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Arizona
Literary Magazine

2012
Winning
Contest Entries



CENTENNIAL EDITION



2012
Arizona
Literary Magazine
Centennial Edition

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Winners

of the

Arizona Authors Association

2012

Annual

Literary Awards





Toby Fesler Heathcotte, President Arizona Authors Association

TOBY FESLER 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, Linn'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 Book*, *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 tobyheathcotte.com.



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SCOTT JONES

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Melanie Lee, Assistant Coordinator Arizona Authors Association

MELANIE LEE

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Arizona Literary Magazine

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FRED ANDERSEN has had two short stories web-published in the last few months. Google Fred Andersen Frequent Author to go to his Facebook page for links. Also coming soon is his website, www.fxahistory.com.



Drew Aquilina

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Lisa Aquilina

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Marlene Baird

MARLENE BAIRD, a Prescott resident, has been an active member of AZ Authors for several years; this is her fifth year as a judge. In 2003 her manuscript, *Minnie and the Manatees*, won the novel competition. Marlene has published several short stories, and she has four books available at her website, www.marlenebaird.com.

MALI BERGER, a writer and teacher of writing, lives in New York City. With university degrees in English, History, Black Studies and Education, Berger taught American Literature in Michigan and Chinese Universities as well as



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Kebba Buckley Button

KEBBA BUCKLEY BUTTON is the author of the award-winning book *Discover the Secret Energized You*. She is a holistic health educator, columnist, pain-solutions

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EMILY PRITCHARD CARY varies her writing between a weekly entertainment column for Examiner Newspapers, romantic mysteries, and articles on music, education, travel, genealogical research, and parapsychology appearing in newspapers and magazines worldwide. A specialist in gifted and talented education, she presents writing workshops for all ages at schools and libraries.

JAN CLEERE has received national and regional awards for her historical manuscripts. She writes extensively about the desert southwest, particularly the people who first settled in Arizona Territory. Her books reflect her love of the west and her knowledge of western history. Her freelance work appears in national and regional

Judges



Jan Cleere

publications. Jan serves on the Coordinating Council of the Arizona Women's Heritage Trail, an organization dedicated to linking women's history to historic sites throughout the state.



Kathleen Cook

KATHLEEN COOK began her career in the Seventies as a writer and editor for the *Port of Call News*, a Nazarene newsletter. In 2006, she was named Fictional Religion Editor for the Open Directory Project.

She has written several novels, including *Jane's Remedy*, and currently works as a copy writer for Demand Studios.



Elizabeth Davis

ELIZABETH DAVIS teaches middle school language arts; her day is filled with creativity, sarcasm, and hormones. At home, she is a mom and a wife. In her non-free time, she writes children's books, and young adult fiction. Twice she has won the NanoWriMo challenge to write a 50,000-word novel in a month! When not writing, she is a voracious reader.

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Jennifer Fabiano

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DIANA FISHER has authored and illustrated many award-winning books and kits for both adults and children.



Diana Fisher

Self-employed since the Eighties, Diana was already a widely published illustrator when she was invited by a client to write a book. This began a career shift, which turned into an obsession with outlines, plots, beginnings, and endings.



Mary L. Holden

MARY L. HOLDEN is a freelance editor and writer in Phoenix. Articles she's authored have appeared in *Raising Arizona Kids*, *My TekLife*, and *Discover the Region* magazines. The direct mail resource guide, *House2Home Showcase*, recently hired her to be editor, and she is on the staff of editors at www.MiniBuk.com. A member of the National Association of Writers and Editors, Mary's website is at www.marylholdeneditor.com.

M. KAY HOWELL is one of those successful oddballs who combined a great corporate career with a wonderful home life. She and her husband had seven children of their own plus, 193 foster kids over the years, and says she can definitely relate to children. Her children's chapter book series, *The Lost Babies*, met with moderate success with over 5000 copies sold. Her current writing project is ghost writing for a Harvard professor and director for Children's Hospital Boston. The topic is self-hypnosis for children in hospice care. Of course, she is in perhaps the fifth rewrite on her true court miscarriage of justice tome. You just can't limit your topics or you get stale!

MARILYN JUNE JANSON is the owner and president 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 2011. www.janwrite.com



A.S. Johnson

A.S. JOHNSON, a published author and disabled Army veteran loves to write and read everything romance. She grew up in the Midwest most of her life and now lives in Phoenix where she enjoys writing, reading, traveling, cooking, and paranormal research. She is currently working on a poetry collection with her sisters and nieces to benefit a scholarship grant.



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Cherie Lee

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MICHAELE LOCKHART brings a diverse background to her writing: a passion for history, a fascination with human drama, and a love of literature. Embracing a variety of genres, her versatility extends from favorite historical periods to contemporary social issues. She is a retired teacher as well as a talented nature and landscape photographer, often inserting elements of visual lyricism into her writing. Her short stories and novels include historical adventure, romantic magic realism, and suspense. A University of Arizona graduate, Michael Lee lives in Tucson, Arizona. Her upcoming mystery series is set in the scenic beauty of the Southwest. www.michaellockhart.com

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John H. Manhold

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Chantelle Aimée Osman

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York and Los Angeles, and his works have been produced around the world. Sodaro now writes full time and lives in Phoenix with his wife Sue.



Susan Wingate

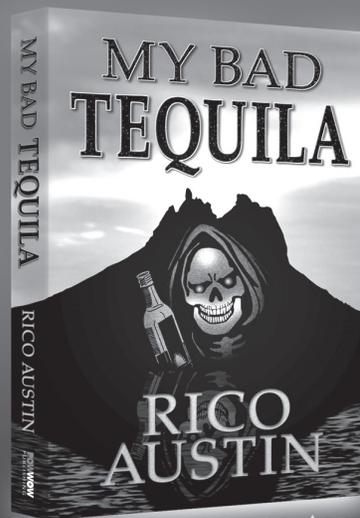
Award-winning, bestselling author, **SUSAN WINGATE**, is co-host of the extremely popular talk radio show, *Dialogue: Between the Lines*. You can hear Susan speak with Joshua Graham every Thursday at 10 a.m. Pacific Standard Time as they chat with other authors about writing and the publishing industry. Susan has written nine novels, two short story collections, a few plays, one screenplay and tons of poems. *DROWNING*, (contemporary women's fiction) her latest release has just received a finalist award in the 2011 *International Book Awards*. And, the no. 3 book in her very popular *Bobby's Diner series*, *SACRIFICE AT SEA*, is slated for publication in October

The more
that you read,
the more things
you'll know.
The more things
you learn, the more
places you'll go.

~Dr. Seuss



MY BAD TEQUILA



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MADNESS...
MARGARITAS, MEXICO
& MURDER?

Thinking about
sending your "Kids"
to Paradise
Unsupervised?
THINK AGAIN!!!

"You'll see the true
reflection of me when
the Tequila bottle
is empty," I shouted
out to the wind as I
tossed the sad, angry,
bottle-shaped mirror
to the sea.

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1st PLACE ~Centennial Adult Essay

Centennial

BY EMILY PRITCHARD CARY

Grace Voss Frederick's Affair with Arizona



Emily Pritchard Cary is an honors graduate of the University of Pennsylvania with majors in English and anthropology. Her graduate studies encompass education, archaeology, public communications and environmental science. A gifted/talented specialist, she was a member of Writers in Virginia and a state finalist for the NASA Teacher in Space Project in 1985. The author of seven published novels and winner of Arizona Authors Association's 2009 first prize for an unpublished novel, she is an entertainment columnist for *The Washington Examiner*. Several of her articles on music, education, travel, Americana and parapsychology appear in anthologies.

1905 - 2009

SOME ARIZONANS ARE born here. Others arrive by accident, linger awhile, then move on. A few end their days here wishing they had ventured beyond the canyons and dry riverbeds. But Grace Voss Frederick simply burst upon Arizona during a dude ranch vacation, embraced its unique qualities without question, and devoted the evening of her life to preserving its heritage and that of the country she loved.

Her love and enthusiasm continue to reverberate throughout the Grace Museum of America in Cave Creek. Here, this country's history comes to life in multi-media exhibits built around her personal collection of technological wonders that trace our nation's cultural and scientific history from Native American art to the Apollo 11 moon landing. By the time of her death at age 103 on January 16, 2009, she was contented; she had completed the project that had dominated every waking hour for a half century. Its

treasure trove of historic scenes is crafted to pique contemplation by current and future generations.

Who is this woman spurred onward by unknown forces to single-handedly design the building and its exhibits, supervise construction and develop the electronic lighting and audio devices?

Grace Caroline Voss came into the world November 3, 1905, destined to cut a vivid swath through American culture directly into the next century. Born in Nepperhan Heights, Yonkers, she was the third child of Reuben Tree Voss, 35 (b. 1870 in New York City), and Olga Rommel Voss, 29 (b. December 25, 1877, in Niagara Falls, New York). Her father, a printer, and her mother, a housewife, knew their daughter was exceptional. She proved them right.

At his print shop in Brooklyn, Reuben Voss published the borough's first "Red Book," the telephone directory that set modern New Yorkers apart from what was still a rural America. His

daughter inherited his pioneer spirit toward technology and incorporated it many years later in her masterpiece to man's ingenuity.

Reuben's print shop backed up to the Brooklyn Bridge. When Grace visited him at work in the company of her mother and older sisters, Ruby and Olga, the traffic on the mighty span was primarily horses and buggies. Soon she would see those forms of transportation make way for daring new inventions powered by gasoline motors and driven by dashing young men.

The 1910 U.S. Census finds the family in Westfield, Union County, New Jersey, but the 1920 Census confirms their return to New York with residence in their own home in Queens. By then, Ruby, 18, Olga, 16, and Grace, 14, had a brother named Curtis, age eight. Helen T. Beckett, age 25, lived with the family, possibly as a housekeeper.

The Voss family lived comfortably in middle-class surroundings. When Olga's passport was issued May 13, 1922, the family resided in Hollis, Long Island, a genteel Queens community that has since been home to former Governor Mario Cuomo and humorist Art Buchwald. Today it is best known as the seat of hip-hop culture.

When Grace Voss lived there, it was but a dream and a subway ride away from Broadway. She had always been an imaginative child, inventing stories and directing her sisters and playmates in plays springing from her fertile mind.

At Jamaica High School, her aptitude for drama surged to the fore. Buoyed by encouragement from her teachers, she persuaded her parents to allow her to attend the New York School of Theatre. The school founded by Elizabeth B. Grimball, a greatly admired acting coach, was located at 139 West 56th Street in New York City. There Grace studied in-



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depth facets of the craft, from the gestures and emotions required for mastery of Shakespeare to fencing and voice projection. She slipped easily into every character demanded of her and firmed her skills by emoting in a variety of roles in many plays.

Her first professional appearances were in vaudeville skits, but it was not long before she caught the attention of important

directors while cavorting on those popular stages. Taken by her beauty and talent, many urged her to audition for the legitimate theater, exactly what she had in mind. Her early Broadway run as Kitty Verdun in "Charley's Aunt" was brief. The comedy opened on June 12, 1925, and closed after eight performances. But that did not deter her from developing into a much sought-after leading lady. Each production added to her experience and resumé.

In 1927, the attractive blonde starred as Anne Hood in "Her First Affaire." Written by Merrill Rogers and directed by Gustav Blum, the drama about a teenager who seduces an older man was daring for its time, perfect for the adventurous Grace. Others in the cast were Stanley Logan, Aline MacMahon and Anderson Lawler. (Five years later, the play was filmed as a movie in London. It starred Ida Lupino, then age 19 with bleached blonde hair. Her father, the famous comedian Stanley Lupino, traced his show business legacy back to 17th Century Italy. Stanley's wife, actress Connie Emerald, was auditioning for the role of Anne and happened to take Ida along. Instead of casting Connie in the role, as had been expected, the director chose Ida, thereby launching another Lupino toward stardom.)

Grace was next cast as "Cinderella," a fairytale role that allowed her to exhibit her ingénue qualities. She continued to thrive on Broadway for the next few years, appearing with

fellow thespians Barbara Stanwyck, Spencer Tracy, Basil Rathbone, Tyrone Power, and others destined for fame in Hollywood. But a new day was dawning. Ever eager to spread her talented wings, she applied for a position with CBS, a pioneer in broadcasting about to embark on an unproven medium.

During 1931, she appeared on nineteen 15-minute experimental television broadcasts, capturing attention with beauty that enhanced her pantomimes and perfect enunciation that accented her monologues. Many of the broadcasts were shown at state fairs and public events where crowds gathered to see the novelty that few believed would develop into anything useful. So many thronged into the tents that observation was limited to one minute in order to accommodate all the curious.

Grace was indeed a beauty and so photogenic that her fabulous face adorned the covers of *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, and other magazines popular during the 1930s. Taking a cue from those experiences, she concluded that photography would be a profitable business. It took little coaxing on her part to convince the photographer father of a beau to take her on as an apprentice and teach her the basics. Even before that romance faded, she established herself as a professional photographer and opened her own studio on the top floor of the Theodore Roosevelt Mansion on 57th Street in Manhattan.

Her photographs appeared weekly in *The New York Times*. Destiny intervened when amateur photographer Claude Frederick happened by. He would become the true love of her life.

Following their marriage, Grace and Claude plunged into a virgin field, designing theatrical backdrops for the television shows that soon became the daily fare of Americans coast to coast. The only prerequisite of the scenery and props they created was the ability to withstand lights, action, and live performances. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Grace and Claude Frederick were the undisputed brains behind the scenery of major network television shows. They began by providing background stills but soon created movement with one of their inventions, a three-plex projector capable of projecting up to nine slides to create a moving effect. The prototype is now on display at Brigham Young University.

To gather props and inspiration for their work, they traveled extensively. Along the way, they amassed rare memorabilia for the dream project tucked away in their hearts: a museum depicting two hundred years of American technological progress. Until their travels took them to Arizona for a vacation at the Sierra Vista dude ranch in Cave Creek north of Phoenix, they had not considered where to construct the museum in their minds.

For several years, they continued to enjoy brief stays at the ranch.

Then they learned that a New Jersey physician had purchased the ranch and divided it into 40-acre lots. The option to purchase the pristine property was too good to turn down, especially since Claude's doctor had suggested a change of climate for his health. They were in love with the huge stand of majestic saguaro cacti and the atmosphere of the town that might have been plucked from a Hollywood oater. Settling for 93 acres of pristine Sonoran Desert, they promptly ordered construction of a mansion they named Hopi House.

When the home was completed in 1973, television's premiere set designers retired, moved to Arizona and turned their attention toward design and construction of the museum. It would occupy the property's airstrip once used to ferry local workers to a distant copper mine. Meanwhile, they spread their enormous collection throughout their home and several outbuildings. Their regular jaunts to augment Claude's rock collection coincided with Grace's yen for antiques and clothing.

Antique shops had captured her attention from the outset of her career. She continually browsed for potential theatrical costumes and was never happier than when she chanced upon special pieces from eras past to add to her collection. Heeding suggestions from friends and acquaintances or simply following her nose, she traveled great distances to scoop up clothes of all descriptions, some dating back to Martha Washington's time.

Her practiced eye located uniforms from the Civil War, raccoon coats from the 1920s and zoot suits from the World War II period. After moving to Arizona, she acquired dozens more outfits from bygone days crying out for inclusion in her planned exhibits.

Among her collection adorning mannequins in the 18,000 square-foot museum are ten bustle dresses from the 1870s, visiting dresses (worn when making polite calls in the 19th Century, called afternoon dresses in the early 20th Century), livery and bicycling outfits, an early 1800s covered wagon-type dress, a late 1800s maid's uniform, a black widow's dress with veil and parasol worn during the Civil War, a World War II nurse's uniform, ragtime dresses, bordello dresses, flapper dresses, handmade wedding dresses, lingerie, raccoon coat, monkey fur coat, and many others too extensive to list. To entertain local groups, Grace developed a show she called "Streaking Through History with Clothes On." It encapsulated every decade according to the fashions, history and music.

When Claude died of cancer in 1982 after a long hospitalization, the museum project might have come to an abrupt halt had not Grace been in charge. The spunky lady, despite her heartbreak, vowed to see their shared dream to completion.

For two decades, all who followed the winding, rocky road past great stands of saguaro

were welcomed inside her home to inspect her treasures. On the main level, a glass wall encases a solarium filled with local flora. The view flows outdoors through sliding doors where Grace would strike a gong every evening. At its sound, a deer herd congregated to partake of her treats. They were frequently joined by peccaries, or javelinas, a wild relative of pigs just as eager to share in the

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bountiful feast. Indoors, Grace often retreated to her saloon, designed after those standard in the early West, for a sip of wine. Later, she might meander into the surrounding rooms to pore over scrapbooks and contemplate cherished mementos of Hollywood films and Broadway.

The lower floor, reached by a circular staircase which Grace eventually was compelled to master with the help of a cane, was occupied initially by instruments both strange and familiar: phonographs, radios, pianos, jukeboxes and television sets, each in every stage of development, even a permanent wave machine resembling a multiple-tentacled Portuguese man-of-war and a German recording device from the 1800s.

An adjacent building was home to dozens of life-like figures positioned in intimate gatherings. Some might have stepped from Godey's fashion book, others from a 19th Century wedding party. Several were gathered around a Chickering piano dating back to 1857, once the gift of the Rockefeller family to a Baptist church. Upon completion of the Grace Museum, all were redistributed to permanent quarters in period-appropriate exhibits.

Every item in the museum is from Grace's personal collection. As far back as the 1930s, she began picking up items destined for the trash heap from shops and skyscrapers being torn down in New York City. She and Claude always returned from their travels with technological oddities that caught their imagination, never exactly certain how they would be utilized, but convinced the opportunity would arise to display them.

