to be done. A few dark clouds edged over the Catalina Mountains northwest of Tucson, Arizona, but it would be hours before the clouds drifted far enough west to reach this old homestead. Wouldn't it be a blessing if the monsoons brought rain to her plants?

"Maggie girl, could you watch this rascal for a minute?" Jeremy James flipped open their oldest quilt and deposited their four-month-old son in the middle. "I gotta finish nailing that horseshoe on old Rupert before I leave tomorrow."

She glanced up at their mule tied to the hitching post in front of their adobe home. Rupert brayed his displeasure, as if he knew he would be stabled away from home while Jeremy worked several railroad shifts on the Tucson-to-Lordsburg, New Mexico, run.

She glanced up at their mule tied to the hitching post in front of their adobe home. Rupert brayed his displeasure, as if he knew he would be stabled away from home while Jeremy worked several railroad shifts on the Tucson-to-Lordsburg, New Mexico, run.

"Do you know how many days you'll be gone this time?" Maggie blotted sweat from her face with her apron hem.

"At least seven. But if old man Benson's leg isn't healed yet, I may be able to pick up some double shifts and that means I'll be gone at least twenty days. Do you still think you can handle the homestead that long?" Jeremy asked, anxiously.

“Me and the kids have been okay for eleven days before, so we should be all right. I got plenty of food put up in our storage room and the garden’s in good shape.”

“I just wish we had some neighbors closer than twenty miles that you could walk to if you need help. Too bad this piece of land was the best we could find near Tucson. With me taking the only mule, you are trapped here alone until I return.” Jeremy mumbled his words around a mouthful of nails while he hammered on the mule’s hoof.

“Now Jeremy, we’ve been over this before. We want to build another room on with real glass windows, so you need to work any extra shifts that come along.” Maggie rose and gave him an affectionate pat on the arm.

Etta stumbled around the corner with a half-full bucket of water clutched to her chest. She’s a good worker for just being six years old, Maggie thought.

The front of Etta’s worn shift was soaked. She obviously liked getting wet because it cooled her down, and she knew she would never get scolded when she was working.

“Is this the next row to get water?” asked Etta as she squinted her eyes toward the squash and cocked her head just like her dad.

Maggie and Jeremy exchanged grins over Etta’s head.

“That’s the row to dump it on, Etta. Why don’t you sit down here and play with Buster for a while and make sure he doesn’t crawl off of the quilt.” Maggie grabbed both pails and marched toward the well, determined to finish the watering and get supper started.

Maggie held her hand in front of her new wood-burning stove and counted slowly as she calculated the oven’s heat. The sweet potato pie was just about done, but the biscuits would need ten more minutes. Two more sticks of mesquite should hold that heat steady, she thought. The freight wagon from Ronstadt’s Hardware Store in downtown Tucson had delivered this precious new stove two months ago. She’d heard of electric stoves back East, but doubted if electricity would ever reach as far as their ranch. A real indoor stove and oven meant she didn’t have to bake everything in a Dutch oven over a campfire. Cooking outside wasn’t too bad when weather was decent, but the ramada built over the campfire didn’t offer much protection.

“Now Etta, you help your mama while I’m gone.” Jeremy held Etta on one knee while she helped him clean the family guns. “I’m leaving you and your mama the shotgun and the pistol and taking the rifle with me in case I spot some game on the way home.”

“Papa, can I shoot those javelinas if they get into our yard again?”

“No, sweetheart, you don’t touch these guns without your ma or me to help. You should be old enough to shoot by yourself when you are ten or eleven.”

“But Papa, you said there’s a mountain lion killing livestock around here. What if Mama’s busy taking care of Buster or cooking or something?”

“She won’t be too busy taking care of your brother to shoot a mountain lion. You just let her know if you see anything strange. Now hop up and set the table, Missy.”

“I think there’s a storm brewing.” Jeremy lifted his head and sniffed the air. “This breeze smells like wet dirt and creosote.”

“That’d be welcome. I wouldn’t have to water the garden tomorrow.” Maggie poured water from her teakettle into the coffee cans on the sleeping porch. Summer heat evaporated the cans of water that held the legs of their bed frames. The water drowned scorpions and centipedes when they tried to crawl up into the bedding.

“I think we better roll down the canvas curtains on the sleeping porch. I just washed them sheets.” Maggie untied the straps holding up the rolled canvas. The canvas dropped over the three screened sides of the lean-to porch, so they could be tied. “Do you think we could put a wood floor in here instead of hard pack dirt? It’s so hard to keep out bugs and stuff. That baby king snake Etta found in the corner yesterday scared the heaven out of me. I was sure it was a rattlesnake.”

“We’ll see, Maggie, finished lumber is expensive.”

Wrapping her arms around Jeremy's middle, Maggie tried to hide her fear over being left all alone for so long with the children.

Thunder rolled over the Tucson Mountains for most of the night, washing the air crisp and clean. Maggie woke Jeremy before sunup so he could load his saddlebags.

The small house smelled of coffee and fried bacon as Maggie made Jeremy's sandwich with last night's biscuits. She knew he had to cross the Rillito River before flash flooding in the Rincon and Catalina Mountains sent a ten-foot wall of water down the usually dry riverbed. She watched him kiss both sleeping children, then turned her face up with a smile as Jeremy gave Maggie a long hard hug, and he left.

Of course, she was terrified of being alone with Jeremy gone, but she was determined to keep life as normal as possible for the sake of the kids. Maggie woke Etta and the two of them made beds and swept out the floors. Etta scooped soggy bugs out of the tin cans that held the bed's legs and carefully smashed the insects that still wiggled between rocks before taking them outside.

"Run over to the storage room and get us a jar of them peaches, Sweet Girl. We'll have a special breakfast this morning. And you be careful," she added.

The storage room was dug under the largest mesquite tree for shade. A dozen stone steps led down to the small domed room made from round river stones and mortar. Here, below ground, foods stayed cool and protected from wild animals as well as the relentless summer heat. Unfortunately, rattlesnakes liked to curl up in the bottom stairs so everyone tread carefully until they could clearly see into the deep shade in front of the thick mesquite door.

"Etta, can you see good enough to also bring me a can of tomatoes? I saw a couple black widow spider webs there yesterday."

Etta ran back up the stairs. "Mama," she babbled with relief, "I checked for rattlesnakes and for spiders and I was real careful."

Maggie smiled at her oh-so-grown-up daughter. "Well, since our storage room's safe, I'll get us a bag of grain. It's too heavy for you. We can feed the chickens out back in the coop when it cools down."

With her breakfast dishes drying on a dishtowel and Etta watching Buster in his cradle, Maggie finally had time to fetch grain from the storage room. Jerking open the door, she waited until her eyes adjusted to the dark, when she felt a sharp jab on the back of her calf. Jumping back, she could see what looked like a huge Mojave rattlesnake behind the door recoiling for another strike. Not the expected sidewinder or diamondback.

"Etta," she screamed, "Bring me the shovel. There's a snake in the storage room." Maggie slowly backed up the stairs away from the snake.

Etta came running with the shovel. "Do you want the gun, Mama?"

"No, I can't shoot no gun in the store room. You just get back, you hear?"

Ignoring the fire in her leg, Maggie gave the snake room to glide toward the steps. With a hard downward swing, she cleanly chopped off the rattlesnake's head.

Grabbing the side of the stone stairwell, Maggie clawed her way into the bright sunlight. "Etta, I'm feeling real sick. That snake bit my leg. Go get my sewing kit and bring it out here to me."

Taking a small sharp knife out of the kit, Maggie twisted her leg to look at the two puncture wounds made by snake fangs. "Now run get me your Papa's whisky bottle from the cupboard."

Folks who lived in the desert often talked about what to do for a snakebite. Some stories were grisly tales of horrible slow deaths as flesh twisted and rotted around the bite. Other stories told of fast reactions to snake venom that killed you pretty quick. Sometimes folks had no reaction at all. Maggie chattered to Etta to calm the two of them. "I gotta clean the area with spirits first." She poured whisky on the two holes. "Then I wash the knife in spirits. I cut an X over the holes to get out the snake poison."

Maggie and Etta both gasped as she stabbed her leg and cut a cross over each hole. Blood welled up immediately. "I wish there was somebody here with no sores on their mouth to suck this poison out."

"I can do it, Mama."

“No, Honey. You can’t. You got a loose tooth and all that wiggling you do with your tongue is making it bleed. Help me squeeze my leg instead.”

The two squeezed as blood flowed freely into the ground. Then, Maggie opened the wound again and made it bleed a second time. Gritting her teeth against the burn, she poured more whisky on her leg and tied it with a clean cloth from the sewing basket.

Leaning on Etta, she limped back to the house where Buster’s screams let every wild critter within a quarter of a mile know that it was time to eat.

By noon, a fever raged through Maggie’s body. She could barely nurse Buster as she directed Etta to eat the last of yesterday’s biscuits for lunch. She curled up in a ball on her bed, cradling Buster. If only she could sleep forever. Waking up about six hours later, Maggie watched Etta mashing peaches and coaxing Buster to gum some of them for dinner. The image of Etta’s frightened face registered through her pain and fear.

“Could you bring me the chamber pot, Etta?” Maggie vomited on the dirt floor before Etta could even jump up and fetch the pot. She fell back onto the bed and pulled up the blanket as chills wracked her body.

“Sweetie, could you bring in a bucket of sand and pour it on the puke? Remember how your dad cleaned up after your stomach flu a couple months ago?”

Maggie finally sat up, trying to ignore the spinning in her head. “Etta, lets unwrap my leg and take a look at it, ok?”

Etta brought matches and a lantern to light. They unwound the bandages and stared at her calf. Blood oozed out of the cuts like it couldn’t clot. The skin around the bites stretched tight with its new swollen size and looked black with red streaks running up her leg.

“I think I’ll pour more whisky on this and retie it. I don’t know what else to do.”

“Mama, how soon will Pa come home?”

“Twenty more days.”

“How can we feed Buster if you’re sick?”

“You’re a smart girl. We have a few jars of peaches left if I get too sick to nurse.” Maggie tried to give Etta a reassuring hug, but she could not stop shaking. She knew Buster could not survive on peaches. At four months, he lived on mother’s milk and could not drink out of a cup.

“Could you bring in as many jars of food as you can and a bucket of fresh water? My mouth is so dry and tingly.”

A short time later, Etta’s tearful face appeared as she struggled with the bucket of water. “Mama, the rope slipped off the crank and fell down the well. I can’t get us no more water.”