A stickler for authenticity, Grace handpicked Arizona artist Jason

Hoffman to create the murals and backdrops that connect the individual museum exhibits. Together they trace a visual and aural history of American ingenuity. Throughout the final months of preparation, she cruised the length of her museum in a golf cart to make certain that every item in each exhibit passed muster; right up to her death, that golf cart allowed her to delight selected guests in her favorite role as tour guide.

She welcomed Grace Museum visitors into a large atrium, its signature piece a white concert grand piano awaiting the glittering evenings of entertainment she anticipated. With her usual aplomb, she would pantomime the gyrations of a concert pianist until revealing that the audio magic was provided by a recording. Then she would jump into her golf cart and point out the theater adjoining the atrium. It is designed to showcase music and drama groups from local schools and community organizations, as well as professional performers visiting Arizona.

As the tour moved toward the exhibition hall, Grace would pause before the imposing wall of native rock facing the entranceway. It is a striking background for the display of creatures indigenous to Arizona, among them bear, cougar, bobcat, javelina, rabbit, rattlesnake, pack rat, quail and roadrunner. Grace impressed upon everyone that none of the wildlife were intentionally killed for the display; over the past decades, their

bodies have been found on or near the property and preserved by taxidermists. An enormous mural covering the adjacent wall silhouettes Native American horsemen framed by a flaming Arizona sunset.

Visitors proceed past exhibits depicting the signing of the Declaration of Independence, fur trappers, railroad gandy dancers, the Civil War, the arrival of European immigrants to America's shores, the Jazz Age, the Great Depression, both World Wars, the



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the most
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Desert.



Space Age and many other key events in history. As they pause to observe the scenes, they are surprised to behold the figures

move and speak. The shivers coursing up and down their spines subside when the guide describes the hidden technology that brings them to life. Each scene resounds with period music and Grace's own distinctive voice narrating the stories—sometimes dramatic, sometimes witty—of past events with links to the present and the future.

Here is the country doctor at the bedside of a young patient felled by one of the diseases man has since eradicated by vaccination. Farther along the street, the town barber lures customers to his establishment with a sign broadcasting his fields of expertise: “We Pull Teeth, We Sell Leeches for Blood Letting.”

The telephone switchboard operator works out of her home, relaying messages along the party line. Ever eager to join in the conversations, she comments on the latest absurd contraption. “You're going to see a moving picture? Who on earth would want to see pictures move?”

While country folk warily adapt to the new technologies, forlorn immigrants pour into Ellis Island. They have survived the ocean passage in the steerage of a great vessel that accommodates aristocrats in luxury on the upper deck. Garbed in top hats and fur coats, those above are unaware of their fellow travelers, some of whom are destined to make their way in the new world as peddlers, trundling their carts through teeming city streets. Others establish Tin Pan Alley.

Small town families celebrate the Fourth of July on the village square, spreading their picnic baskets before the bandstand while they soak up the sunshine and sing ditties popular during the Gay Nineties. Indoors, typical Sunday afternoons are spent in the household parlor, its velvet flopped wallpaper and Oriental rugs reflecting the rise of the middle class. A grandfather clock hovers over the family as Father reads his newspaper and Mother plays the organ accompanied by Junior on his violin, while Grandmother and Sister marvel at the stereopticon.

Progress meets a brick wall when an irate farmer's wife scolds the driver of a Model T ("Tin Lizzy") for scaring her chickens, but life in post-World War I cities is less rigid. Gangsters and the Jazz Age come to life in a speakeasy where flirty flappers perch on a player piano. The gent strumming a ukulele is updated in the next decade by the Big Band, followed by teenagers in pony tails and bobby sox dancing around the Wurlitzer jukebox in a 1950s diner. They make way for Elvis and the arrival of Rock 'n' Roll.

Grace Voss Frederick was young at heart her entire life. A born flirt, she would wink at all the men she encountered at the local post office, taverns, and social gatherings. She loved white wine and unabashedly would savor a glass whenever it was offered. If it was served with a side of her favorite French fries dipped in

butter, she became ecstatic.

Her birthdays were cause for celebration throughout Cave Creek. When she reached 95, pilot friends planned special excursions that allowed her to observe her monument to the country she loved from on high. For the next six years through her 100th birthday, she was treated to jaunts in a bright yellow bi-plane, a hot air balloon, a Huey helicopter and other special aircraft to suit her fancy.

She delighted in living in one of the most scenic parts of America, the Sonoran Desert. Her concern for the environment and wildlife began many years ago. Shortly after moving to Arizona, she was so outraged to learn of a plan to allow a mobile home park to be constructed on a magnificent plot of land that she marched into a meeting of the Maricopa County Supervisors and spoke so eloquently against their plan that the supervisors stood and applauded the feisty little lady who dared waylay their agenda. The road cutting through the land she saved is known as the Desert Foothills Scenic Drive.

Grace Voss Frederick received many awards during her lifetime. She was especially proud of her First Women in Communication Award from the Association for Women in Communications. In 2007, she received the Distinguished Patriot Leadership award from the Sons of the American Revolution. The following year, she was awarded the DAR Medal of Honor from

the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Grace maintained her passion for America and its people until the very end at age 103. To all who visited her museum, she exclaimed, "The past 200 years have been the most fascinating time in history. We have progressed from the establishment of this wonderful country to technological achievements our forefathers never could have imagined."

Created with love and dedication to historical accuracy, the Grace Museum for the Preservation of Americana is a monument to this nation. Admirers marvel that Grace did not officially begin work on her museum until reaching her 90s. This culminating project of her life, built on a Smithsonian-style scale, echoes the determination and work ethic that have touched and inspired the lives of many great people on this planet. In 2001, she gave 90 acres of her land containing the museum to the Arizona State University Foundation and donated \$6 million to create and maintain a center for cultural improvement. Thanks to Grace's insistence that the land on which it is located be preserved for posterity, the entire collection and the magnificent acres surrounding it will delight generations to come.

A memorial service for Grace was held January 22, 2009, at Good Shepherd of the Hills Episcopal Church in Cave Creek, Arizona, the western town where the native New Yorker is now a beloved legend. ■

2

2nd PLACE ~Centennial Adult Essay

Centennial

BY SHERRY MANN

A Fine Line in Shifting Sand



SHERRY MANN headed west nearly a quarter century ago and has since lived in the borderlands of Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico leading a double-life as a wildlife biologist and writer. She holds an M.A. in English from Northern Arizona University and an M.S. in Wildlife Science from the University of Arizona. Though writing for many years, she has only just begun to venture into the world of essay publication.

I SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN surprised to meet him. I mean I was less than a mile north of the border between southeastern Arizona and Mexico, a line lightly drawn by several old strands of barbed wire through remote desert grassland. The names of the area landmarks were also clues. I was in Montezuma Canyon heading toward Coronado Peak and its wild west vistas deep into Sonora, Mexico to the south and the San Pedro and San Rafael Valleys of Arizona to the east and west. The Huachuca Mountains spread north of the Canyon and Peak in a rugged Madrean oak woodland, like those of Mexico's Sierra Madre, of *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* fame, where Mexican bandits inform miner Dobbs (who is on the wrong side of the border himself) that they don't need no stinkin' badges to claim his gold. Neither did Coronado, I guess, when he journeyed northward through this area on his own ill-fated quest for gold in the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola. Montezuma must have been laughing from the beyond at this stroke of revenge (one more

effective than mere intestinal irritation). Maybe this is how he would "regain" his lost Aztec empire: the Spanish as well as his many native enemies might eventually drive themselves out of it toward the supposed lures of the north.

Nevertheless, I was surprised when I met him—and so was he. He was sitting in the middle of the trail, a boy of only 13 or 14, his dark-haired head face down on brown arms folded over bent knees. When he heard me, raised his head, and widened his eyes even more than I had, I instinctively asked, "Are you OK?" both to ease the tension between us and to see if he indeed was OK. OK people don't just sit like that in the middle of a trail in the middle of nowhere.

"Sí, sí. OK, OK," he replied raising his palms toward me as if trying to allay my concern and end our conversation as quickly as possible. I asked if he was sure, and he said sí, so I stepped around him and continued up the trail, steep, narrow, and rocky along this section where it winds up the south side of Montezuma Canyon onto

Smuggler's Ridge (a name even more apt today than when it was given over a century ago).

Later, on my way back down the same stretch of trail, I found the boy exactly where I had left him. He stood up this time when I approached and seemed to want to talk, so I asked again if he was OK. "Sí, sí. OK." He scanned the Huachuca Mountains to the north of us and then in fairly good English asked, "What state am I in?"

I couldn't help chuckling a little as I answered him. "Areesona," he repeated, looking again toward the mountains. "I have family here somewhere." I asked where, but he couldn't say, so I began naming towns. When I said Tucson, he repeated the name, pronouncing the c as a k, and then straightened up as he asked, "Dónde está Tucson?" But his body deflated when I told him it was at least 80 miles al norte.

"Where are you going?" I asked (in Spanish), sounding a little motherly perhaps, for I assumed that he had come with some clear destination in mind. Surely he had not just crossed over al otro lado—to the other side—without a plan.

"Oregon!" he said, chin and chest up again. I told him that was very far from here and then focused on some present practicalities, like how this trail leads to a paved road, which if followed east would lead him to a building where he could get water and other assistance. He thought I lived in that building. I tried to explain that it was a visitors center and that I worked on this land as a biologist, but he didn't understand the concept of a national

park and my Spanish wasn't good enough to explain it to him further. He stood, thinking, and then lowered his voice a little as he asked, "Dónde está la migra?"

I couldn't help chuckling again. "Everywhere, por todas partes," I said, sweeping an arm across the horizon. He nodded and scanned the landscape more closely. I filled his empty water bottle with what



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little water I had with me and told him again where to go for more and for other help and to be careful on this rough trail, especially at night. I did not radio for a park law enforcement ranger because none were on duty at the time, and once back at the office I did not call la migra, the Border Patrol. I'm not sure why, except that it was late in

the day and he was just a lone boy and for some reason he had trusted me. For some similar unreasonable reason, I didn't want to betray his trust.

I should have called, though, to have him picked up for his own safety if for no other reason. I still wonder what happened to that boy, the first of many illegal immigrants I would meet down here in the borderland as they make their mad runs al norte. For every one I've met, however, at least a thousand others have passed unseen based on the mounds of trash they've left behind. Items of all sorts turned up in the park and throughout the adjacent forest and grasslands: backpacks, clothing, Mexican blankets, plastic bottles and milk jugs (used to carry water), tuna cans labeled Azatun, juice containers labeled Jumex, black plastic bags (used as camouflage at night), toothbrushes and tampons, tennis shoes and cowboy boots, piles of human excrement (easily differentiated from those of wildlife by their accompanying paper wads and strong stench)... The trash is scattered both along trails and far off the trails, especially in the washes, and is sometimes piled up thick at "layup sites." At the park, we held "clean-up" events regularly, enlisting the public to help collect and haul tons of trash off of their public lands, one of our greatest national treasures. Whatever we hauled out was soon replaced, however. Twenty years ago when I hiked these remote areas, I could never have conceived of such defilement—such

heartbreak.

I also could not have conceived of this great migration, the causes of which apparently warrant risking one's life to get *al otro lado*—another heartbreak. The body of a woman, far along in pregnancy, is found high up in the Huachucas: presumably she had been left behind by her “coyote” and the group of other illegal immigrants he was leading. A man calls 911, says he's an immigrant stranded in the mountains, that he has broken his leg and is out of food and water: his cell phone dies before rescuers can find him. A Mexican boy shows up at the park's visitors center, says his grandmother is lost, that she fell behind the group, was disoriented and talking to herself, and then disappeared somewhere up near the Pass: rangers immediately begin searching on foot and the Border Patrol by helicopter, but the woman is never found. These are the types of stories I got used to hearing while working at the park, though they haunted me—and still do.

Some illegals would give up their journey before the worst happened. We often found them walking along the park road out in the open in broad daylight, “hitching a ride from the Border Patrol,” as we described it. Though to us it seemed they had only just begun their journey because they had barely crossed the border, they had already spent many days, even weeks, and likely all of their money just to have reached this point, and now they were either ill or injured, left behind by their coyotes, having

second thoughts about the already arduous trek, or just plain lost and worn out. So they walked the main road hoping for a lift from us passersby (an illegal act for us, by the way) but moreso expecting the Border Patrol to pick them up and give them a free trip back to Mexico.

I felt—still feel—for all these immigrants making such dangerous journeys through the rugged wildlands of southern Arizona, yet I also resent having to share the risks involved with this crazy border running business. Twenty years ago I used to hike and camp this area with no real fear, just extra attentiveness perhaps in the most rugged terrain or in really good bear and mountain lion habitat. People are the scariest animals to meet in the backcountry to me, but I rarely saw them here. Now, though—for at least the last 10 years, in fact—a bit of true fear taints every hike because I must scan the brush for people hiding there more than for wildlife and even if I see no one I must assume that I'm being watched. The hills do indeed have eyes these days. Even selecting a good spot to pee, the bane of all female hikers, has become a much more difficult and consequential affair. Camping is simply out of the question since most immigrants and smugglers travel at night as well as bandits who try to rob both groups. Throw the Border Patrol, whose agents must assume all people are potential enemies until proven otherwise, into this mix and you have a great chance of being in the wrong place at the wrong time no matter where you pitch your tent.

While working at the park, I learned to divide illegals into two groups: immigrants—those with presumably good intentions (despite breaking immigration laws) coming here to find work and maybe a better life—and smugglers—often ruthless bad guys hauling contraband, such as drug runners (often in vehicles and armed), drug mules (usually on foot and unarmed), and coyotes (those smuggling immigrants across, both on foot and in vehicles). Running into an immigrant was usually not a problem, but running into a smuggler could be deadly.

Consequently, the park was divided into various zones of worker safety based on law enforcement information. There were “safer” areas in which I could travel alone during the day; less safe areas in which I had to travel with at least one other person during the day; and no-go zones in which I could not travel at all (like south of Smuggler's Ridge). (Oddly, visitors were not provided this specific information, only some signs posted along the main park road which warned that illegal border activity occurs in this area.)

Of course, I could travel nowhere at night without a law enforcement escort. I never quite got used to taking along a ranger dressed in full camouflage uniform and armed with an M-16, handgun, and other defensive gear just to do surveys for owls, bats, and frogs; but better safe than sorry, I guess. I did prefer to keep a little distance between the rangers and me, however. An

armed ranger in uniform was always a target. I never wore a uniform or carried a weapon and concealed my two-way radio (which all employees were required to carry out in the field) in a backpack pocket. Ironically, I was safer this way.

Ironically, again, the only time I did run into smugglers on the park was during the day in one of the “safer” zones. I was hiking north from Montezuma Pass when they appeared a ways in front of me, six of them in single file striding down the narrow trail toward me. I saw them before they saw me and quickly concluded that they were drug mules who had dropped their loads somewhere up north because now they carried nothing, not even water bottles, were traveling fast, and were heading south (biggest clue). When the one out front, a boy of no more than 16, saw me, he stopped short, looked confused, and then turned to the men behind him for guidance. They, too, jerked to attention and volleyed anxious looks as they tried to figure out what to do. The trail was bordered by a steep drop on one side and an even steeper rise on the other, so running was not a good option. I had already stopped where I had enough room to stand on the side of the trail, so I waved for them to keep coming down past me. After a few moments of conference, they did, and as each passed he nodded his head and said, “Buenos días.” At least they were polite—and empty-handed.

Beyond polite to downright helpful some illegals could be. Once when another park employee was

driving the winding dirt road up to Montezuma Pass, she pulled over because she thought something was wrong with the engine of her park vehicle, an old Suburban which rangers had seized from drug runners on the park a number of years prior. As she stood by the open hood of the Suburban, a man stepped out of the oaks and junipers on the side of the road nearby and asked if she needed help. The middle-aged Mexican walked with



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a limp either from some past injury or a birth defect. When he reached the Suburban he immediately started checking out the engine. The surprised park employee said thanks, that that was really nice of him, and then confessed, “I have to tell you that I’ve already called for help, and the law enforcement rangers are coming. When they get here, they’ll take you into custody and call the Border Patrol.”

Instead of making a break for it, though, the man shrugged and said,

“That’s OK. I’ll just come back across tomorrow or the next day.” Obviously a veteran crosser in this area, he knew he would be deported nearby and could easily start his trek anew afterward, especially since he was traveling on his own and didn’t have to find and pay a coyote to lead him across the border or onward into the great gabacho north.

So goes this endless game of cat and mouse along the border. In Montezuma Canyon, the cats—park rangers and Border Patrol agents—have to chase the mice—illegal border crossers—mostly on foot and mostly uphill from the canyon bottom (already over 5,000 feet in elevation itself) into the mountains (about 9,000 feet in elevation at their highest peaks). One ranger, who liked the extra challenge and effort of tracking on foot, said that one time he chased a group up toward extra steep Montezuma Peak. The group climbed long and hard, but finally stopped in exhaustion. “When I caught up with them, about ready to cough up a lung,” the ranger said in his thick Oklahoma accent, “the first thing I did was ask if they needed water, ‘Necesito agua?’ I said—and they all offered me their water bottles.” He laughed at his mistake, having said *necesito* (I need) instead of *necesitan* (you need) in his question. He was also impressed by their generosity, but not especially surprised by it.

Another time, he said, he was tracking a group through a wash quite a ways and figured they were pretty far ahead of him. Then, as

he ducked through a thicket of mesquite and raised his head on the other side, there sat the group right in front of him. The ranger said he “screamed like a girl” in surprise, but the illegals didn’t run or otherwise take advantage of his awkward position. I asked if they had laughed at his scream (because I was laughing at the thought of it). He thought a second, and then said, “Yes, yes, they did,” and then seemed even more pleased with his story because of it.

The capstone of his “friendly mouse” tales was one a Border Patrol agent had told him. The agent said that one time when he and some others were chasing a group of illegals full-speed and pell-mell through the forest, one of the agents caught his foot on a root and fell hard. As he lay there trying to catch his breath and raise himself up, a few of the illegals he had been chasing actually stopped and came back, helped him up, and asked if he was OK. Good sportsmanship has to be appreciated wherever it is found.

The Mexican illegals (“undocumented immigrants” or UDIs, as the park rangers called them) were perhaps friendlier than most, more neighborly we might say than OTMs (illegals who were “other than Mexican”). One of the rangers told me that the Mexicans usually did as they were told when caught. That is, if a ranger yelled “Alto!” to a group at close range, the Mexicans would usually stop and subsequently follow further instructions as given. “But OTMs,” he said, “just run like crazy.” He

thought they ran for broke probably because they had much more to lose by getting caught than most Mexican crossers because the OTMs had come further, from countries south of Mexico, and consequently had invested more money, energy, and hardship to get to the U.S. Second chances at crossing were much less likely for them.

The ranger had just chased a large group of about 30 or more OTMs that morning up at the Pass. He had caught some of them, but most got away. “They were Guatemalans,” he said of the ones he had captured. “Very nice. I felt bad for them. They said they’d been traveling on foot for over 30 days straight to get here.” He shook his head, looking not so happy with having done his job well that day. Good sportsmanship, again, this time from the other side. How does it endure at all in a game so hard to win—which neither side can win, it seems?

The game often gets rough, of course, and full of bad sports, real bad guys who play to win at all costs. Scouts, working as or for smugglers, often manned the hilltops in the park both day and night. They used high-tech equipment like scopes, night-vision devices, GPSs, cell phones, and two-way radios to recon smuggling routes and monitor law enforcement activities. Park rangers told me that the scouts sometimes broke into the law enforcement channels of their two-way radios and taunted and threatened them. “I see you. I know who you are. I know where you live,” they would warn.

Some of the rangers were actually required to live on the park at that time, a protocol which most parks follow. Luckily this park has since eliminated that protocol, I hear.

My radio did not receive the law enforcement channels, so I was spared such intimidation. But when I arrived at a location in the southern end of the park near Smuggler’s Ridge one day to survey agaves and realized that I had forgotten my radio, a law enforcement ranger passing by lent me one of his to use so I wouldn’t have to return to the office for mine. I kept the volume on the radio low since it was quite a chatterbox as the rangers, according to protocol, constantly communicated about their activities. Then sometime later, amidst my Zen of measuring agaves, I heard rushes of raised voices on the radio and then “Shots fired! Shots fired!” I turned up the volume and called the other biologist working with me over to listen.

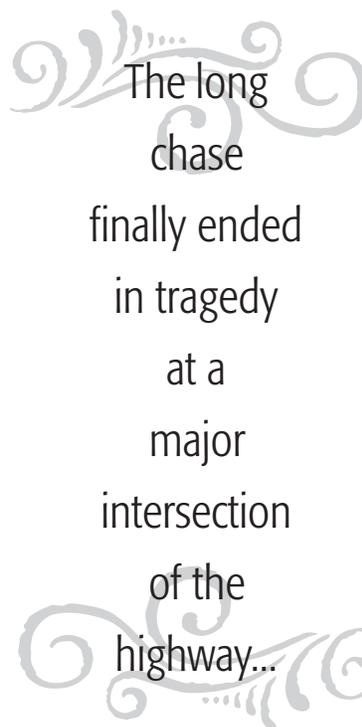
Our rangers had apparently tried to stop a pick-up truck hauling a refrigerator over Montezuma Pass. (Anywhere else this would not have been a suspicious activity, but here it was; no one hauls appliances through the outback of Montezuma Pass, from nowhere to nowhere.) The truck pulled over, but when the rangers stepped out of their vehicle, the truck turned and tried to ram them. A ranger fired several times and thought he hit the driver of the truck, but the driver kept going. A chase ensued, truck last seen heading east. The only road they

could take south to the border was the one along which we had parked our vehicle. I could already see dirt-road dust in the distance from that direction—the Border Patrol arriving on the scene. I suggested that we run to the nearest arroyo and take cover since our location could end up being the center of a firefight. As we ran we couldn't help stating the obvious to help get our heads around it, "We're just biologists out measuring agaves, in a national park no less; why are we running for our lives?!" Because we had to; we didn't want to die while out just measuring agaves.

The rangers told the Border Patrol who and where we were, so after a bit I braved walking out of the arroyo, hands raised, toward the Border Patrol agent who had of course stopped by our vehicle, the old Suburban again, which used to be and still looked like a typical Mexican drug running vehicle. The truck hauling the refrigerator cut through a picnic area and then drove cross-country along the foothills of Smuggler's Ridge just to the west of us and through the barbed wire fence back into Mexico. That terrain is difficult to walk through, let alone drive through at top speed. Whatever was in that refrigerator was worth dying for—and killing for—it seems; getting caught and losing the cargo was apparently not an option, probably not for fear of facing U.S. law but of suffering cartel punishment.

Other biologists I knew and occasionally worked with

encountered an even scarier type of drug runners. I called these smugglers the "ninja runners" because they dressed in black, were usually armed, and traveled on foot like stealthy, well-trained military units. The biologists were out baiting mammal traps—at the other end of the Huachuca Mountains, a good 20 miles north of the park and border, and very near a major



state highway, and on an Army fort, no less—when they saw the "ninjas" with packs on their backs moving fast in a line through some grassland. Unfortunately, the "ninjas" also saw the biologists and stopped and stared hard at them. At least the front and rear "ninjas" appeared to be carrying rifles, so the biologists headed back to their vehicle. The armed "ninjas" followed and kept following, and as the biologists drove away, they could still see the menacing figures nearby, still staring. Again, losing whatever they were hauling was a

less appealing option than murder perhaps for these smugglers; and the biologists, of course, didn't want to die while out just baiting mammal traps.

Even when not "on duty" as a biologist in the Huachuca outback, I encountered dangerous smugglers right in town. One Saturday afternoon, when heading north along the state highway, just running to Target for some shopping, I saw a white pick-up truck coming up fast behind me and then the flashing lights of a police car a ways behind the truck. I moved to the shoulder of the road and complained to my husband in the passenger seat, "Why doesn't that truck move over and let the police pass?" Through the rest of our shopping jaunt, we saw lots more police activity and joked about how town was hoppin' that day. Later though, we learned that the police and Border Patrol had been chasing that white pick-up truck I had complained about all over the place. The driver was a coyote hauling a large group of illegal immigrants, who must have been lying low in the bed of the truck when it passed me since I didn't see them. The long chase finally ended in tragedy at a major intersection of the highway when the truck slammed into traffic stopped there, after swerving to avoid tire deflation spikes set by police. Some witnesses sitting in that traffic described the scene as bodies just flying through the air. Most of the immigrants were seriously injured and several died. So did a local American

couple in one of the front vehicles stopped at the intersection; they were a pair of seventy-somethings who had married just six weeks earlier. The smuggler driving the truck escaped on foot, but was eventually apprehended.

Despite such crimes as these and other stories of violence in the borderland, I've always been surprised that even more violence is not the norm here, though it has seemed to increase in recent years. We have been "lucky" in this respect. This observation, however, doesn't help law enforcement officers injured or killed in the line of duty by illegals, like Border Patrol agent Brian Terry, killed this past December, 2010, near Rio Rico, Arizona in a shootout with some illegals and/or bandits who prey on them (the case remains only partially solved). It also doesn't help the rest of us legal tax-paying citizens threatened by border runners, like rancher Robert Krentz of Douglas, Arizona, killed in March, 2010, on his own property, most likely by a trespassing smuggler who Krentz thought was an immigrant in distress and had gone out to help, according to Krentz's last communication with his brother via two-way radio (this case also remains unsolved).

"Unsolved" is a good descriptor to keep in mind when trying to make sense of what goes on down here in Arizona Territory, as I often call it these days.

Private property rights are sacrosanct everywhere else in the United States, but those of

us who live in southern Arizona (and California, New Mexico, and Texas) are apparently expected not to expect such rights. Meanwhile the rights of illegal (a key descriptor which for some reason is always ignored) immigrants, some of whom really are bad guys who trespass through and often vandalize citizen properties—not to mention, commit murder here and there—are defended in rallies in D.C. and other



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U.S. cities. The plight of these illegal immigrants also gets a lot of cable news coverage; the murders of Terry and Krentz were hardly covered at all, except locally; and the run-ins many of us locals experience regularly and widely are known only to us—now just an abnormal norm we swallow with swigs of surprise

and disbelief.

We borderland residents also must expect—and accept—being patrolled ourselves. You can't drive far through southern Arizona without having to stop at a Border Patrol checkpoint where you must let an agent view everyone and everything you're carrying, allow a dog to sniff your car for contraband, and/or answer some pointed questions. When I drive the backcountry, the Border Patrol often races up behind me and tailgates my car, trying to see what or who I'm carrying, I guess, or testing me to see if I try to flee, as any good smuggler would do, I assume. I would prefer that the agent just pull me over; that would be safer I think than these tailgating shenanigans. Maybe pulling me over takes too much time and/or requires too much paperwork.

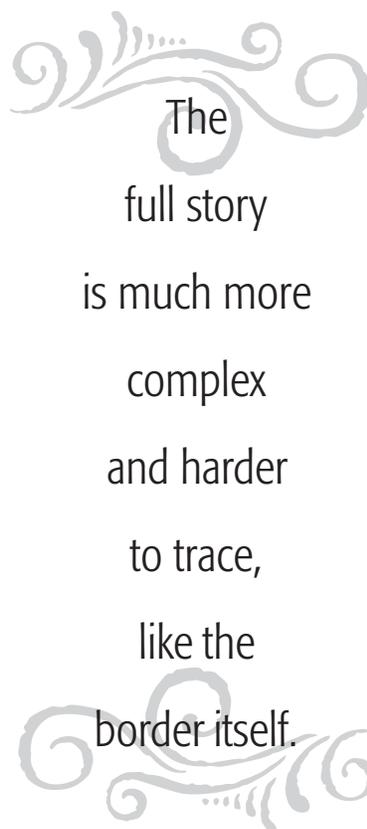
At night though, they tend to do official stops, especially when tailgating with their high beams on doesn't satisfy their curiosity. Whenever I left the park after dark, I was usually pulled over. As soon as the agent saw me in the beam of his flashlight and no one else in the car, though, he would say "Thank you, ma'am," and walk away before I could say anything. One time an agent walked away before even reaching the car of one of my coworkers once he had pegged her as neither an illegal immigrant nor smuggler, I guess. She stomped out of her car and yelled at him, said that he could at least come and speak to her after making her stop, especially since

she drives through here every day to and from work, which he should know by now. But the agents work different areas all the time and therefore don't recognize us locals. Nevertheless, the agent apologized to my coworker for his "rude" behavior.

Are they profiling? You bet. And the first level of the profile is: anyone on these borderland roads. After that, many factors must come into play: specific location, time of day, type of vehicle, people and cargo in the vehicle... Like many here, I often resent being patrolled by the Border Patrol, especially when pretty far north of the border, up to 50 miles or more in some cases (but 100 miles is what the U.S. government considers the border zone, the "constitution-free" zone, as many people call it). At the same time, I wouldn't want to live or travel here without the Border Patrol around these days, especially closer to the border; and when my dander's down I do understand their cagey behavior. Who can quickly identify a person as legal or illegal, let alone "good" or "bad"? And smugglers and coyotes are sometimes legal U.S. citizens and sometimes non-Hispanic. Agents have the added pressure of sorting out these matters under constant risk of bodily harm. So, even when irritated, I respect and support the job the agents do—I wouldn't want to do it.

Yet, I am doing it, I guess, at least defensively for my own safety in these borderlands—and I resent my

having to do it as much as I resent the Border Patrol patrolling me. I profile as necessary, as everyone does no matter who they are or where they live, but I must do so more here than I normally would anywhere else—always on guard, right in my own back yard, both literally and figuratively speaking, and just as much where I live now at 50 miles north of the border as where I lived near the park at 20 miles north of



the border.

Though "profile" has become a dirty verb tied to racism in today's conversations—or lack thereof—about illegal immigration, especially after Arizona's passing of State Bill 1070, my concerns are not racial. I think I speak for most of my fellow Arizonans in this matter. One of the reasons most of us live here is because we like the Mexican

influence on Arizona's culture—the customs, language, architecture, food, music, fiestas... Many of us are of Hispanic descent ourselves. Many of us like to travel to Mexico and like the Mexicans we meet, both in Mexico and here in Arizona. What concerns us is not race, but all of this dangerous illegal racing across the border, which we have been caught in the middle of for over a decade now.

Though this free-for-all border running and its associated violence and tragedy doesn't seem to faze Washington politicians, it often stuns visitors from non-border states, I think, like a man from Massachusetts on his first visit to the Huachuca Mountains area who told my husband, "I just can't believe what it's like here! People in the rest of the U.S. just don't know what's going on down here!"

No, they don't. Neither do we half the time. Race, of course, is part of our region's story, but it is not the story. The full story is much more complex and harder to trace, like the border itself. That arbitrary line is not as simple and tangible as a barbed wire fence or a big-ass wall or the ceremonious drag of a bootheel through the sand. Instead it shifts and snakes and undulates, disappearing and reappearing like water in an arroyo. It's hard to know which side you're on, above, or below at any given moment, or if there really are any sides at all to this fine line in shifting sand—the symbolic start and finish of all good Mexican standoffs. ■

3

3rd PLACE ~Centennial Adult Essay

Centennial

BY NITA RINEHART MEDE

Surrounding Sedona *A Verde Valley Story*



NITA RINEHART MEDE was born in a small fishing village in Alaska. Her rustic beginnings inspired her to explore nature and her first writing was about animals. Family kept her busy but she wrote whenever she could. It was not until she moved to Arizona in 1990 that she got serious. She studied the history of the Verde Valley first hand and started a historical society for Cornville. She volunteered at all the Historical Societies and wrote what she learned in story form. She calls her style FADE which means Factually Accurate Dramatically Enhanced.

THERE IS AN EMERALD green valley in the center of Arizona called "The Verde." It is surrounded by ruby red rocks, white limestone cliffs and The Black Hills. In ancient days the valley was a large basin filled with water. Eventually volcanic activity opened one end of the basin and it drained. The lush vegetation and massive marshes that grew out of the once encased basin drew prehistoric animals to its bounty.

Dinosaurs, elephants, camels, tigers, lions, and bears splashed and wallowed here. Creatures, only imagined, played and preyed on each other. They ate and drank, they slept, they lived and they died. Best of all they left a legacy. Frozen footsteps in the now dry and hardened limestone dot dry creek beds that were once mushy and wet. Not too many years ago there were lots of tracks to see. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, seeking men of archeology, anthropology and geology came to this rich land. They sought out and moved the limestone tracks to big city museums. The New York City Museum of Science in Manhattan

has some limestone chunks of the Verde Valley on display and are by now hidden away in vaults.

There are still a few tattooed scratches and indentations of dinosaur tracks left to stir up inspiration. A strong sense of the presence of these massive creatures haunts the hallways of Bee Canyon in Cornville. Once you walk the dry, icy white stream bed that meanders below towering canyon walls you do not forget it. The wind whistles a requiem and the bees hum their mourning cries because the imprints are now as extinct as the mighty animals who laid them there. It divides the imagination to know that a glass cabinet cannot hold the awe of the canyon wall, the silent roar of a saber tooth lion, or a stream bed frosted with limestone. A large part of history is not what it looks like but how and where it was made.

The entrance of humans into the valley follows four major migrations. The Anasazi, Sinaqua, Yavapai/Apaches and the European/Americans. The Spanish came as explorers but did not settle until recently.

There are no Footprints of the Ancient Ones. They walked with soft moccasins and bare feet. Their existence is evidenced only by the homes, house wares, and tools they left behind. Precisely placed stone walls as well as pottery and artifacts lay dormant across the valley floor. Evidence of their meanderings in the Verde has been documented by a myriad of archeologist and anthropologist since the nineteenth century. These findings are tucked away in universities, museums and private collections to be retracted and unearthed in the dust of forgotten time vaults. Attempts to enable those who desire history but do not have the means to acquire it create an arduous adventure that demands one to tromp the valley floor and hallowed hallways of time and space.

The ancient ones called Sinaqua meaning, “without water”, acquired their name from the modern. This name was tacked onto them only because there is no evidence of their true identity. The assumption is that their disappearance from the valley around 1400 AD was due to a drought causing their water supply to dry up. This event caused their resources to diminish, causing famine, and war, thus evacuation. It is not known how long the Sinaqua people farmed the creek banks and nearby fields. They hunted wildlife and gathered berries, nuts, grasses and herbs. They mined the hills for decoration, adornment and trade. They revered the mysterious and beautiful land formations,

abundant life and sheltered ambiance. They attributed all of this wonder to God, himself and worshipped according to their way of understanding who He is. They lived in this utopia for many centuries with little disturbance and then they disappeared without understanding.

Natives have a more clear



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understanding of the same people who they call “hohocum”; this title means “Ghost or lost people.” They suspect that these ancient ones are relatives of the Hopi tribes who to this day live in private pueblos and stone houses similar to the ones left behind. They migrated further north and are still there abiding in the oldest

known communities in America.

Nature recycles herself from time to time and eventually the Valley became lush again. Deer, cougars, squirrels, turkeys reentered followed by Indian tribes of several types. The Yavapai tribe redug ancient wells and farmed along the water ways. They grew corn, beans, pumpkins as well as hunted grains, berries, fruits and nuts. They constructed Hogans made of sticks and brush and occupied some of the ruins left behind. They were a peaceable tribe prone to agriculture. It was the Tonto Apaches that gave the valley a reputation of fear and it was the Black Hills that made it difficult to enter. Many a wild west tale actually happened in this little basin in the center of Arizona. It became one of the last holdouts of the Indian Wars.