“Don’t worry any, Etta. We’ll get through this and your Daddy will be so proud of us.” But Maggie knew they couldn’t last long with no water. “Come over here and let me just hold you and Buster a bit.”

Maggie forced herself to stand up and get Buster changed for bed. She swayed with dizziness and swallowed hard to keep from throwing up again.

“Mama, can I sleep in your bed tonight?”

“Of course. I can use the company. Just turn off the lantern first.” Etta and Maggie crawled into bed together with Etta carefully cradling the mom like she was the grown up.

Maggie dozed fitfully, waking up every time Etta moved. She knew Etta wasn’t sleeping either because every time they heard the wowl of that nearby mountain lion hunting in the neighborhood, her daughter burrowed in closer.

Maggie slowly opened her eyes blinking rapidly. Blurred vision made it difficult to focus on her daughter, but it was not hard to focus on her son’s screams. She had to think. There were no neighbors to help. There was nobody Etta could walk to for help. A six year old could not walk through twenty dangerous miles of desert alone with no water. She was going to die before Jeremy got home, and there was no hope for her babies. Hot tears trickled down her cheeks in despair.

Jeremy knew something was wrong when he rode into the homestead's yard. His spirits were buoyed over only having been gone seventeen days. But, as he looked around, the garden plants drooped with neglect. What sounded like the buzz of bees broke the silence. "Maggie? Etta girl? Where are you," he hollered.

Dismounting stiffly, Jeremy climbed the step to the front door. The buzz grew louder. Puzzled, he jerked open the door. No bees. Flies covered the bodies of his wife and two children. The smell of rotting flesh came at him in waves.

Jeremy spun around and barely cleared the porch before he lost his breakfast. What had happened? Had his family been murdered? Had they caught a horrible disease? Yanking his bandana over his nose, he steeled himself for the horrific scene awaiting him in the house as he forced his feet to retrace their steps. Etta and Buster were in one bed with clean bullet wounds in their heads, dressed in their best Sunday clothes and carefully covered up. Maggie also wore her only good dress, carefully laid out on their bed with his pistol still in her hand. On the nearby table was a letter addressed to him.

*Dearest Jeremy,*

*I got bit real bad by a rattlesnake the day after you left. I tried to hang on til you come home, but my leg is swollen bad. My mind wanders. Some days I dream bad nightmares all day long. I can barely move, I am so thirsty and my milk has dried up. Our Etta is so brave, but she can't take care of Buster and me. We don't even got water. I can't let our babies starve before you come home, so I have to end all our suffering. May you and God forgive me for taking our lives.*

*Your Maggie*

*End*

*Based on historical events as recounted by Jean Goodman in an April, 1969 interview. Employed as Southern Pacific Railroad Telegrapher in Southern Arizona from 1918 to 1968.*

*University of Arizona Special Collections*

*MS333 Box 35, Folder 3*

*1926 Casa Grande Incident*

**1st PLACE****PUBLISHED  
FICTION**

**THOMASINA BURKE** is a native Phoenician who loves just about everything in Arizona. She and her husband Bill reside in Phoenix, but every weekend they head up the dirt road to their cabin in Crown King, Arizona. A Registered Nurse and Volunteer Firefighter, she can also be found hiking any of the Phoenix mountains, Irish dancing, or planning a new travel adventure. *Magic Bridge* is her first novel.

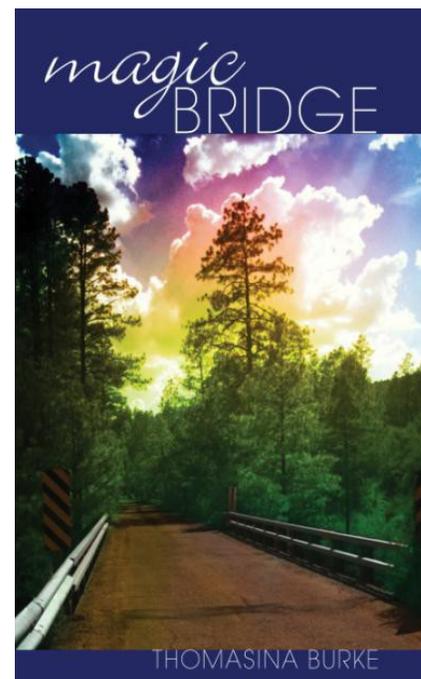
**MAGIC BRIDGE**

By Thomasina Burke

It all starts when you cross the Magic Bridge

How far would you travel to keep a promise to someone you love? The tiny hamlet of Crown King, Arizona is the setting for this story about love, travel, and completing an epic journey. Bridgette Madden and Matt Decker crash into each other—literally—in the wilderness of the Bradshaw Mountains and begin a love story with each other, Arizona, and world travel. Their adventure circles the globe; castles in Germany, the gentle beauty of Ireland, Nepal’s Himalayas, the seas of Honduras, Italy’s shimmering Cinque Terre, and finally back to Arizona where it all began. Bridgette finds the strength to honor a commitment to her husband and return to the places they loved the best.

“Now was the time for what we had talked about: our pact that we would support each other when the time came for one of us to die. When it comes down to it, this is what love is all about. It isn’t your first meeting, getting married, or making love. It is the strength to do the hardest thing imaginable to ease the suffering of the one you love at the darkest moment of their life.”