When the Apaches entered the Valley it was already occupied and beautified by the Yavapai. Many other tribes tried to settle here but were quickly driven out by the warlike Apaches. They were cunning and brave. They lived alongside the Yavapai and took advantage of their farming skills by holding regular raids upon their crops, cattle, and even their children. It was the Zuni’s that called them “Apache” meaning “the enemy.” It was said that “they could run 50 miles without stopping and could travel more swiftly than a troop of mounted soldiers.” The animal-like skills that they acquired allowed them to silently attack travelers from behind a bush or a hole in a

rock. Shock and surprise set their victims at such a disadvantage that they were not able to recover and retaliate. In off times they loved to gamble. A 40 cards monte deck was made of rawhide consisting of four suits: cups, swords, clubs and coins.

This was the stage that was set when white settlers tried to enter the Verde Valley for settlement. All who entered were driven out and soon a plea went out to the government which resulted in Special order #21. It was August 23 1865 when 1st Lieutenant Antonio Aberytia started his trek from Fort Whipple in Prescott to the Verde Valley. His bedraggled crew of eighteen foot soldiers, a doctor, four old mules, a wagon and thirty day's ration was the beginning of the white man's occupation.

The trek took four days but was not without incident. Just as they arrived into the Valley they were surprised by Apaches. Well equipped they raided the wagons, burned them and killed some of the crew. It has not been determined exactly what happened because all the military books and documents were burned with the wagon. A fort had not been established yet so the only real clue to the mystery is the name that was left at the scene. To this day it is called "Grief Hill".

Reassured of protection the party of nine families who ventured into the Clear Creek area aligned themselves with the soldiers. The struggle to establish a

settlement and a military fort was a hard one. The Fort moved four times starting with a small tent camp close to the Clear Creek settlement. It was later moved to higher ground and named for our slain President Lincoln. Camp Lincoln soon moved and was established as Camp Verde. Eventually it was called Fort Verde and remains at its present location.

There was much marauding and killing on both sides for six years and then Captain Crook was brought on the scene. He was the commanding officer for the Arizona Military Department and known for his success with Indian affairs. Although a reservation had been set up near Camp Verde and the Indians induced to reside there, it was not successful. The Indians were known to come and go as they pleased. Some built adobe houses on the reservation and then would rejoin their relatives on raiding parties. Crook realized that soldiers were not enough to conquer the wily Indians of the Verde Valley so he recruited other Indians as scouts. In 1872 he put out an order for all roving tribes to go to some reservation or "be regarded as hostile and punished accordingly." The Apache Campaign was under way and it was a bloody one but successful, thanks to the tenacity of the Indian scouts and the persistence of the three cavalry companies. Within six months the major chieftains surrendered with what was left of their band.

By 1874 it looked as though all was well. The Indians were living

peaceably and productively on a reservation forty miles long and twenty miles wide. Crook saw to it that they worked hard, building canals and raising crops in which they were well paid. There was still some raiding and renegade behavior but it was controllable. The valley began to fill up with a new culture of peoples from around the world and the two cultures lived separately but together. Just as all was coming together as planned, certain "powers that be" from Tucson stirred up Washington DC. It was their plan to remove the Indians from the Verde and place them on a less desirable reservation at San Carlos.

Crook was opposed to the move but could not stop it. The exodus began on February 24, 1875 with fourteen hundred former Verde Valley residents leaving their ancestral homeland. Some of them would never see their beloved valley again and some of them were released twenty-five years later to return to a whole new world. Many of them returned not as a vibrant independent race but as servants to the new culture.

February 24 1877, two years after and in the same week as the exodus, a baby girl was born to an affluent family in Missouri. She was the sixth child and second girl to be born to Amanda and Philip Miller. If Amanda Miller was in a creative mood or just ran out of names we do not know but the name she chose for her

daughter was not only beautiful but prophetic. Amanda named her daughter after two surrounding towns in Missouri. One town was Sedilia which was named after the daughter of a Captain Smith. The baby girl was christened Sedona Arabella Miller. The family expanded to five more girls and one more boy.

On Sedona's twentieth birthday she married T.C. Miller without her father's approval. That same year T.C.'s brother Elsworth moved west for his health. He was offered a job in a newly developing community in the Verde Valley at the center of the Arizona Territory. He loved the place so much he could not resist asking his brother to come also. His eloquent writing skills described the place like a piece of heaven, perhaps the long lost garden of Eden. T.C. became restless and curious to the point that he talked his young wife with two small children into settling there. They arrived separately in the fall of 1901. T.C. was already camped out on land he purchased from Frank Owenby when he drove to Jerome to pick up his family. It was late in the night when they arrived at the little cabin and Sedona just wanted to sleep off the long journey. At the early morning light she awoke and stepped out into the fresh fall air. She was awestruck at the majestic beauty that spread out before her eyes. She had never seen mountains so high, a creek so clear, or a smell so sweet, surely this was

the garden of Eden rediscovered. T.C. came up behind her, placed his hand around her waist and asked "Well, what do you think, Dona?"

When her breath came back to her she whispered. "It looks like the mountains fell away and left their heart behind."

It was 1901, a new century, a new land, new opportunities and a new life for many in the Verde Valley. It had been twenty-five years since the Indian exodus and

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now the government had released them to return to the Valley. They returned to work in the mines and the ranches. Some camped out in the open or built wickiups in unclaimed areas just like their parents and grandparents did so many years before.

Because of the lost twenty-five years, the returnees saw many changes. The reservation had shrunk to just a few acres, Most of the land was opened to public domain the year after they left. It was divided and divided again to accommodate settlement.

Like a giant bee hive the "Spirit Mountain" was abuzz with activity. A large city of fifteen hundred people grew on it like a mysterious disease. The people spoke unusual languages from around the world. Many odd looking buildings clung precariously to the steep mountain slope. Machines and steel towers pulled out precious metals from deep in the earth. Men were coming and going in and out of these huge holes. The noise was deafening and the smoke choked everything in sight. The mountain was bare of vegetation and so were portions of the valley. Farmers were forced to move farther and farther from the mountain in order to grow desperately needed food for the increasing industrial effort.

Rugged cattle trails wind their way from hamlet to village mostly to feed the hungry mountain people. By 1900 the Verde Valley townships had been registered with the postal service for fifteen years. Towns were usually named for the first patent land owners, or adopted from landmark names. In 1883 Jerome was the first town to get its name. Although mining efforts had been going on since the first squatters came into the valley it was not very successful until the men with money tried their hand at it. An investor from New York put up a large amount of money if they would name the town after him. Eugene Jerome, who was an uncle to the young Winston Churchill, stamped his mark on wild west history.

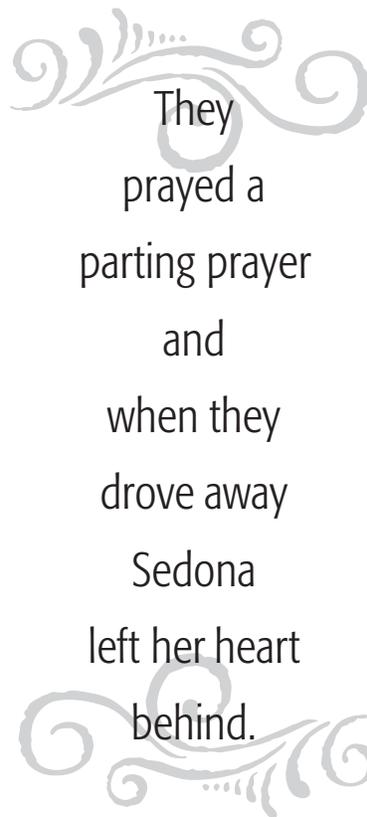
Jerome became a wild west boom town. Men from all around

the world heard of the strike that produced the world's largest supply of copper along with a good amount of gold and silver. Mail routes and supply lines were needed to support the increasing activity. The route from Cherry to Jerome was dotted with stage stops that were given names and a post office. July 9, 1885 three towns got their names—Cottonwood, Aultman and Cornville.

Cottonwood was a grove of trees where weary travelers camped. The Straham Family built a brick house nearby and it became the post office. Aultman was a stage stop at the Y that took one east to Fort Verde or west to Cottonwood. The Marrs Brothers established the station but a photographer who made it famous got to name it. His name was John Aultman. Cornville was the stop along the trail at lower Oak Creek that traveled onward to upper Oak Creek. Henry and John Cone owned the land at the Big Springs but when their name was submitted to the postal department it came back as Corn. The town was called Cornville and despite efforts to change it to something more romantic the name has stuck. Although these were the main territorial towns along the route to Jerome, several others have come and gone.

Arizona was a Territory when T.C. and Sedona Schnebly arrived. To some it was still considered "Indian Territory" and very dangerous. Horror stories were

told around the camp fires that traveled their way back east. Although the Indian Wars were over, tales of massacre and mayhem were branded in the minds of families left behind. Philip Miller, Sedona's father, was one who feared having any of his children taken there. His dislike of TC only increased when he heard that TC had a bug to go west.



Sedona's father's anger was especially ignited when they talked about Arizona, the most hellish place of all. "I will not let you go there" he spit. "If you do I will cut you out of my will. That was the strongest weapon he could wield thinking shurly he would have his way"

Sedona did not relent. "I go where my husband goes" She said. "I will make friends with

the Indians. I will teach them the bible. I will be a missionary. Please father I don't want your money. I just want your blessing."

"This could be the death of you" he stomped. "I approve of this move as much as I approved of your marriage to TC. You have a fine home here. Why go so far away?"

Sedona knew her heart. Her determined love for her husband and her bible overrode her father's threats once again. "Father, It says in the bible that you must leave your mother and father and cling to your mate and that is what I must do."

TC said, "Mr. Miller, I promise I will take very good care of Sedona. She will have a fine home and a good life."

"Well that remains to be seen." Philip sneered.

The challenge was set forth and TC was confident he could change his father-in-law's mind.

Once they arrived in the Verde Valley, TC set forth and accomplished all that he and Sedona dreamed of. Their three-story house was the talk of the small town that surrounded their eighty acres along the creek. It was known far and wide as a place to stay one night or a week. Sedona cooked her garden fresh foods, sang psalms around the piano. TC trucked produce to Jerome and Flagstaff. A child was added to the family. Genevieve was born a year after their arrival to the canyon. The older children, Ellsworth and Pearl, were thrilled with their new baby girl. The children were with Sedona

wherever her chores took her. They helped in the garden and in the barn. They had their very own Indian ponies to ride and they practiced roping calves just like the cowboys.

The bounty and beauty of Upper Oak Creek became known as a good place to call home. Away from the wild and wicked Jerome they could raise a family in tranquility. The Schnebly home became the place to receive mail that TC would bring back from Jerome or Flagstaff. Sedona knew the procedure to request a post office as her father was a postmaster in her hometown of Gorin, Missouri. They put in their request and after three tries it was accepted. It was uncle Ellsworth that suggested naming it after Sedona. In the westward movement it was not unusual to name a town after a loved one. When the name was accepted Ellsworth turned to Sedona and said "Well now you have a town named after you". He said that knowing the story that she had been named after two towns.

Three years later their biggest test came upon them suddenly. It was the kind of test that some would never overcome. Sedona always held strong to her biblical beliefs and relied upon the words that she read to get through all her trials. The trial with her father had been the greatest but she was blessed beyond measure when she married TC. She felt as though their life would have pleased him and perhaps his heart would turn.

It had been a hot summer day

in June but the evening sun was going down and a cool breeze swept in. Sedona called to the children to get on their ponies, that it was time to bring in the cows. She mounted her small horse with Genevieve, now almost two, in front of her. They all rode bareback along the usual trail to the upper field. The cows saw them coming and knowing the routine rallied forces. The next few minutes became chaotic and confusing. It was as if the whole world flipped upside down without a chance to grab on. Ellsworth and Pearl goaded their ponies forward to chase the new calves. Sedona called after them to slow down. A cow jumped, a calf panicked, a bull bellowed and Pearl's pony stopped dead in his tracks. She was forcefully thrown forward over his head. Her bonnet string caught around the pony's neck, he panicked and jolted forward. The unusual burden caused him to run to the only safe place he knew, the barn. Sedona clutched Genevieve closer to her chest as she tried to stop the horrible scene that was playing out before her eyes. Ellsworth was close behind.

“**S**top, Stop, Please stop” was all she could choke out as the pony raced even faster dragging her beautiful Pearl beside him. It was a long long way to the barn. A farm hand who heard the horrible commotion was able to catch the runaway pony and remove Pearl's limp and ravaged body from his neck.

The devastating event sent Sedona into a deep pit of grief. With shaky hands she toiled to cut pieces from her beloved wedding gown to make a burial dress for Pearl, the same dress she had dreamed of seeing her wear on her wedding day. Despite friendly advice Sedona insisted upon laying Pearl in the garden, not a grave, for who can bear a grave for a five-year-old child.

The days and months that followed could not pull Sedona from that pit of despair. TC stayed closer to home and in his own grief groaned as he watched Sedona peering out of the kitchen window at the garden. Almost every night he awakened to his wife sitting straight up screaming "Stop, stop, Please stop". His heart would seize up as he attempted to comfort her back to sleep.

Friends and neighbors tried to keep up the chores but eventually it was not possible. Sedona grew thin, drowning in guilt and grief. When the doctor was called his only advice was to leave this place and perhaps she could come out of it.

They packed up all they could carry and readied themselves to go back to Gorin as another tragedy had occurred there. Sedona's eighteen-year-old sister Pearl had died also. Before they mounted the buggy that would carry them away from their dream life they bowed their heads over the little garden patch. They prayed a parting prayer and when they drove away Sedona left her heart behind. It would be twenty-five years before she would return. ■

1

1st PLACE ~Centennial Adult Stories

Centennial

BY POLLY BAUGHMAN

Mom's Last Gift



POLLY BAUGHMAN, a former journalist and health care executive, took a U-turn at age 50 to pursue a long-deferred calling: writing women's fiction. Prone to periodic reinvention, she finds her latest incarnation as an author to be her most fascinating to date. A fourth-generation Arizonan, Polly sets her stories in the place she calls home while exploring the lives of women – their friendships, contradictions, grief and passions – all with a touch of humor that's characteristic of Polly herself.

“Unfinished Business”

I TRIED TO TELL MYSELF – again – to not be irritated with Ginny; it was like saying I wasn't going to breathe. I could manage it, but only for a time. The buzz of her incoming text message signaled time was up.

Going 2 B late. Use keypad to enter. Code is date Mom died. – G

I scrolled through it twice before throwing the phone on the dashboard. Below it, glowing green numbers switched to 5:36. Going to be late. Like I didn't know that already. We were supposed to meet at 5:00. I'd arrived in Phoenix at 4:45, which in my book was on time, even though I was well aware my sister was usually tardy. I'd been prepared to wait in her driveway ten extra minutes, figured with constant repetition of the Serenity Prayer, I could manage fifteen. I hadn't expected to spend nearly an hour wondering if Ginny had blown me off or how much Timmy was missing me. But what was I going to do? Turn around and make the two-hour trip back to Tucson?

When I'd kissed Mark and

Timmy goodbye, I'd left there believing Ginny cared about us getting together as much as I did. So I'd made the trip. All she had to do was be home when I got to Phoenix, but apparently it was too much bother for her to be on time for our – what was it? – A memorial? Regardless of what you called it, we'd decided it was important to do this together – open our last Christmas gifts from Mom. We'd agreed to it a year ago. She was supposed to come back to Tucson, but at the last minute she asked for me to come to her. I agreed. It was hard to say no to a baby sister when you grow up hearing, “Look out for Ginny. She's not as mature as you.”

That still hadn't changed.

I retrieved my tossed phone and put it back in my purse and looked around for the keypad. Thanks to the Christmas lights on her neighbor's house, I spotted it next to the garage door. Punch in 12-25-10 and I could wait for Ginny inside. I took a deep breath and gathered up my purse, overnight bag and the two wrapped presents from the seat next

to me. Arms full, I got out, bumped the car door closed, and made my way toward the keypad. I tried to lift the lid covering it, but when I raised my arm, my purse slid off my shoulder, causing me to bobble everything I was holding. One by one – purse, travel bag, presents – hit the ground with a thud.

A security lamp clicked on above me and in its half-circle of light I saw my purse landed upside down, spilling its contents. I watched as a tampon rolled down the driveway and stopped under the middle of my car. The rest was a scattered mess at my feet – keys, lipstick, a travel-size bottle of Tylenol, an assortment of pens and my cell phone with the battery cover popped off. Beneath the phone was a scribbled drawing Timmy had made me that morning. I'd promised him, "I'll think of you whenever I look at it."

For a moment, that's all I could do as I stared at his artwork on the ground. I may have remained trapped in my thoughts, but sudden winds touched down from the west and whipped open my unbuttoned coat. I turned my back and dipped my head, but another gust circled around me, stinging my eyes. I blinked and through narrowed slits saw the wind catch hold of the bows that had been knocked from the presents. They danced in front of me and then were gone.

I pulled my coat tight and sank to my knees. I salvaged Timmy's picture first, checked next to see if my phone was broken, and then began scooping up the rest of my stuff. Before I could gather it all, the wind came whistling back, this time lifting

the nametags in Mom's loopy script off the wrapped boxes. The tags skittered down the drive in short hops just out of reach. I lunged across my overnight bag, and pinned the gift tags with the palm of my hand to the cold concrete. Before the wind could lay claim again, I stuffed them in my purse, dumping the rest of the items on top.

I stood up quickly and lifted the keypad lid. I wanted inside but,



...a decorative

sign hung

on the wall.

Friends

always welcome.

Relatives by



appointment.

with finger poised over the buttons, hesitated. Ginny's chosen code felt disrespectful. I pushed aside the feeling and punched in 12-25-10 then "enter." The garage door slowly lifted as though Mom's death finally granted entrance into Ginny's world. Nice symbolism, if only it were true.

Ginny had long ago distanced herself from Mom and me – ever since her senior year. She'd make mandatory family functions, but

signaled her indifference by arriving late – like tonight – and leaving early. Mom put on a brave face, happy with any crumb of Ginny's attention she got, and irritated with me if I dared note how inconsiderate she was.

"Ginny's finding herself. She'll come back into the fold."

That had become Mom's mantra for twelve years, even during her last illness. Ginny had finally come down for that, when the Hospice nurse said it was time. She kneeled by the bed, stroking Mom's hand and crying. When Ginny finally stepped away, Mom looked to me, eyes filled with panic. I had to watch her parched lips form the words her thin voice couldn't carry. "Keep Ginny close. She needs family ... and faith. She just doesn't know it."

So here I was with Mom's unfinished business – save Ginny from being Ginny.

If I needed a reminder how hard it would be to take up Mom's mission, Ginny had made it clear. Inside her guest bedroom, where I dumped my belongings on the bed, a decorative sign hung on the wall. Friends always welcome. Relatives by appointment. Well, we'd made the appointment, but still no Ginny. I went through her house and in defiance of her sign made myself welcome. I started with her wine rack. Noting everything from a Charles Shaw varietal known as "Two Buck Chuck," to an expensive French cab, I chose on price. I'm no wine snob. It was just too tempting to help myself to a bottle Ginny was probably saving to impress friends.

She was doing well giving the morning traffic reports on Channel 7, but the sixty dollars I figured the wine cost would still make a point.

At the kitchen counter, I wrestled with the cork and took in the room. The kitchen opened onto a great room, dominated at the moment by an eight-foot Christmas tree. A decorator tree with no presents under it. At home, Timmy had put the first present under our tree. One he'd made in preschool. It was just two days before Christmas. What was I doing here? My place was with ... I jumped. It took a moment before I realized the sudden sound of grating metal was the garage door going up. Ginny was here. I finished pouring my wine and then looked at my watch. 6:15.

"Martha," she cried. "Your car's blocking me and the wind's going nuts out here. Come help me carry stuff in." The door slammed behind her.

I started to put my glass down, and then stopped. I could be otherwise occupied until the car was unloaded. I retreated to the bathroom, wine glass in hand. I sat on the edge of the tub slowly sipping Ginny's expensive French cab.

"Martha." Ginny pounded on the door. "You in there?"

"Just a second." I needlessly flushed, turned the faucet on and off for good measure, then emerged with an empty wine glass.

Ginny was in her on-air style. A dark hip-hugging pencil skirt

topped by a tailored jacket open just enough to show a splash of emerald green ruffles. She knew what she was doing. The green brought out her eyes. "Merry Christmas," Ginny said.

"Better than last year anyway."

Ginny's smile faded. She turned and walked ahead of me back to the kitchen. "Mark and Timmy didn't mind you coming?" she asked. "They barely had time with you last year."

"I know. I was thinking about heading back tonight."

"But you just got here."

"Actually, I've been here since 4:45."

"Why? We weren't supposed to meet until 5:30."

"Five."

"No, we said 5:30."

I looked pointedly at my watch. "Which explains why you're here at 6:15?"

"Let's not do this. I had a good reason for being out, ok?"

"Well?"

"Well nothing." Ginny started unpacking the bag on her granite countertop. She lifted out a Styrofoam carton and popped open the lid to show me. "I got us a good dinner – prime rib – from this great new restaurant. I did a live stand-up from there and they said come back for a free meal anytime. I thought this would be a perfect occasion."

"Good thing I chose a red," I said, picking the bottle up off the counter. "I already helped myself to the good stuff. I'll get you a glass."

"That's okay. I'll pass."

"You don't like this?"

"Are you kidding? That's \$75

a bottle. I love it. I'm just not drinking, that's all."

Then pigs fly, but I let the thought pass. "More for me, I guess."

"Careful if you're driving back tonight."

I held the bottle over the glass, but didn't pour.

"Not that I want you to go. I hope you stay, but you were the one who mentioned it, and I know how important family is to you."

I finished pouring and pushed thoughts of Timmy and Mark away. "You're family too."

Ginny said nothing, just pulled out nice china and cloth napkins. With plastic forks, she lifted a piece of red meat onto the first dinner plate then dropped a sprig of rosemary on top.

"They understand," I said. "Being with you right now is important." I watched Ginny scoop the pre-packaged horseradish into a small ramekin. "To Mom," I said. "It was important to Mom." She looked briefly up at me, and then began displaying the steamed vegetables on the plate.

"Yeah," she said. "Mom would like us being together." She duplicated her efforts with the second plate. "Voila," she said, holding each out to be admired. "Let's eat at the table instead of the counter. I'll light some candles."

We took our time eating. The talk between us mundane. I scanned the room, looking for something to hang our conversation on. "Didn't you use to have pictures on that

shelf?”

She glanced over her shoulder. “I like to keep books there.”

I remembered the photos distinctly. Gin with a dark-haired man – a Don or Dan – one of them skiing and one arm-in-arm on a sailboat. “So where did you put the photos?”

Ginny speared a carrot. “Away,” she said, and popped the food in her mouth.

When we were done eating, it was a relief to have dishes to clear. I started to get up.

“I’ll handle it,” she said, grabbing both of our plates and rising from the table. “Relax.”

Wine was helping with that. I ambled over to the kitchen, leaned on the counter and watched her rinse dishes. “So you never said what were you doing before you got home?”

“I guess you’d say I was having pictures taken.”

“For the station?”

“No,” she shook her head.

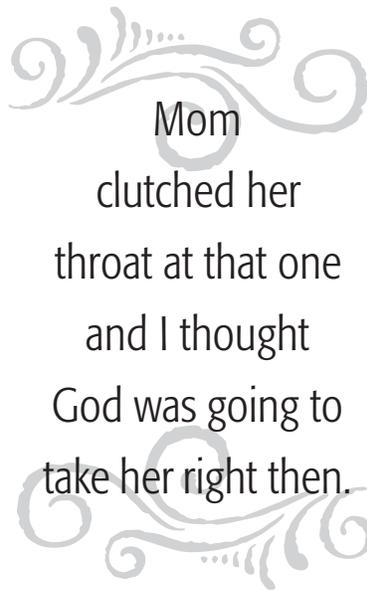
“Personal.” She reached to toss the plastic lid from the horseradish in the trash.

“Hey, that’s recyclable,” I said. She pulled it back out. “So today was the only time you could get photos?”

Ginny stopped what she was doing and put both hands on the counter. “Look, Martha, I didn’t think it would take so long, all right? Then it put me behind getting the food, and, well, I thought I’d be in and out, but things changed.”

I’d say they’d changed. When we were little, Ginny had been like my little doll. I fawned over her,

and she worshipped me. Followed me everywhere. If ever I were out of sight, I’d hear her calling “Marta. Marta.” She couldn’t pronounce the “th,” which was fine with me. I hated my name. Martha was the sister Jesus rebuked even though she was the one in the Bible who did all the work. While she toiled, her sister sat worshipfully at Jesus’ feet spilling outrageously expensive perfume. For that, she received all the praise.



And so it’s been for me. Being the older sister, I helped Mom when Dad left; Ginny sat around collecting all Mom’s praise. Mark thinks it’s because we each replaced Dad, but in different ways. When he took off, Mom needed an adult to confide in, a role I took on. And she needed some place for her affection which ended up focused mostly on Ginny. She was younger and, unlike the Biblical sister, was anything but pious. That certainly commanded Mom’s full attention. She became set on winning her over to Christ with unconditional love, especially

after Ginny declared herself an atheist in stark contrast to Mom’s “Praise be to God” outlook.

Mom meant well, but hers was a showy kind of faith that led more naturally to satire than salvation. Ginny saw it as a crutch, which in her more tolerant moments, she deemed, “Fine for Mom, even understandable given what a miserable life she’s had.” Most times, though, she preferred to poke at it. In pitch-perfect imitation, Ginny would throw up her arms and declare, “See God listens. Our Lord is good.” It was a declaration Mom made for the smallest of “miracles.” She might not be able to pay rent, but saw proof of His almighty power whenever she found a prime parking spot or got the last can of beans that matched the 30-cents-off coupon. The fact that all Mom’s prayers hadn’t turned Ginny back to God was only temporary. “All in God’s good time,” Mom said.

Ginny had other views. “If God’s in control of everything, then it was His will for Dad to run off. That’s no God of mine.”

Mom clutched her throat at that one and I thought God was going to take her right then. After that episode, I was careful to spare Mom more time on her knees by never telling her of my own wavering conviction. And yet, Mom counted on me to take up her cause and lead Ginny to salvation. I couldn’t lead Ginny to Tucson for presents.

“I brought Mom’s presents,” I said. “They’re back in the bedroom. I’ll get them.”

“All right,” Ginny agreed though her voice was hesitant. “I guess we

should open them.”

“I thought that’s why I came.”

“It is. It’s just ... No, you’re right. Get the presents.”

I left her at the kitchen sink, her back turned to me. I didn’t understand. The whole idea was to open these together – gifts Mom had somehow managed to get from catalogues or with the help of one of the Hospice nurses. Funeral arrangements had taken precedence over opening them last year. Besides, waiting had seemed like a good idea, a way of holding on to Mom for one more Christmas.

But now Christmas would always be the anniversary of her death. God couldn’t wait even one more day to take her. It was cruel. Yet Mom wanted me to believe in His benevolence? Help Ginny see it? Mom had asked the impossible. I was angry, in no condition to be a pitchman for God’s sweet mercies. I’d be lucky to get through the present opening with Ginny. Why did we think it would be easier to wait a year? A year straight from hell.

There’d been Mom’s death, and then right after New Year’s, my other loss. It had still been early, the baby no bigger than a grain of rice. But while I carried it, it had sustained me. I had wanted Mom to know, but by then she was already in and out of consciousness. I wasn’t sure what she heard, but the telling was as much for me as for her. A private joy I could share in the midst of so much pain. Mark and I had told no one else. So when that bright spot in our lives became a red stain of

discharged tissue, we bore it alone. Everyone thought my grief, my inability to bounce back, was all for Mom. Just as well. I couldn’t have taken another round of condolences. I just wanted to put the last year behind me.

I picked up the shirt-size boxes from the bed, both wrapped in royal blue paper patterned with a white and gold shining star. The bows that had festooned the corner of each package had probably been flung by the wind on to the needles of a neighbor’s saguaro. The gift tags, I remembered, were rescued from the next gust and sat somewhere in the bottom of my purse.

“I’ll be home for Christmas. You can count on me.”

Gin had turned on an older version of the song – Dino or maybe Frank. It filled the silence as I dug the gift tags out of my purse. Mom’s distinctive handwriting made them too special to discard even if I wasn’t sure which one went on which package. We’d figure it out. Gin and I weren’t close to the same size or liked the same style. The gifts would be distinctive enough to know who they were for or would be generic enough to not matter. I stuck one tag on each box with the circle of Scotch tape still clinging to it.

When I came back down the hall, Ginny was sitting on the floor in front of the tree, its lights blinking on. In addition to the music, she’d flipped the switch on a gas fireplace. The flames danced without any crackle. A faux-fire to go with a faux-celebration. I sat down on the floor across from Ginny and put the

two gifts between us.

“You first,” she said.

I stroked the box in front of me, and let my finger idly trace the star on the gift wrap. “It’s amazing Mom got us anything.”

“Do you think they’re matching presents?” Gin asked. “Like the year she got us those awful dresses with the bolero vests?”

“That was my sophomore year so you must have been in seventh grade.”

“Immortalized forever in that picture of the three of us. I looked ridiculous. What was Mom thinking?! Braces and a bolero.”

“Not your best look,” I agreed.

Ginny laughed. “The worst was, I couldn’t escape that awful dress,” she said. “When I outgrew mine, Mom brings in yours and says, ‘Now you can fit into Martha’s.’”

Now I laughed. “I guess it wasn’t always easier being the younger sister.”

“So true,” she agreed. Her blonde hair, loosely pulled back in an artfully mussed up ponytail, seemed to emphasize her point with an affirmative bounce.

I grabbed a loose lock of my own dark hair and tucked it behind my ear. “It was no picnic being the older sister either.”

“I know,” Gin said quietly, looking off into the fire. She sat very still. “Mom leaned on you. Expected you to fill in for Dad. I was mad at him for leaving, and since you took over his role, I guess my anger spilled over to you too.”

I blinked fast and avoided looking at her. No one had ever

acknowledged my lost childhood before. “Well,” I said my voice gravelly and uncertain. “Are we going to hold these present another year?”

“No,” she said firmly, and then flashed me a grin. “Count of three and we’ll do it together.”

“Ok. One,” I started.

“Two-three,” she quickly finished, simultaneously ripping the paper.

“So much for doing it together.”

But I wasn’t mad. It was good to see Ginny being playful, even if it might have been forced.

“Here,” she said and reached over, ripping the paper on my box too. Each of our boxes now sat in the middle of gift wrap peeled back like the skin on a filleted fish. I slid a fingernail along the side of my box, breaking the tape holding the top to the bottom. I waited and she did the same. “This time,” she said, “we’ll do it together. One...”

“Two-three,” I said and lifted my lid first. She quickly did the same.

With them both opened, I looked from my box to hers. My mislabeling error was obvious. In Ginny’s box was a green and yellow footed baby jumper meant for the grandchild who’d left my womb nameless and unacknowledged by anyone but Mark and me. The box in front of me held a rosewood business card case and matching rosewood pen – a gift for someone who still had a life outside the home, a gift no doubt for Ginny.

I looked up from the boxes to Ginny, ready to claim my gift and tell her at long last about my loss, but her hand was fluttering at her throat, her eyes huge. “Oh my god,”

she said. “She knew. Somehow she knew.”

I waited. Not sure what she meant. Had Ginny somehow known I was pregnant? Was she as dumbstruck as I was that, in the fog of painkillers, Mom realized she was to be a grandma again? Before I could sort this jumble of thoughts out, Ginny carefully lifted the baby outfit from the box and held it to her, crying. She made no attempt to

“Mom’s gift
is like
she’s telling me
I can handle this.
That married
or not,
she wants me
to have this baby.”

blink back these tears or even wipe them away, but let them fall into the soft cloth of the jumper, rocking herself back and forth as though the outfit held a baby needing soothing. “I can’t believe this,” she said.

“Believe what?”

In answer, Ginny got up; the green and yellow jumper still clutched to her, and left the room. When she returned, she was carrying her briefcase, too. Sinking to her knees beside me, she handed the outfit to me, and with her now free hands, rifled through the case, pulling out an image printed on thin

curling paper.

“The picture I was out having taken today,” she said.

I looked at the print of gray static lines and detected a small curved spine and a dark splotch that might have been a heart. Inadvertently, I looked at Ginny’s stomach, still model flat. “How far along?” I asked.

“Thirteen weeks. Time the doctors said I need to decide for sure what I’m going to do.”

Her words seemed to come at me in a time warp. The sound registered in real time, but the meaning trailed behind. I’d wanted my baby so desperately. Ginny had to decide. “You mean you’d consider an ...”

“No,” she said, shaking her head firmly, but then dropping her eyes and adding quietly, “Not now.”

“Because of the gift?” The one meant for me.

Ginny met my eyes now. “Not really. I heard its heart beat today, and that’s when I knew what I’d do. But, still, don’t you think this means something?” She took the jumper back from me and held it out by the arms, the feet weighting the legs down so that it seemed to form a cross in front of her. “This is a sign,” she said. “Mom’s gift is like she’s telling me I can handle this. That married or not, she wants me to have this baby. That it will all be okay.”

“What about the father? Is it Don?”

“Dan,” she said. “He was set on the other ‘solution.’ I’ll be a single mom.” She carefully folded the jumper and placed it in the box,

smoothing the tissue back around it as though tucking a sleeping baby to bed. She looked up, “What about your gift, Marta? Do you like it?”

I looked at the rosewood business set. “It would be nice, I guess, if I went back to work.”

“Are you?” Ginny seemed to vibrate with the idea of a second miracle – Mom foretelling my future as well. “Timmy’s getting older,” she pressed. “And Mom’s . . . well, you don’t have that now. Maybe the time’s right.”

I picked up the card case, lifted the lid and saw there was an inscription on the inside. I read it and clicked the lid closed. “It’s not that easy. I’m out of date,” I said. “This gift would be better suited for you.”

Ginny pressed her lips together tightly. Recognition was dawning; her miracle evaporating. “That is the kind of gift Mom would get me. But then why the . . .?” She fingered the tissue over the baby outfit. “Are you and Mark thinking about more kids?”

I shook my head in an honest no. Not more kids. I was still thinking of the one I’d lost.

“Well, Mom probably wanted you to have more. You’re so good at it.” She pushed her gift box toward me, wadded up the torn gift wrap from both packages and stood. The CD player shuffled to a new disc and in the break between songs, a wind gust rattled the windows so loudly, Gin and I both jumped.

“Wow. Look at me. Jumping at nothing,” Gin said with a derisive laugh. She squashed the paper some more, squishing it tighter than need be and turned on her heel toward the

kitchen trash. “What am I going to be like when the pregnancy hormones get really strong? Already I’m seeing miracles that aren’t there, and I’m not even religious.”

Most of Gin’s words were lost on me. The wind had become insistent against the windows, rattling the panes and demanding my attention. I looked at the two open presents in front of me, the ones the wind forced me to re-label.

Gin came back to where I was sitting. “It’s crazy.”

“What’s crazy,” I asked, trying to pull myself back to the conversation.

“I’m crazy. My reactions to the gifts. As though Mom knew what I’d need a year after her death.”

Was it crazy? The wind was a howl now. I took Gin’s hand, pulling her down to sit beside me. “Mom wouldn’t call it crazy. She’d see God’s hand in it.”