## 2nd PLACE FICTION

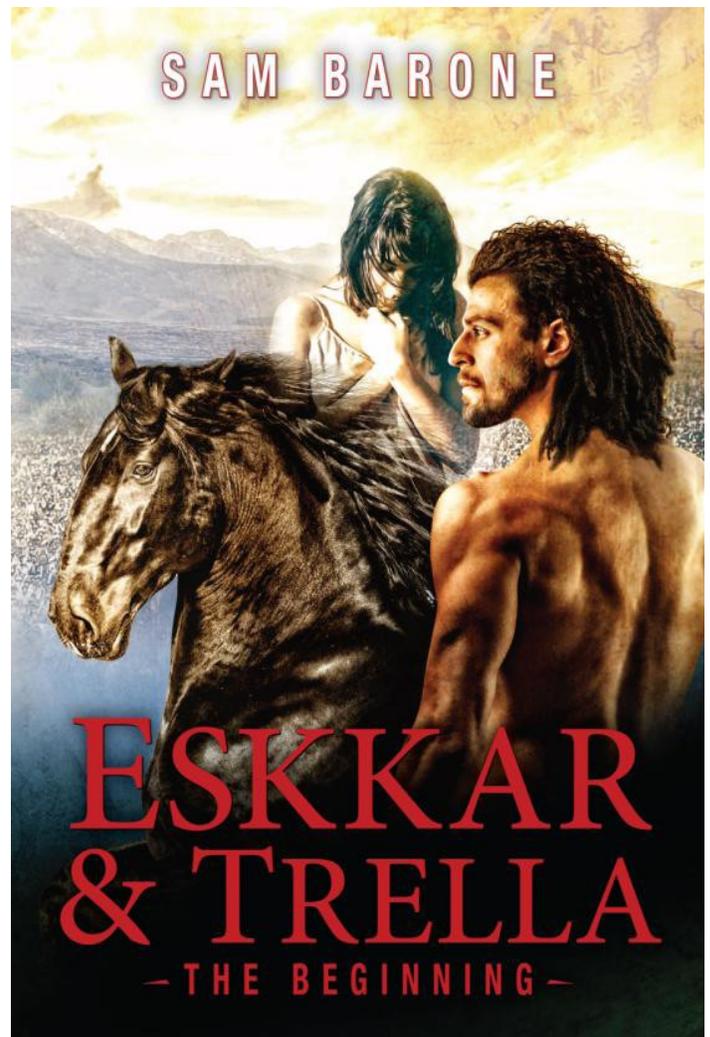


# Eskkar & Trellar— The Beginning

By Sam Barone



**SAM BARONE**





# 3rd PLACE FICTION

## CROSS ROADS

By Lori Hicks

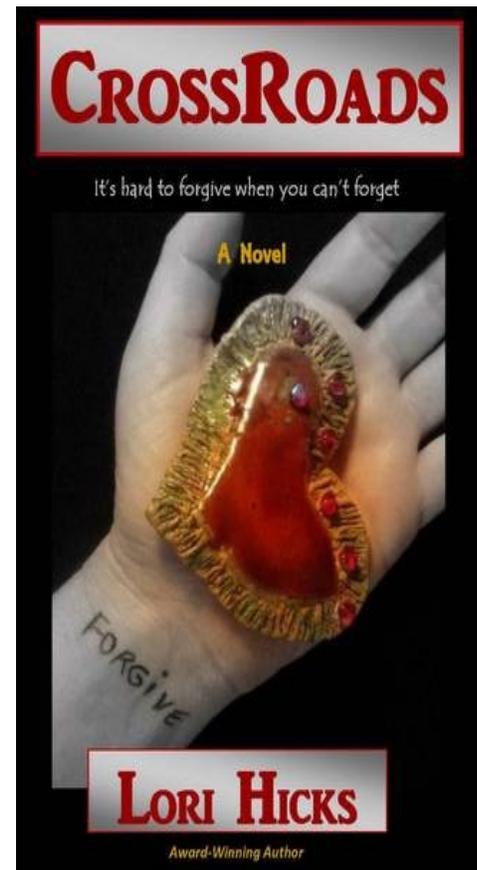


**LORI HICKS** has written a collection of short stories and essays, and she is currently a columnist with a Phoenix magazine. *Cross Roads* is Lori's first published novel. She is currently revising novel number two. Lori is a proud member of the Scottsdale Society of Women Writers and The Arizona Authors Association. Undaunted by any subject, Lori has a sense of social responsibility and devotion to community that is expressed in her writing. Lori can be found on the internet at [www.LoriHicks.com](http://www.LoriHicks.com)

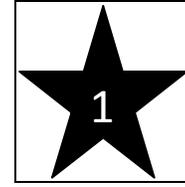
Two-time Pushcart nominee, Author **Lori Hicks** gives a dramatic and suspenseful chronicling of the intersecting lives of four unforgettable characters. As young people, each character experiences a significant, life altering event that follows them into adulthood. This startling story explores the depth and disappointment of their grief and the desire to find understanding and forgiveness.

As a backdrop to their stories a murderer is lurking in the inner-city of Phoenix. Each character is at risk of becoming a victim again. Many unpredictable and explosive subjects are all woven into this character driven novel.

*CrossRoads* is a story of Love, Friendship, Redemption, and forgiveness, stretching into a journey of self-discovery and life changing enlightenment. It is a suspense-thriller that can be an inspirational story of survival, showing how will and determination can change your fate, and in turn change your destiny.