Ginny pulled her own hand back from mine. “She saw God’s hand in everything.”

“Like in the wind,” I said. I took a deep breath, said a silent prayer I’d get this right and then plunged ahead. “When I arrived, Gin, the wind blew the tags off the packages. Maybe I mixed them up putting them back on, but maybe God blew them off so I’d do that. Or maybe the gifts we opened tonight were the ones Mom intended for each of us. Maybe it was all a coincidence. And maybe that’s the point. We get to believe what we want.” I paused. “I believe it happened the way it should.”

Ginny looked at me like maybe I was the big sister with the answers. Still, she challenged me. “I can believe the baby gift was a special

affirmation for me. One I needed. But what about yours? How is that a special last gift?”

“Maybe I’m not going back because I’m scared. Maybe I need a nudge. But most of all when I do go back to work – whenever that might be – I’ll get to read a message I want to believe was meant for me.” I handed the card case to Ginny.

She lifted the lid and read the inscription aloud. “For my dearest daughter.” She closed it and looked at me thoughtfully, then pressed it into my hand with a kiss on my cheek. When she pulled away, she had an impish grin on her face. “With that inscription, are you sure it wasn’t meant for me? I mean it said dearest daughter. Maybe if it was dear daughter, it was for you.”

I gave my pampered, spoiled, beloved baby sister a backhanded swat to the shoulder. “I’m quite sure that was a reference to me,” I said, “But tell you what. I’ll let you use it sometimes as long as my next baby gets to wear that jumper after yours.”

“Deal, my dearest sister.”

“I’m your only sister.”

“Precisely,” Ginny said. “So that I can be your dearest sister too.” Then in her best Mom imitation she threw her hands up in a Hallelujah gesture and said, “Just as our good Lord intended.”

I could have added “just like Mom’s dying wish,” but that one I kept to myself. Family and faith were fragile things. Then again, this wasn’t in my hands alone. I looked at Ginny and clasped my hands in front of me in mock prayer. “Amen to that sista.” ■

2

2nd PLACE ~Centennial Adult Stories

Centennial

BY JANET FERRIS

The Gecko Sisters' Daring Desert Adventures



JANET FERRIS lives in a desert area in Scottsdale and has seen every character in her story about the Gecko Sisters. One day, she decided to write about them--what they might do and say about their lives and adventures. In eighth grade, she won an Americanism essay contest, which inspired her to keep writing. Writing has always been a part of her life, from grading students' themes when she taught English to composing her own stories. Presently, she is a member of the Scottsdale Society of Women Writers, a great group of dedicated writers.

GRACIE AND GERTIE Gecko live in Arizona's Sonoran Desert. They had been born there and made their home under a giant rock. When they got hungry, they had to leave the safety of their rock to find food. Right now, they were very hungry!

"Let's go get a bite to eat," Gertie said to her sister, Gracie. "I'm starving."

"Okay," Gracie replied, "but let's try a new place. There's nothing but crickets and flies where we always go."

"I'm scared to go anywhere else," Gertie said. "It's safe under our favorite cactus. Remember the last time we were out in the open and that horrible hawk almost got us? If we hadn't spotted that snake hole to dive into, we would have been a snack in the sky! Thank goodness the snakes weren't home!"

"Oh, Gertie, you're just a big scaredy-cat," Gracie answered.

"Cat? Cat? That brings up another subject," Gertie shot back. "I suppose you've forgotten the

bobcat that came out of nowhere. What if he's waiting for us?"

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" was Gracie's reply, as she ran out from under the rock.

Gertie very cautiously inched her way out from under her comfortable spot, looked all around, and then reluctantly followed her sister. They ran, wiggling and jiggling, lickety-split, as geckos do.

It wasn't long before they saw the cactus, but Gracie didn't stop there. "I know a great place," she said. "Follow me."

"I'm not so sure about this, Gracie," replied Gertie. She was awfully hungry, though, so she kept up the pace until she caught up with her sister.

After darting around rocks, cactus, and Palo Verde trees, Gertie was out of breath. She almost bumped into Gracie who had suddenly stopped running. "We're here," Gracie said.

Gertie looked up at an enormous building. Gracie explained that it was the home of some humans who had everything

a starving gecko could want.

“You mean you’ve been here before?” asked Gertie. “Why didn’t you tell me about it?”

“Well, sisters don’t have to tell each other everything,” answered Gracie. “See that big round thing? I ran to the top one time and slid right into some really hot water. If Sydney Squirrel hadn’t been there to pull me out with his big teeth, I would have drowned. He told me it’s called a hot tub, and humans actually sit in it!”

“So that’s why you have that scar on your back,” observed Gertie.

Gracie continued, “Yes, and did it ever hurt! Luckily, the humans had some aloe vera plants in their yard. Sydney helped me get the juice out of one and rubbed it on my back. It made me feel lots better.”

Both sisters looked up at a plastic ball hanging from a wooden pole. It was filled with a red liquid, and Gracie said, “I’ve heard that the juice is absolutely delicious, and I’ve always wanted to taste it. Today is the day!”

Gertie asked, “Is that the drink Henry and Hannah Hummingbird told us about?”

“Exactly, dear sister,” responded Gracie. “Let the tasting begin!”

The two sisters shimmied up the pole and tried their best to get at the sugary liquid. They looked at the tiny holes which were perfect for hummingbirds’ long, thin beaks, but they, of

course, weren’t hummingbirds.

They heard a buzzing, whirring sound and saw Henry and Hannah flying toward them. “What are you two doing here?” questioned Hannah.

“We thought we’d check out this great juice you were telling us about,” Gracie answered. “We can’t get to it, though, because we don’t have pointy tongues.”

“Ummmmm,”

was all

that the sisters

could say

as the liquid

slid down

their throats.

“No problem,” said Henry. “We’ll help you. We desert dwellers have to take care of each other.”

So Hannah and Henry took deep long drinks through their beaks, and, instead of swallowing, squirted the liquid into the eager, open mouths of Gracie and Gertie.

“Ummmmm,” was all that the sisters could say as the liquid slid down their throats. When they had had enough, they thanked their bird friends and scurried

down to the desert floor. Gertie said, “I’m feeling really pumped, Gracie. What was in that juice?”

“That’s sugar water,” she answered. “Henry and Hannah told me it gives them so much more energy. Aren’t you glad you got to taste something new?”

“I sure am,” Gertie said, and as she swished her tail, some bread crumbs flew in front of Gracie.

“What luck,” shouted Gracie. “Bread crumbs! The humans put them there, and now they’re all ours. Finders Keepers!”

Gertie’s eyes opened wide. “You’ve seen the humans?” she asked.

“Yes, I have, but they haven’t seen me,” answered Gracie. “A little boy lives here with his family. He throws out bread crumbs every morning for Calvin Cardinal and Cathy Cactus Wren before he fills up the juice feeder. This will really be a treat!”

“Oh, Sis, this is great. Thank you! Thank you!” responded Gertie. “I’m sorry I was so afraid to go on a new adventure. Let’s eat!”

So, they ate every last bread crumb in sight. After their little gecko bellies were full, they felt very tired and fell asleep, side by side.

Just as they were starting to dream about giant caves filled with bread crumbs and sugar water, they quickly woke up when they heard a voice say, “Gotcha!” Before they could squiggle away, they found themselves in a big net.

Gracie and Gertie were nearly frightened out of their skins, which wouldn't have been good at all since geckos need their skins for protection in the desert. They didn't dare say anything, even though they knew humans couldn't understand "Gecko Garble."

The little boy who caught them carried them into the house and put them into a covered glass box on the kitchen table. They saw a lady standing by a silvery hole where water was splashing out from something on top of the hole. They couldn't believe their eyes.

"I didn't know humans could have water any time they wanted," whispered Gertie.

"Neither did I," answered Gracie quietly. "This might be interesting."

"Interesting? Interesting?" Gertie looked at her sister in amazement. "Is everything an adventure to you? Aren't you the least bit worried about what's going to happen to us?"

Before Gracie could answer, the little boy walked over to the table and picked up the glass box. Gertie and Gracie looked at each other and wondered what was going to happen next.

"I'm going to take my geckos to my room, Mom," said Justin.

"Okay," she replied, "but make sure the lid is on tight. I don't want them to get loose, and I sure don't want to see another one of

your four legged friends hiding in the sofa."

"Don't worry. They're not going anywhere," he answered. "That was pretty funny, though, when you nearly sat on him."

"Funny for you, maybe, but I wasn't laughing," his mother said as she rolled her eyes.

Justin carried his latest "catch" to his bedroom. While he was in the hallway, his sister, Kylee, saw him. "Why do you keep catching those lizardy things?" she asked.

Gertie
quickly replied,
"My wish is
to stay here
forever and ever
where it's safe.
I've had
enough adventures!"

"Because I like to, that's why." Justin wished she'd mind her own business.

"Well, how would you like it if some ginormous gecko caught you and put you in a cage?" Kylee was not happy with her brother and had told him several times how she felt. The desert was where these two belonged, not in the house.

"Oh, Kylee, stop telling me

what to do. I take very good care of my collection, and you know it. They always have food and water. What more could they want?" Justin wished his big sister would leave him alone.

"I'll never understand boys!" Kylee said as she stomped toward her room.

When he got to his room, Justin put the glass box next to a bigger one. Gracie and Gertie stared at the other box and recognized the occupants as their cousins, Lorenzo and Loretta Lizard.

"Justin, let's go. We have to be at your gymnastics lesson by Noon. Be sure to wash your hands," shouted Justin's mom down the hallway.

"Okay, Mom, be right there," was his answer.

As soon as Justin left his room, Gracie and Gertie began "Gecko Garbling" with their cousins.

"How long have you been here?" asked Gertie.

"It seems like forever," said Loretta. "One minute we were happily eating bread crumbs and the next thing we knew, we were stuck in here."

Lorenzo added, "I remember there was a full moon the night before we decided to find a new place to eat, and now there's only a sliver of a moon. That must have been two weeks ago."

"Two weeks!" exclaimed Gertie. "So that's why we haven't seen you at your home rock."

Loretta sobbed, "We don't know how our little Lily and Leonard are doing."

“Oh, don’t worry,” said Gracie. “We’ve seen them every day, and they look fine. We even gave them some of our leftover flies. Your Leonard is really getting good at catching them. He even caught one in midair last week.”

“See, Loretta,” said Lorenzo. “What did I tell you? I knew that boy had talent!”

“Well, I’m proud of him, too,” answered Loretta, “but I really want to see him and Lily again.”

The four of them heard a loud grinding sound and Lorenzo said, “That’s the garage door opening. The humans must be leaving.”

“Okay, guys, we have to start planning how we’re going to get out of here,” said Gracie. “Anybody have any ideas?”

“Believe me, Gracie, we have been trying to figure that out ever since we got here,” answered Loretta. “Lorenzo did manage to jump out last week when the boy took off the lid. He made it all the way down the hall and into the room with that big soft thing the humans sit on before he was caught. We need a miracle.”

“I have an idea,” said Gracie. “Remember Gordy Gecko who lives two rocks over from us? He told me he was captured once by humans and was going to be sold in a pet store. He played dead and was tossed outside. When he thought it was safe, he ran all the way home in record speed. Maybe we could play dead.”

As the four captives were thinking this over, Kylee came into the room. “I thought you said the humans were leaving,” said Gertie in her softest gecko voice.

Lorenzo whispered, “Well, sometimes Kylee gets to stay home since she’s the Big Sister.”

Kylee took the lids off the glass boxes, scooped up Gracie and Gertie, and put them in with

now. Go back to your homes and please don’t ever come back here again.”

“Let’s get out of here,” gasped Gertie.

“Oh, my goodness,” replied Loretta. “I didn’t think I’d ever see my Lily and Leonard again!”

They all raced across the desert floor to their homes. Lorenzo and Loretta found their home rock first, and there, safe and sound, were little Lily and Leonard. “Mom! Dad! Are we ever glad to see you,” they shouted.

Gracie and Gertie kept running until at last they saw their home rock. They were panting as they slid under its shelter. Both were so tired that they immediately fell asleep. When they woke up, it was night. Gracie looked up at the star-studded sky, saw a shooting star, and said, “That’s a good sign. We can make a wish.”

Gertie quickly replied, “My wish is to stay here forever and ever where it’s safe. I’ve had enough adventures!”

“You’ll change your mind in the morning,” Gracie said in her “know-it-all” voice. She started flipping her tail around and sang something about “We have survived,” a song her best friend, Gloria Gecko, used to sing.

“She always has to be a show-off,” thought Gertie.

Gracie looked at Gertie and said, “We can do anything now. We can’t just hide under a rock all of the time. Gertie Girl, I have a feeling our adventures are just beginning!” ■

Gracie looked up
at the
star-studded sky,
saw a
shooting star,
and said,
“That’s a good sign.
We can make
a wish.”

Lorenzo and Loretta. “Guess what?” she asked. “I’m going to set you free. I’m sorry my brother did this to you. You belong in the desert.”

She walked down the hall with the four of them to the kitchen and then out the back door. As she tipped over their temporary home, they all ran out as fast as they could. They didn’t hesitate for a minute, but they could hear Kylee saying, “You’re free

3

3rd PLACE ~Centennial Adult Stories

Centennial

BY BARCLAY FRANKLIN

The Last Time I Saw Wickenburg aka Voyage with the Beagle



BARCLAY FRANKLIN was born and raised in western Pennsylvania. She was, and is, an unapologetic tomboy. Franklin has a BA in Medical Technology and a Masters Degree in English and has taught creative writing at Yavapai College for 4.5 years. She currently works part-time for Bent River Books and Music in Cottonwood, Arizona and writes under the pen name, Barclay Franklin. Her published novels include: *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*.

MY HUSBAND IS a herpetologist. He studies things that slither and slide and writes about his studies in scientific papers called “Noteworthy Notes.” I do believe he married me because I was the rare woman he’d courted who wasn’t afraid of snakes and frogs, lizards, turtles, salamanders and other exotic creatures. I never scream when I find the pillow that cradled my head all night also warmed the rat snake curled up in under it. I don’t even mind having to lift the hissing, foot-long alligator, Alger, out of the tub each day so I can take a bath, though I do object to Alger Hiss’s attempts to breakfast on my toes when I get out of the tub.

I grew up a tomboy. I investigated my own fair share of wild things while tramping around the hills, fields, streams and upland woods of Appalachia. I respect, but don’t fear, all forms of reptilian life. Once I got married, I enjoyed going out collecting with my husband’s herpetologist friends on weekends. They liked to take me along, too. I had a good sense of direction and

could usually locate the car after a long night of slogging through southern swamps and cypress knees in a quest to capture tree frogs.

For a couple of years, we lived in an apartment in Baton Rouge while my husband was enrolled in graduate school at LSU. Our apartment was always full of wildlife. Snakes and lizards basked in screen-topped aquariums. Two box turtles had free run of the place. A chuckwalla adopted the lath behind the wall heater as its home, and Alger inhabited the bathtub. All that was fine, but I longed for a “regular” pet. A dog like my father had when I was growing up. A dog that would be good with the children we planned to have. A beagle.

I watched ads in the paper and went to investigate beagle litters. After several tries, I found a nice family whose registered female beagle had a litter of six pups. I selected a male and named it Masked Rusty Falstaff. Friends thought the beagle was named for the Shakespearean character. My husband laughed. He and I knew the dog was named for the brand of

beer my husband preferred to drink.

When I learned I was pregnant with our first child, I was doubly glad Falstaff was such a sweet-tempered dog. He was easily housebroken and fairly obedient. He came when he was called. He loved to walk on his leash. But it was humid in Louisiana, and not long after his first birthday, Falstaff came down with a case of mange.

The vet shaved him bare except for his rust-colored ears. Falstaff seemed embarrassed by his nakedness and hid under the bed. He only came out when coaxed by a bone, and before I would give him the bone, he had to endure being slathered with some evil-smelling lotion to cure the mange.

The mange changed him. He wouldn't go out on his leash unless I swaddled him in a dog sweater. He started wetting the rug by the front door instead of barking to go out. When he did go out, he refused to come back when I called him. He was obstinate. Since the shaving, he marched to his own drummer.

Not long after his coat grew back we moved to Arizona. The drier climate prevented a recurrence of the mange, but Falstaff's personality didn't revert to his pre-shaved sweetness.

Now, Falstaff has to stay in the fenced yard or he runs off. He has to sleep in the laundry room because he continues to wet the rugs.

Staying at home with a child of one and a wayward beagle does nothing to improve my outlook. Our child is sick—a lot. She seems always to be coming down with a cold, or getting over one. She has

tonsillitis and earaches. The tedium of being tied down to the house begins to alter my personality. I grow snappish.

On the advice of our pediatrician, our daughter gets her adenoids out. It's a whole new horseshoe-pitching match. She's two and six months. She's finally well. She's thriving. I see some excursions on the horizon now that she's not always ill.



In spring, the weatherman predicts a warm weekend and my husband suggests a herping adventure to the granite boulders near Yarnell. Geckos live under the shale flakes on the boulders and he wants to collect a few. I beg to go along, pleading to take our child and the beagle. All of us are in sore need of an outing and a change of scenery. My husband finally relents and says we all can go.

We load the portable crib, the potty chair, suitcases, dog food,

herping equipment and the beagle into the rear of the station wagon and set out on our first collecting adventure in Arizona.

Just past Yarnell, he pulls off on a dirt road and stops about five miles from the highway. While he goes to investigate the rocks, my daughter and I walk along, admiring the desert poppies growing in profusion. Falstaff sticks close in the unfamiliar territory. When we head back to the car for a snack, Falstaff, torn between going with us or following my husband, elects to follow the snake man.

My husband begins breaking off rock shale with a crowbar, looking for geckos. Falstaff spots the normal quarry of beagles . . . a rabbit. With throaty baying, he gives chase, but this is neither a grassy field nor a wooded upland Appalachian hill. This is Arizona desert.

The rabbit makes a beeline for a stand of cholla cactus with Falstaff hot to catch up. Not a half-yard into the cholla, a cactus branch lodges in the bottom of Falstaff's foot. Yelping like he's been shot, Falstaff turns for sympathy to my husband, who believes the dog might have encountered a rattlesnake that he can catch.

Whimpering, Falstaff lies down and tries to bite the offending cactus spines from his paw. He manages to shed the biggest piece, but in the process, several spines take up residence in his tongue and nose. My husband, seeing the dog in agony, takes pity and pulls out his nib-nosed pliers to extricate the offending spines. He fails to notice the dislodged clump of cactus and

kneels directly on it.

Now, both Falstaff and my husband are howling. We come on the run, thinking a snake may have bitten both. Seeing the problem, we break into muffled laughter. I make my husband lower his pants and I attack his knee full of spines. Once his knee is free of the sharp needles, we take turns holding out Falstaff's saliva-covered tongue, wielding the pliers until all the spines are gone from his tongue and nose.

Disgusted, muttering about the foolishness of hauling a beagle on a collecting trip, my husband herds everyone into the car and we resume our journey. After a long drive down another dirt road, we come to a trickle of water running across the road. The trickle feeds a cattle tank to the left of the road. On the right side of the road lie a number of pieces of corrugated tin. My husband gets out to investigate the tin, hoping to find a snake under the pieces. My daughter and I walk down to wet our hands in the rivulet of water and Falstaff gets a drink there, then takes off to scope out the area.

My husband finds nothing under the tin, and restarts the car. He blows the horn to summon family and dog. Falstaff quickly jumps in the back and I close the tailgate of the station wagon. We begin traveling down the road again.

After a mile, the car smells horrible and our daughter is gagging. We look around to find Falstaff covered in wet cow manure. Grumbling, my husband backs up the entire mile to the cattle tank.

Grabbing Falstaff by the collar, he wades into the tank up to his thighs and bathes as much of the manure from the dog as he can.

By bath's end, it's growing dusky as evening comes on. My husband sets off for Wickenburg where we planned to spend the night. He pulls into the first motel and tries to obtain a room, but the manager seems unwilling to rent one to a



After a mile,
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and our
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We look
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Falstaff
covered in
wet cow manure.



man wearing slimy mud to mid-thigh and green streaks of cow manure on his shirt. My husband's request isn't enhanced by the green beagle baying out the rear window of the station wagon idling under the motel's canopy. The "no vacancy" light blinks on and my husband returns to the car.

We drive to six or seven other motels, but word spreads fast in the small community of Wickenburg and as our wagon approaches each of them, the "no vacancy" light goes on.

It's well after 3 a.m. when we pull into our driveway in Clarkdale. My husband, exhausted, has driven over the Bradshaw Mountains and Mingus Mountain, on winding, narrow roads while swearing a blue streak, vowing never to take any more herping trips with a beagle.

In the wee hours of the morning, I sponge off our daughter, get her into her nightgown and put her to bed. I pull the alligator from the tub and put Falstaff in it, bathing off the rest of his horrid smell.

As I climb wearily into bed, I am glad we're home. We are whole. We have survived. For a few minutes, I lie awake wondering why a town that bills itself as the "Dude-Ranch Capital of the World" would roll up its sidewalks that way when faced with nothing worse than a man and a dog wearing essence of "cow flop."

I finally fall asleep thinking of Charles Darwin and his voyage on the Beagle. I wonder if Darwin encountered as many problems traveling on the Beagle and making his scientific collections as we just had traveling with the beagle so my husband could make his scientific collections. I tug up the sheet to cover me.

"Ouch!" my husband shouts as the sheet covers him, too. "Another damn cactus spine!" he yelps, clutching at his knee. ■

1

1st PLACE ~Centennial Junior High & High School Essay or Story

Centennial

BY TRISHA ADAMS



ARIZONA AUTHORS ASSOCIATION

WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE

Trisha Adams
on the
award winning entry
Rain Dance

1

1st PLACE ~Centennial Junior High & High School Essay or Story

Centennial.....

BY LAREE CROCKETT



ARIZONA AUTHORS ASSOCIATION

WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE

LaRee Crockett
on the
award winning entry

Remember

1

1st PLACE ~Centennial Elementary Essay or Story

Centennial

BY KODIE RUPERT



ARIZONA AUTHORS ASSOCIATION
WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE

Kodie Rupert
on the
award winning entry
Arizona

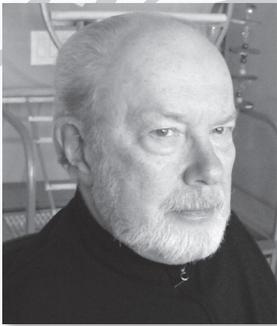
1

1st PLACE ~Poetry

Unpublished.....

BY DENNIS SCHWESINGER

Rocks and Skins and Wings and Shells and Sensitivities



DENNIS SCHWESINGER'S

fiction and poetry writing express his personal discoveries involving multicultural mythologies and the human experience while engaged in health and human services in the Middle East, Far East, Africa, Eastern Europe, Central America and the Caribbean. Until January of 2005, he was Director of Program and Research Development for Cardiac and Vascular Diseases at New York University School of Medicine, and he is the co-founder of Project Kids Worldwide. Dennis has traveled throughout much of the world organizing medical advancements. Now he is fulfilling his lifelong goal of expressing what he has come to understand of the human condition in poem and parable.

Stone canoes dug deep enough can float
But skin stretched over wooden bones
Floats high and carries lighter
Across sand bars and forest trails
And if capsized bobs up and pulls
Easily to shore to be reentered

It's cold in night's unbound horizons
Filled with rocks and nuclear upheavals
Too dim or too ill imagined to possess
What reason reasons being
Rarer things bear consciousness
Wolves and cats and birds and fish

Insects that crawl or fly or web
Or change mid life to soar in yellow beauty
All aware as god is and unaware too
A single one adds scripture to the theme
To elevate itself above the rest

Each awareness exits skin or shell
As if from an overturned canoe
And buoys back onto the firmament
To reconstitute those sensitivities
Without which nothing is
Not even god

2

2nd PLACE ~Poetry

Unpublished

BY ROBERT BUUCK

Hinking With Vivaldi



ROBERT BUUCK is a retired CEO of a medical device company based in Minnesota. He has maintained his primary residence in Paradise Valley for the past several years where he has renewed his interest in writing poetry. In addition to completing some challenging hikes in England, Italy, and Peru, he has enjoyed hiking on some trails in Arizona where his idea for the four seasons of verse originated.

The path I walk in early May
has a trace of snow,

SPRING

it winds past trees that are my friends
and places that I know.

The gecko shares my midday sun-
I dodge the prickly pear,

SUMMER

saguaros on the distant ridge
float up in desert air.

The mountain aspens watch the sun
and know their time is near,

FALL

the lower woodlands have a path.
but none so grand as here.

Today I walk on morning snow
my breath the only sound,

WINTER

I pray this path will never end
but always circle round.

3

3rd PLACE ~Poetry

Unpublished.....

BY RODNEY BLAKEMORE

The Invisible One

RODNEY BLAKEMORE,

42, Born in Texas, currently residing in Parks, Arizona.

Artist, musician and creative thinker. Very handsome.

Suave. Debonair. Mostly

Suave. He can run really fast and people like him. He can

boil water pretty good. Was

told not long ago that he

resembles an early Charles

Manson. "Wow!, I've finally

made it." He likes old things

like antiques and the smell

of history while thumbing

through pages of an old book.

Soft or Hard Target interdiction / Nonfiction / I'm a man on a mission

Ready at a moment's notice / Combustible / Like Nuclear Fission

Send me Here / Send me There / Crisscross a nation without a care

The time is drawing near / Night Optics on / Mission in high gear

Target acquired / Distance unknown / 10 minutes of calculations /

"Every Dog Gets His Bone"

I scan left / I scan right / Time to remove him from his throne

Got you in my sight / Better check my Angle of Slant and Windage /

From 1000 Yards I can remove an Appendage

From my Hide / Nature is my cover / Slow my breathing / Not to discover

"Nothing left to do-ahh! / But "Dope My Scope" /

And send a 338 Lapua"

No sound is heard / No shot is seen / You fall to the ground / Broken /

Completely cut clean

One more Notch on my Stock / Many more to come / When in "Theatre"

"I'M THE INVISIBLE ONE !"



HONORABLE MENTION ~Poetry

Unpublished

BY LAURIE EDEM

And for a Moment I Became as I Began



LAURIE EDEM has been writing for three decades. She enjoys many methods of writing, poetry, texturing, threading and tonality of words; writing germinates, living up to the anticipation. She rarely shared her work; The Arizona Authors contest is the first time she has been brave enough to submit her work since college, Laurie was born in Providence, Rhode Island, raised in Wichita, Kansas and been a resident of Arizona since 1993. She has taken various writing and literature courses at Wichita State University, Phoenix College and Arizona State University. William Faulkner, Chaim Potok, Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Celan, Charles Baudelaire and Emily Dickinson have been her greatest influences.

as a child, I became Eva's—a
stepmother's puppet
moved by switches used to
thwack against my thighs
leaving welts as though wires
were strung beneath skin's surface
I became made of thick jerky-like
strips
—flesh dried sick from
remembering how I began in
scorn
in red-hot dying—from when
rose stems were whipped against
and in my mind's eye, I'm still
hung on Eva's clothes line
like the one beside the pines
where wooden clothes pins pinch
—holding crimson skin and
sallow past in place

recently, as I sifted through old
writings—a particular incident
returned
by my reaction I am left to realize
a spark of disdain

once I held a doll close—a baby a
year old—my daughter playing
on the floor
pulled herself up by tugging the
skin of my underarm, grabbing

her hand
spitefully I screamed, “ouch!” as I
set her on the floor, her cry began
I watched her fall backwards
from a seated position, she hit her
head—
not catching or releasing another
breath—held silent, paused stiff in
my arms
her back arched in mid-cry, in
mid-gasp, she remained with her
eyes
rolled back
my daughter stopped breathing—
a rigid body like a plastic doll
held—molded in place
inside clenched fists she held
my secret in her small palms—I
pleaded for one gasp
one breath—panicking, I ran
down the apartment hallway—
listening for anyone
I banged against a neighbor's
door, begging, “Somebody help
me!”
She came to life and began to cry
and breathe

in that moment, I became wicked
mirroring
as if still damned and wired just

beneath flesh
my stepmother and I merged,
indistinguishable
turning in on my own—leaving
not even a feeble light
a hostile exchange, the kind I'd
witnessed as a child
while shriveling up inside a
helpless little girl—
who instinctively knew this
appalling harm
—where all became formidable,
self broken brittle
how can I forget?—when i can
see in my mind's eye
flesh still hangs on her clothes
line by the pines?

how my skin remains in neat
bitter rows—in the way Eva hung

the sheets
—often, I wondered if I could
ever be billowing in the wind
dancing like twirling little girls,
giggling
spinning in white skirts—how
badly i wished to be them
but deterred I am under my own
duress kept—within yesterdays

if only I could go quietly into
that certain dark

where past hardly sleeps
barefoot on tip-toes on the balls
of my feet
so my soles won't slap against
concrete
then onto grass, past the pines
where shadowy monsters hiss and

hide
if only I could run as I did as a
child
run fast to the clothes line
gathering skin off wires, letting
clothes pins pop off
—then quick, I could snatch
myself back
into wholeness—out of the
forsaken night
like a thief stealing what was—
once mine—and my daughter's

AND FOR A MOMENT I
BECAME AS I BEGAN

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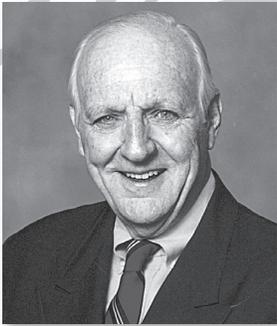
1

1st Place ~Essay

Unpublished

BY BOB NATIELLO

Classroom Expectations



BOB NATIELLO After a career as a Madison Avenue ad executive, New York native Bob Natiello retired to Sedona to write fiction and creative nonfiction. His *Dog Fight* won First Prize in Manhattan Media's 2009 fiction contest and appeared in *Our Town*, *West Side Spirit* and *New York Press*. That same year, AAA awarded *El Caballo Blanco* First Prize in Fiction. *How Jiminy Cricket* took Second Place in AAA's Memoir category. In 2010, AAA gave Special Mention to his *Ticket to K Street*. Tucson's Society of Southwestern Authors has honored his *J.D. Salinger's Tobacco Dependency* with First Prize in Literary Humor. They also anthologized his nonfiction, *Hollywood Marines* and gave Special Mention to several of his other short stories.

CHANCES ARE strong--very strong--you weren't a student at all-male Brooklyn Prep in the late Forties. Even so you may be familiar with the name, Tom Bermingham. One of his former students, William Peter Blatty, cast him as Georgetown University president in the top-grossing film, *The Exorcist*. Another of his students--legendary football coach Joe Paterno--mentions Bermingham in his biography, *The Coach from Byzantium*.

Blade-thin in his black cassock and wide sash, Tom Bermingham looked like the typical 26 year-old Jesuit scholastic. During their long preparation for the priesthood, scholastics teach for three years, mostly at the secondary school level. Inside and outside the classroom, we called them Mister. Father was reserved for priests.

Mister Bermingham was devoted to the classics. As a 15 year-old, I got my first taste of his commitment to the languages of ancient Rome and Athens when he chose me as part of a group of

high achieving Latin students for his classical Greek course. The day we cracked open our first basic Greek reader even the brightest students, knowing nothing of the Greek alphabet, we could only stare at the pages, bewildered.

Mister Bermingham quickly built our confidence. He steered us through rough breathing and such new grammatical concepts as the aorist tense and the optative mood. In a few weeks we read and translated sentences. Soon we progressed to a routine of preparing paragraphs at home and parsing them at the following day's class. Our self-assurance grew when we advanced to longer stories of Darius, the Persian king who conquered Thrace and Macedonia.

On a pleasant spring morning, midway through the second semester, our classroom routine took a sharp turn. Mister Bermingham asked our top student to read the assigned Greek passage. The instant he finished,

Mister Bermingham pounced.

“Now translate,” he said, “into Latin.”

Every head, as though, controlled by a master puppeteer, snapped to attention.

“But Mister, I don’t know all the Latin vocabulary.”

“I’ll give you the words,” Mister Bermingham said, “where necessary. You make sure the nouns and adjectives match in gender, number and case. And the verbs have the correct person, number, tense mood and voice.”

The student struggled through, the strain showing in his stammering. When he raised his relieved eyes from the text, Mr. Bermingham challenged him again. “Now translate the Latin-- into French.”

Again, every head snapped. And so it went, student after student, the tension growing with each recitation.

When my turn came, I rose and plodded through the Greek-to-Latin portion. “Now translate the Latin into French,” Mister Bermingham said.

“But Mister,” I protested, “I can’t translate into French. My modern language is Spanish.” I prayed he’d let me sit down and avoid embarrassment. His silent stare made it clear that my prayers had gone unanswered. In a perfectly businesslike monotone, he said, “Translate into Spanish.” Like a marathoner staggering toward the finish line, I translated the Latin to Spanish, the Spanish to English and sat, mentally spent.

Today when I recount this story, listeners express amazement. “Why would any modern American want to translate Greek into Latin?”

I always give the same response. Moving through three languages gave me the courage to tackle any foreign language. No matter



On a pleasant

spring morning,

midway

through the

second semester,

our classroom

routine

took a



sharp turn.

what country I’m in, I earn welcome smiles for my efforts to communicate in the local tongue.

Far beyond giving me an appreciation for languages, Mister Bermingham taught me a

life lesson I’ve never forgotten. It wasn’t the Greek or the Latin, neither of which I’ve ever spoken in everyday conversation. It was the high expectations he placed on us. As the years have passed since that challenging spring morning, I’ve grown to believe that education that demands nothing gets nothing in return.

I’ve also learned something about the best teachers: they bring two vital skills to the classroom. Like Mister Bermingham, they require their pupils to stretch their mental faculties to the utmost. At the same time, they provide the encouragement every student needs to flourish. In the classroom, Ronald Reagan’s “Trust, but verify” translates to “Support, but demand.” I firmly believe we could vastly increase our return on our education investment if more teachers and parents followed this support-but-demand model.

Decades after graduating from the Prep, while at a Manhattan athletic club, I struck up a poolside conversation with an 80 year-old Jesuit.

“How’s my old teacher, Mister Tom Bermingham?” I asked, fully aware that he’d been Father Tom Bermingham for many years.

“He’s still teaching,” the old Jesuit said. “A dedicated classical scholar.”

And probably making the same outrageous demands on his students, I thought. Lucky them. ■

2

2nd Place ~Essay

Unpublished

BY D.L. KEATHLEY

A Father's Answer



D. L. KEATHLEY

Diana Keathley is a retired school teacher whose career of thirty-five years included teaching Spanish to all age groups, K-12, English Immersion to English Language Learners students, Spanish Immersion, and Latin-American Studies, both in public and private schools. She is fluent in Spanish and has traveled to Mexico and Spain, co-sponsoring student trips and exchange programs. She enjoys writing poetry, and personal stories of encouragement and faith. She loves music and is also a singer/songwriter. Mrs. Keathley and her husband of thirty-two years reside in Tulsa, Oklahoma near their four children, four grandchildren, and other family members and friends.