# 1st PLACE NONFICTION



## A CHANGE OF HABIT

By

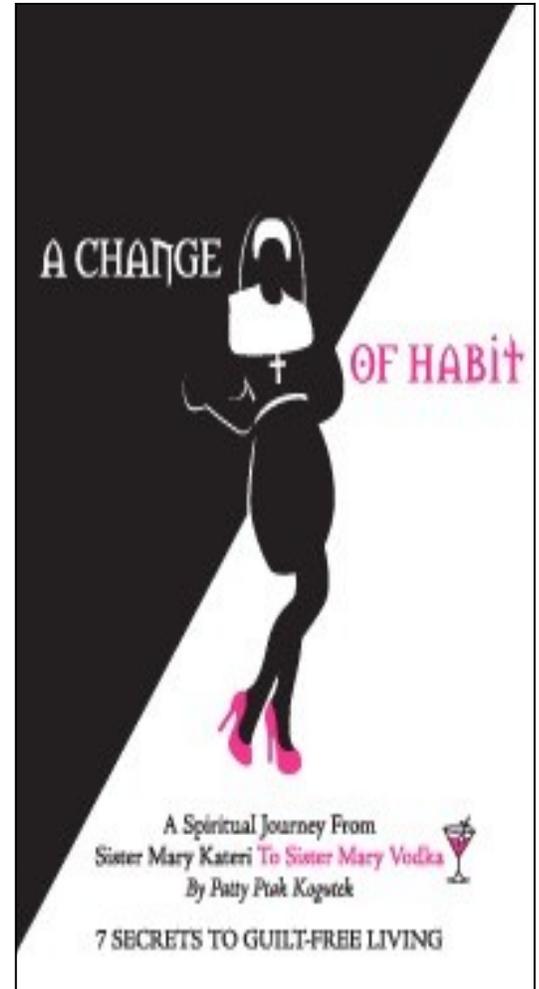
**PATTY PTAK KOGUTEK**



Raised in a strict Catholic family, **PATTY PTAK KOGUTEK** lived as a nun for seven years. After leaving the convent, she continued working in education and has a doctorate in policy, planning and school administration from the University of Southern California. Today, Patty and her husband split their time between Arizona and Montana. She is active in community charity work and a member of the Authors of the Flathead in Montana and the Scottsdale Society of Women Writers in Arizona. For more information on Patty and her journey, visit [www.achangeofhabit.net](http://www.achangeofhabit.net).

*A Change of Habit* recounts a spiritual journey that starts when a religious eddy hurls seventeen-year-old Patty into a convent in the 1960s. Her deeply embedded guilt drives her to obey the Catholic Church, please her earthly father and say yes to her heavenly Father. But in the convent, she fails to find happiness in religious rites and rules. After leaving the convent following seven years of service, she assumes she can pick up her life and move on. But once the religious habit comes off, long-practiced habits of poverty, chastity and obedience dog her into married life.

In finding true spirituality and finally listening to the God within, she shakes the destructive habit of guilt. Her story speaks to like-minded "guilt sponges," offering hope on their personal spiritual quests. She shares the seven secrets to guilt-free living learned on her journey.



# 2nd PLACE NONFICTION

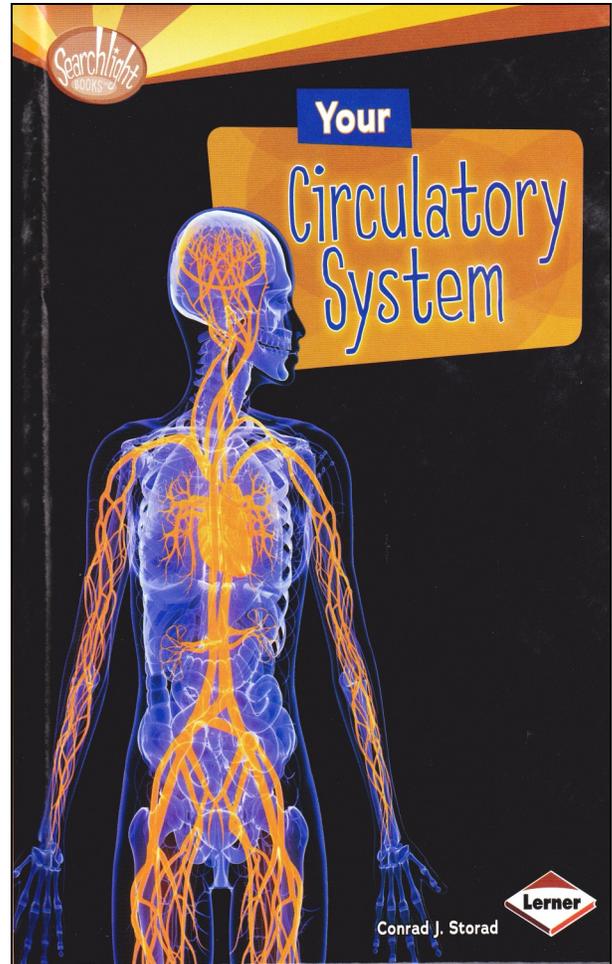


## YOUR CIRCULATORY SYSTEM

By Conrad J. Storad



**CONRAD J. STORAD** is the author of more than 40 science and nature books for young readers. An award-winning editor and science writer, he has written thousands of newspaper and magazine articles. His book *Arizona Way Out West & Wacky* was named OneBookAZ for Kids in 2012 by the State Library as part of Arizona's Centennial celebration. The book also won a national Benjamin Franklin Silver Medal for children's nonfiction. In 2001, the Arizona Library Association honored Storad with the Judy Goddard Award as "Arizona Children's Author of the Year." He is also a member of the ASU Walter Cronkite School of Journalism's Hall of Fame.





## 3rd PLACE NONFICTION



**CHERYL CARMICHAEL** left her engineering career with HP in 1997 to pursue her passion for helping the elderly. She began her career in aging with the Area Agency on Aging, in Phoenix, Arizona. Cheryl earned an AAS in Gerontology (awarded with Highest Distinction) in 2002. With the Arizona Department of Health Services, Cheryl trained and managed surveyors who inspected, enforced, and licensed Assisted Living Facilities in Arizona.

She was a hands-on and long-distance caregiver for her mother, grandmother, and grandfather.

### Dare to Care - *Caring for our elders* By Cheryl Carmichael

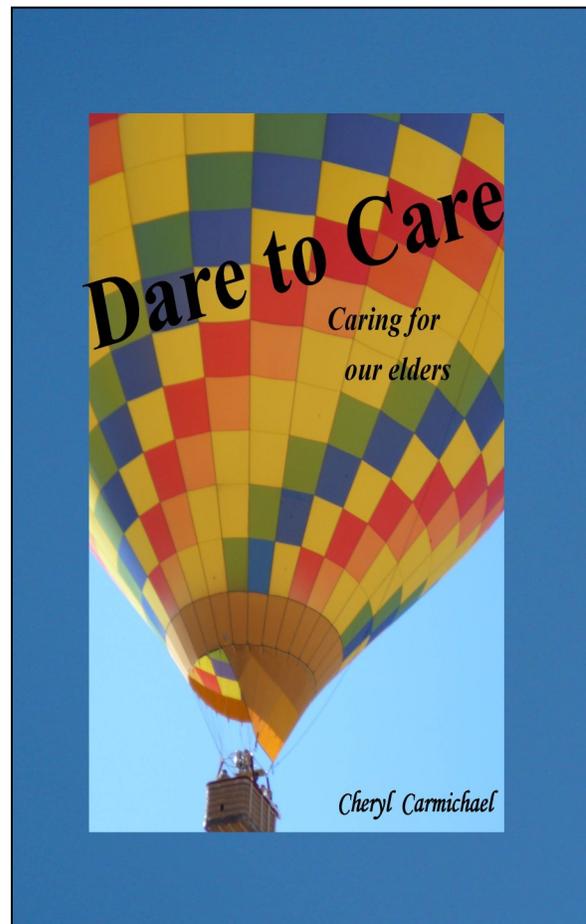
is a 196 page easy to read caregiving reference for new or existing adult non-trained caregivers.

You will learn:

The person you are caring for has unique needs. There are different types of care. **Supervisory care** is *hands-off* and **Personal care** is *hands-on* caregiving. **Memory loss care** and **Palliative care** are both forms of comfort caregiving. The first half of the book introduces these types of care. Each section provides specific topics.

Every caregiver uses fundamentals or building blocks of caregiving. The second half of the book presents: **Caregiving basics** - Communication, Infection Control, and Food Preparation and Storage. **Home safety** - Safety in the home and Fire safety. **What to do in an emergency** - Medical emergencies or accidents and prevention. **Medication, Care plans, and Medical records.** **Financial and Legal papers** - gathering and/or creating documents like Advance Directives or estate planning.

**Dare to Care - *Caring for our elders*** —  
*helps you keep your loved one living in their own homes as they age.*



# 1st PLACE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



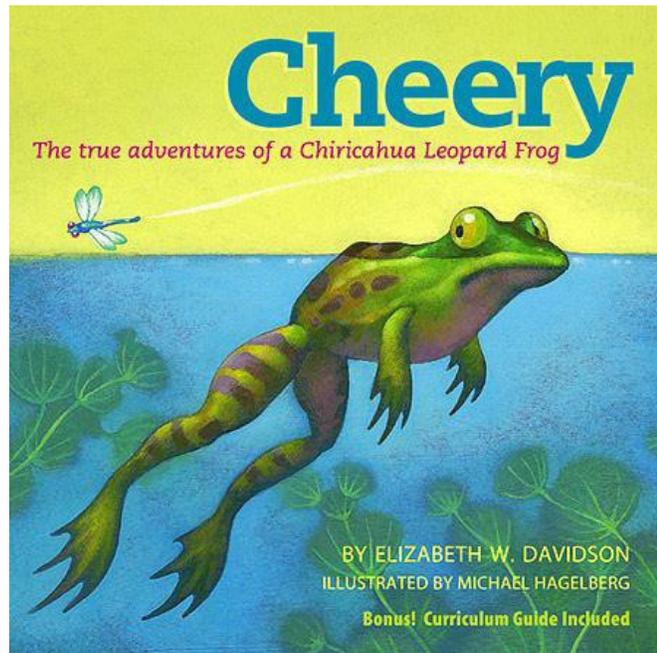
**ELIZABETH W. DAVIDSON** is Research Professor at Arizona State University, where she and her colleagues are working to isolate the various causes of amphibian declines and to help preserve these fascinating creatures. Dr. Davidson has also tutored second and third grade students in reading which led to the writing of *Cheery: The true adventures of a Chiricahua Leopard Frog*.

## Cheery: The true adventures of a Chiricahua Leopard Frog

By Elizabeth W. Davidson

Amphibians around the world are getting sick and dying, including the Chiricahua Leopard Frogs in Arizona. **Elizabeth Davidson** is one of many research scientists working to solve the problem. In her book, she tells young readers about that important work through the eyes of one little frog.

Michael Hagelberg's colorful, exquisitely rendered illustrations bring her words to life. This book is a "must have" for anyone who loves animals and cares about the health of our small blue planet.



## 2nd PLACE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



**HEATHER SMITH** lives in Gilbert, Arizona with her husband, graphic designer, Tad Smith, and their two teenage daughters. She collaborated on *'Tales of a Tombstone, Arizona Tortoise'* with her husband, the book's illustrator. She loved researching the history of Tombstone and creating a family of desert tortoises to reflect on Tombstone's storied past. Heather and Tad enjoy visiting elementary classrooms across the state where they read their book and inspire young writers and artists to be creative. Heather hopes her book will ignite a passion for Arizona history in readers of all ages.

### TALES OF A TOMBSTONE, ARIZONA TORTOISE

By Heather Smith

Tad, a desert tortoise, relives Arizona's 'Wild West' history, as he discusses the fascinating events that took place in the 1880s in Tombstone. Starting with Ed Schieffelin's discovery of silver which led to the growth of the booming mining town, the history includes stagecoach robberies, the Tombstone fires, Nellie Cashman's charitable works and the actions that led up to the gunfight at the OK Corral, with the climax of the story being the famous shootout itself.



# 3rd PLACE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



## Arizona Way out West & Wacky:

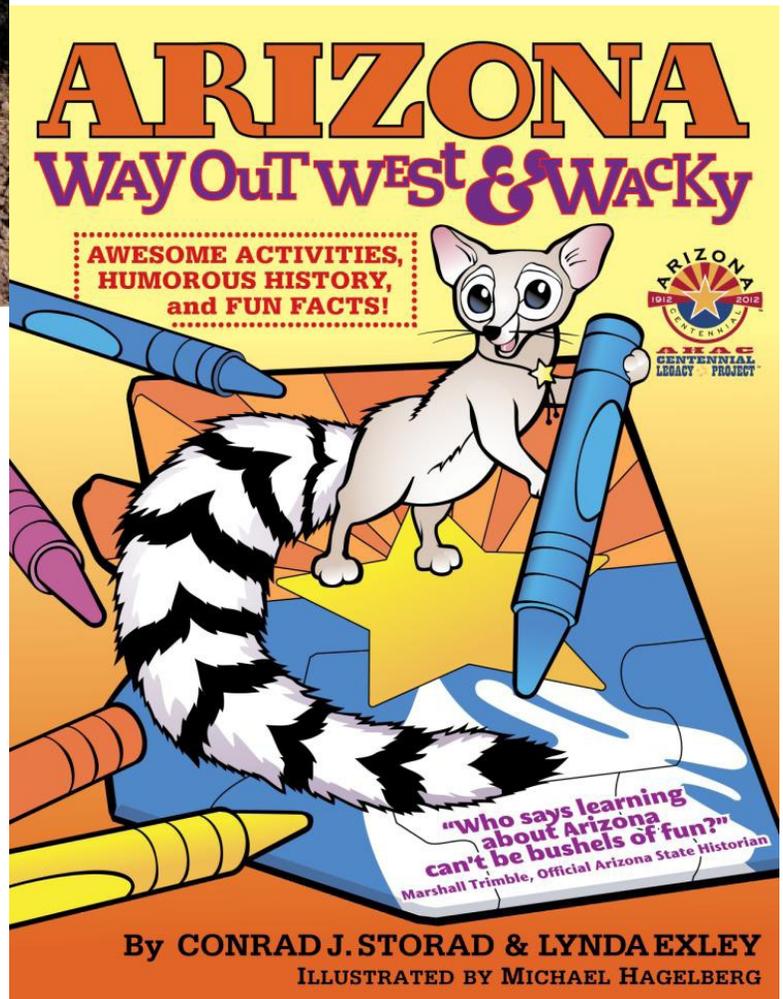
### Awesome Activities,

### Humorous History and Fun Facts!

In addition to true, but humorous, gross, interesting and wacky stories and facts, *Arizona Way Out West & Wacky* makes learning about Arizona's history fun with 60+ amusing activities including word searches, crossword puzzles, coloring pages, games, recipes, crafts, and brain busters. Finally, a history book kids will want to read! AZWOWW was written and published entirely by Arizona based creatives—all multiple award-winners in their areas of expertise. Visit [www.AZWOWW.com](http://www.AZWOWW.com)



*Arizona Way Out West & Wacky's* co-authors, **CONRAD STORAD** and **LYNDA EXLEY**, also co-wrote *Arizona Color Me Wacky* and *Arizona Way Out West & Witty*, winner of 2012 ONEBOOKAZ for kids. Author of 40-plus science/nature books, Storad's numerous honors include USA Book News 2011 Best Children's Nonfiction Picture Book and Judy Goddard Award: Arizona Children's Author of the Year. Also a multiple national and regional award-winner, Exley has more than 15 years of experience working for well-known parenting magazines and newspapers such as *Arizona Parenting*, *Houston Parent*, *LA Parent* and *SanTan Sun News*. She is co-founder of [WWW.KidsCanPublish.com](http://WWW.KidsCanPublish.com).



By **CONRAD J. STORAD & LYNDA EXLEY**

ILLUSTRATED BY MICHAEL HAGELBERG



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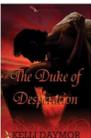


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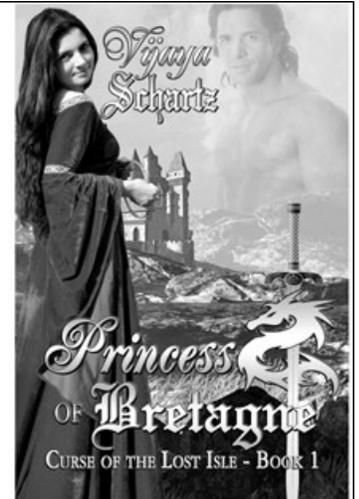
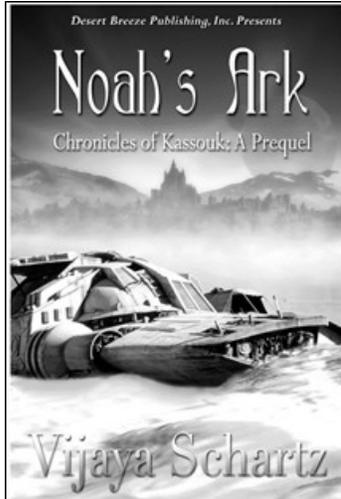












**BLIND JOURNEY: A Journalist's Memoirs by Jack Hawn.** Uncharted and beyond his control for the most part, **Jack Hawn's** career simply happened. He never studied journalism and never aspired to be a writer. After almost four years assigned to the army's public information offices, he faced civilian life with a wife, infant daughter, wild ambition, bursting optimism, unshakeable confidence - and no job. Eventually, he found work as a copyboy at a Hollywood newspaper, was paid \$5 to review plays and nightclub acts, and a year later filled a sports desk vacancy. As years passed, he earned extra income as a television dramatist and wrote TV and radio scripts for sportscasters. In 1970, he was hired at the Los Angeles Times, where he worked in sports and entertainment. During Jack Hawn's amazing 43-year career, he covered Muhammad Ali title fights, boxing at the 1984 Olympics, Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., and other celebrities. To order hard-cover, please send check for \$29.95 to Jack Hawn, c/of 21437 N 142nd Drive, Sun City West, AZ 85375. 623-584-3677 Also on Kindle.

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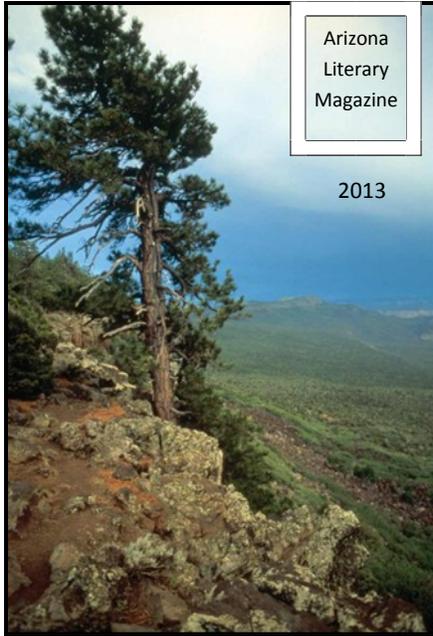


## 2013 Arizona Literary Contest Rules and Submission Guidelines:

1. Winners in unpublished categories automatically consign first serial rights to Arizona Authors Association (right to print and excerpt in Arizona Literary Magazine first). If an entry becomes published after the deadline, it is the responsibility of the author to withdraw that entry.
2. Winning entries will be published or featured in the 2013 Arizona Literary Magazine.
3. Entries will be accepted starting January 1, 2013 and postmarked no later than July 1, 2013.
4. Unpublished categories: Three copies of each entry. No author name anywhere other than on the entry form for unpublished manuscripts.
5. Published categories: Two copies of each entry.
6. Published e-books must be submitted in printed and bound form like a galley or advance review copy.
7. **ALL** published books must include ISBN, copyright dates and publisher information. **ONLY 2012 AND 2013 PUBLISHING DATES ACCEPTED.**
8. Except for poems, all unpublished manuscripts must be double-spaced with 12 point characters and one-inch margins, stapled or paper clipped.
9. Page numbers and titles on header – all pages.
10. Fill out a separate entry form for each entry. Forms may be copied or printed from our website.
11. Unpublished novels and novellas must be completed and available upon the judges' request.
12. Manuscripts will not be returned (except with requested critiques). Published books will be donated.
13. All finalists will be notified in advance.
14. Judges reserve the right to switch the category for an entry, to cancel a category if the number of entries is insufficient, or to decide not to have a winner if the level of the best entries is not up to publishing industry standards.
15. Any entry not conforming to the guidelines will be disqualified without notifying the author. There will be no refund for disqualified entries.

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# SOME OF OUR 2012 PUBLISHED AUTHORS