IT IS A STARK REALIZATION when we see that we are the ‘older generation.’ Unprepared and kiddish as we feel inside, the torch has been passed to us. How in the world will we carry it? I’m very sure our parents felt the same way. And we will do it in the same manner they did, with the help and by the grace of God. We will pass the wisdom we have gained from our mistakes on to our children and pray they listen so they won’t have to make the same ones themselves. We will look at the errors of our parents, knowing the consequences we suffered, and strive to do things a little better for our own children. Such is the nature of life in this world –decades of searching, sometimes by trial and error, for that which is good and right, for love, true joy, and peace of mind; searching for a way to live in this world, but not be of it. In the end, when we are less distracted by the world itself, and when we are better ready to learn it, we find the simple truth that all those good things we longed for are found in one place – in God himself, and that all along

He has been expressing himself, revealing himself in the loving relationships of family and friends around us, drawing us step-by-step, year-by-year closer to Him. And it is ironic that He often uses death to teach us about life – real life, eternal life with Him.

One of my favorite scriptures is Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Those comforting words have served me well in many difficult times of hardship and loss. I’ve seen their truth borne out in countless circumstances in my own life. When I have been tempted to look back at some dark and painful periods and say,

“Why, Lord, did I have to go through that?” or “How could I not see the mistake I was making?”, the Spirit has brought to mind that verse and shown me, more clearly every time, that in spite of my limited knowledge, my misinformation, or lack of understanding, and no matter how devious and deadly the schemes of the evil one to throw me off

track, derail my purpose, and render me useless, God has always been faithful to turn those things around which were meant for evil and work them for my good. So that I now stand with the apostle Paul, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ...” (Philippians 1:6) From the moment He prayed for me, and for all future believers, two thousand years ago, Jesus has always had my back. He’s always been my best friend, even long before I knew Him. The months surrounding my father’s death were no exception. In fact, in retrospect, God revealed Himself in marvelous ways to many in my family through and amid the painful circumstances of Dad’s passing, giving us peace and strength, and in those poignant, intimate moments with eternity, He has let us glimpse the height, and breadth and depth of His love for each one of his children.

I was a classic example of a “Daddy’s girl.” When my brother Kenny came along just eleven months behind me, I was still a baby myself. My Dad used to joke, when people would ask about us, that we were “twins – on the installment plan.” While Mom was busy with the newest addition, Dad was the one who took care of my immediate needs. He cut my food and fed me, smashing my baked potatoes to a perfect paste of half butter and half potato, and flying the airplane into the hanger, to get the green beans down me. He helped me with socks and patiently found

the tiny holes in the ankle straps that buckled my white patent leather sandals. He brushed my hair, and on hair-washing days, he painstakingly combed the tangles out, always working from the bottom up. On a few occasions he tried his hand at making my pincurls, though they were never as secure as when Mom did them. He even trimmed my bangs once as an unsolicited ‘favor’ to my mother. However, they turned out so uneven, after whacking the whole handful of hair in one long sawing motion, that he continued to trim, in a persevering effort to get the buggers straight. I ultimately had only about an inch of fringe hanging from my hairline, far above my eyebrows. Needless to say, he only did that little chore the one time! On weekdays, late in the afternoon I sensed when it was time to start listening for the sound of the Ford Fairlane pulling into the driveway. Sometimes Dad would stop at the grocery store to pick up a few things we needed before the weekend shopping. If he was much later than I thought he should be, I would fret and hound Mom every minute or two with my insistent question, “When is Daddy going to be home?!” Finally, I would hear the car in the driveway, and race to hide behind the front door to jump out and scare him as he came in. Many a time, Dad stumbled through the livingroom with a grocery sack in each arm, and me hanging for dear life onto his leg, trying not to step on me and fumbling to keep his balance long enough to set the groceries on the dining room table before he scooped me up and gave

me a bear hug. The best part of my day was just beginning. He used to wrestle and play with us kids in the floor, and ham that he was, would feign injury, telling my older sisters, or Ken, “Oh, you broke my leg!” or “Whew! You’re too strong for me. Uncle! Uncle!” Well, being the daddy’s girl that I was, I thought it was my job to take care of him as much as it was his to take care of me. I would shout “Don’t you hurt my daddy!” and lay into the others with both arms flailing so fast, that Dad would get tickled at my ‘windmill treatment’ and have to fess up and call the game off so that no one would really get hurt. On Sundays, he would brush out the dried pincurls, fold my lace anklets down perfectly and tie the big bow just right in the back of my dress to go to Sunday school and church, even though he wasn’t going with us, something which bothered me immensely at the time and which I didn’t understand until many years later. He was the epitome of love and strength, wisdom and safety for me. He knew everything, and could do no wrong, well, except the bangs. Those were blissfully happy early years.

Then, somewhere at about five or six years old, I started having horrible episodes of fear. I think they began shortly after Uncle Oscar died. My Grandma Harney’s brother Oscar was scary enough when he was alive – old, and scraggly looking with long yellow fingernails, and false teeth that he would thrust out suddenly at us kids for the sole

purpose of hearing us squeal. He would laugh gleefully at his success and then wiggle his long fingernails making the eerie “Whooooo” noise to get another rise out of us. Being only five years old, I didn’t understand his odd sense of humor, and those were not particularly good experiences with him. Then suddenly, there he was lying all stiff and waxy-looking in an open casket in Grandma’s livingroom. Everyone was sad and crying. I didn’t know what to think of it all, and it raised so many questions, questions I would struggle for years to find answers to. The fear came on unexpectedly after that, at the mere mention of illness, death, heaven, hell, eternity. My thoughts would spiral out of control and waves of sheer terror would wash over me. I never knew when it would hit me.

One such occasion was triggered by a turtle expiring in the science room at McKinley Elementary School. I believe I was in second grade. I cried through the whole class period, though the teacher tried to comfort me with thoughts of heaven, comparing its beauty with the rainbow-like colors on the inside of the turtle shell. Her words were prophetic, but it was not comforting at the time to think of living in a shell forever, no matter how pretty it was. I was upset all day at school and inconsolable by the time Dad got home from work. I climbed in his lap and asked him to tell me about heaven. What would it be like? How would it look? Would we be able to walk around? Would we all be together? Would there be room for everyone? That was a

genuine concern for me, since I had a very large and loving extended family on both my mom’s and dad’s side. I had so many questions. That night was my first realization that my Daddy didn’t know everything. There were questions he could not answer. At least he was honest with me. I never thought until years later about how hard it must have been for him to look in his daughter’s adoring, searching eyes and say

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those words so void of comfort, “I don’t know, honey.” He didn’t try to make anything up. He was quiet for several minutes before he went on. “I don’t know what heaven will be like. But if God can make mountains and trees, I’m sure heaven will be beautiful.” His answer seemed

inadequate at best, for me, and I suspect now, for him too.

The fear episodes recurred off and on until I was well into high school. How God finally delivered me from that is another whole story. But long after the episodes had stopped, and I had grown in faith, and was on with my life, old fears forgotten, God did not forget. And I am sure my Dad never forgot either, that nagging question about heaven that I had so desperately needed to know and that he had failed so miserably to answer.

After many healthy years, and then a decade of dealing with Parkinson’s disease, which had many challenges, Dad was diagnosed with lung cancer in the fall of 1999. He went through a series of radiation treatments, which at first he sustained fairly well for his eighty-one years. But late in the following spring his health began to decline rather quickly, so my next-older sister, Vernelle, and I would take turns at night staying with Mom and Dad in their home in Broken Arrow. Even though it was a sad premise – the ultimate demise of our beloved “Daddy” – those last few months of Dad’s life were, even at the time, a sweet and precious gift from God, riddled with heavenly encounters and glimpses of another life and realm, overflowing with God’s love and presence.

Like the times when Dad would get up at night to go to the bathroom, and being always unsteady and off balance from the Parkinson’s disease, would almost lose his footing and fall but for the steadying hand that stabilized him, by

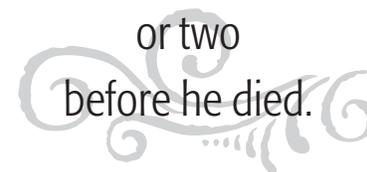
his own account, more than once. He told my sister of one time in particular when he turned to thank Mom for her help – he had felt a strong, gentle hand on his elbow that had kept him from going to the floor when his feet wouldn't move. Regaining his balance, he turned to express his appreciation only to find that she was sound asleep on the other side of the bed, facing the opposite direction! Then there was an evening, on Vernelle's watch, when Dad lowered the newspaper he was reading to ask her in an oh-by-the-way sort of question, "Who was that young man at the table with us at lunch today?" My sister was taken off guard, and didn't know quite how to respond. She said she didn't understand what he meant, and reminded him that there had only been mother and she at the table with him. He looked at my sister incredulously, and very exasperated, he insisted somewhat condescendingly, "Well, I know you and your mother! But who was the young man sitting next to me?" To that, she could only reply, truthfully, "I don't know, Dad. I really don't know who it was." When my sister told me about the incident later, how matter-of-fact his question had been, and his exasperation at her noncomprehension of such a simple inquiry, we came to the same conclusion, that perhaps Dad had actually seen someone, someone very real, but that she couldn't see.

Another time I sat down beside Dad after breakfast, thinking how I would broach the subject that he should drink more water. The nurse said the toxins were building up in

his system and needed to be flushed out. We had to find a way to get more water down him. We would leave a glass of water on the table by his chair, but often hours went by with no more than a few sips taken. I didn't want to nag. Dad was always such a thinking man, surely I could appeal to his reasoning and get him to understand how critically important it was to keep his body



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well hydrated. I patted his leg and began, "Dad, there's something really important I need to talk to you about..." As I paused to form the next words, only for a split second, he covered my hand with his, patting it, and with the sweetest, most celestial smile, he nodded his head and said, "I know – Jesus Christ." I was flabbergasted! Much as I love the Lord, He was far from the subject of my thoughts in that particular moment, but apparently very near to Dad, and very much on

his mind.

The most amazing incident, however, at least from my perspective, happened near the end, just a day or two before he died. Mom and Dad had moved in with Vernelle and her husband Oman early in July. Oman had remodeled part of their house into a suite for our parents where they could still have some privacy and their own space, yet be close to immediate help when needed. For a month or so Dad held his own, with a mix of good days and bad days. The first week in August, however, he took a turn for the worse. We were all pretty vigilant about being there, wanting to spend as much time as we could with Dad in those brief moments of consciousness. But as his pain grew worse and the morphine level was increased, he slipped into longer and longer periods of comatose sleep, only rousing occasionally with a moan of pain. The family was all around, and while Dad was 'resting' we would visit, or several of us would sit down to pray together. Sometimes we would each be lost in our own silent thoughts and prayers, but we all knew we were just waiting for the inevitable. One afternoon Mom, Vernelle, Karen, our oldest sister, and I were all in Dad's room together. They were talking quietly in the sitting area at one end of the large room. I was seated about halfway up the adjacent wall, closer to the side of the room where Dad's bed was. I was silently reading my Bible, soaking in all the passages that have been especially helpful, uplifting and comforting to me. Dad had not

been awake to speak or move on his own for a couple of days.

Suddenly, he stretched his arm out, and calling me by name, he said, “Diana, come here.” I was startled and excited that he was awake. I dragged my chair quickly to his bedside to hear what he was going to say, praying that I wouldn’t miss a word of it. With a broad sweeping gesture of his left arm he described, in a clearer voice than I had heard in many days, what he saw. “It’s like a paintbrush – a rainbow of colors -- beautiful, brilliant colors...” The stroking motion of his arm stopped and he brought it back to his side. Still staring, as if through the wall at something else, he added in a quiet but very distinct voice, “I see five angels.” I wanted to hear more. I may have even asked him what else he saw. But when I looked at him, his eyes were closed again. He had resumed the shallow, irregular breathing of his coma-like state. Those were the last intelligible words he spoke, to my knowledge. I was euphoric as I repeated the message to the others in the room, who had witnessed the exchange but hadn’t heard as clearly as I had. We knew that Dad had described to us a heavenly scene that he was experiencing as God prepared to take him home. And we knew what a rare and sacred privilege it was for us to have the eye-witness account of someone who was on the threshold of stepping into the heavenly life. We were enthralled and basking in the love and comfort that God had so miraculously shed upon us. As we marveled at the

encounter and repeated the events for those who were not present in the room, the question occurred to me “Why me?” Why had Dad called my name? I knew it wasn’t that he loved me any more than my other sisters. Mom had been his sweetheart and helpmate for fifty-seven years. Why had God chosen me to receive and relate



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that heavenly message? My sisters and mother were no less spiritual, no less women of faith than I. Why me? It was a mystery I couldn’t explain. It was one more demonstration of God’s inexplicable grace – unmerited, undeserved, and unearned favor.

It was only in the weeks and months after Dad’s passing, when I was meditating on the things that had transpired, that the Spirit very matter-of-factly, in one of those eye-opening ‘duh’ moments, reminded me that it was I who, as a young child, had asked my Daddy so earnestly about heaven. He hadn’t had an answer then. But it was only logical and fitting that when Dad finally had an answer to that forty-something-year-old question, he would direct that response, in his last hours here on earth, to me.

It still overwhelms me and brings tears of joy when I think of those events and the marvelous way in which God works all things for good, even the dark and scary periods, to answer questions, to teach us things, and ultimately to draw us to a deeper understanding and a more glorious experience of Him. He is with us, each one individually, when we come to face our demons, and when we finally reach the end of ourselves and realize how completely unable and utterly helpless we are to overcome them on our own, there is Jesus, with loving arms wide open, saying “I know you can’t. But I can. Trust me. Lean on me. Rest in me. I’ve already done it for you.”

Glory to God, I now have an answer when my grandchildren ask me to tell them about heaven, not based on supposition, but based on an eye-witness report that both my heavenly Father and my earthly father loved me enough to bring me. ■

3

3rd Place ~Essay

Unpublished

BY SYLVIA FORBES

A Desert Christmas

SYLVIA FORBES likes to watch the flowers bloom and the eagles soar. When not out exploring nature, she sits in her office trying to arrange words in meaningful ways. A speaker and freelance writer, she has published over 600 articles in magazines such as the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Herb Quarterly*, *Rural Missouri*, and *AAA Midwest Traveler*, and is the publisher of the *Bylines Writer's Desk Calendar*, a weekly planner for writers. Visit her websites at www.heartlandwriter.com and www.bylinescalendar.com.

AS SOON AS WE heard the unmistakable maracas-like rattle, everyone froze in mid-step. Looking around, we spotted the source of the sound, a black-tailed rattlesnake, half-hidden in the shade of the creosote bush growing at the edge of the trail. After a moment of checkmate, with us watching him and him staring at us, from a respectful distance, he apparently realized there were more of us than he, and obligingly slithered off, soon obscured by rocks.

"Wow, our first sighting of the day," said Jim, grinning. "I wonder what other excitement today will hold?"

We continued along the dusty trail, hoping to reach our destination for the day—a nice picnic spot by a desert stream, with a few cottonwood trees overhead to break the strong glare of the sun. Ten of us hiked along the trail, sometimes single file, other times two of us side-by-side, talking together, a leisurely, scenic hike through

the national wilderness area of Arizona's Superstition Mountains. We could not have chosen a more perfect day, with the temperature in the 80s and a clear blue sky shimmering above the spectacular

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jagged mountain peaks.

Today was Christmas, and none of us, all graduate students at the University, could afford the plane tickets to go home

for the holidays. Stranded away from home, with school out of session, we could have felt sorry for ourselves. Instead, together, we opted to start a new Christmas tradition, which was a day-long hike through the amazing scenery of the desert mountains.

Raised in different states, none of us were familiar with the desert habitat, and we were looking to get better acquainted. All along our hike, we gazed at the incredible sights before us. We marveled at the tall Saguaro cacti, each weighing several tons, that served as cactus condos for many species of birds. Gilded flickers flitted into their homes in the holes and a cactus wren perched on top, singing away in its particular style which sounded somewhat like trying to start a car with a low battery. Once in awhile we'd see a flash of an iridescent rose color and hear a swift buzz go by—an Anna's hummingbird flying toward its next food source. We spotted a collared lizard doing pushups on a rock, and later a horned lizard almost completely camouflaged in the gritty sand.

Everywhere around us, the November rains had given the thirsty desert a drink; as a result, a sheen of green covered the ground, with new seedlings sprouting everywhere. Come spring, this area would burst into color from an abundance of wildflowers.

The mountains themselves gave us a feeling that we were

explorers, discovering a new world. After the first turn on the trail, the trappings of civilization disappeared. No cars, no parking lot; no telephone wires or traffic sounds. Just a few bird sounds, and mostly the quiet peace of nature. With no signs of the modern day world, it was easy to imagine that we had traveled back in time, perhaps several hundred years, where we might meet an ancient

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Native American around the next bend of the rocky trail. Or perhaps we might have traveled even further back, to the days of the original Christmas.

After about three hours, we put five miles behind us, and reached our streamside lunch site.

We lounged around after lunch, splashing in the shallow stream and enjoying the cool water, not in a hurry to leave. One in our group had brought Christmas gifts of sugar cookies to eat, and another a small jug of lemonade, with little plastic glasses, to toast the holidays. Another pulled out a harmonica to serenade us for awhile. These little gifts weren't much but were appreciated. It's the thought that counts, which is what this hike was all about, sharing the joy of life, and friendship, and love for others.

All too soon, it was time to pack up and start back. All nature lovers, we hoped to spot more wildlife on the way. One of our biggest gifts of the day, unexpected, was spotting some bighorn sheep, foraging in the distance.

Late in the day, we reached our cars, and drove back to the city. Our Christmas Day, which had looked so bleak several days before, had turned out to be a happy, exciting, fun-filled day, spent with friends, with stronger relationships forged. For the next several years, this desert hike became an annual Christmas tradition for us.

I have long since graduated, but remember well, how Christmas away from home turned out not to be a sad occasion, but a happy one. I can only hope, as some of us graduated, got jobs and moved away, and the next ones took our places as they entered the graduate program, that this Christmas tradition has continued. ■

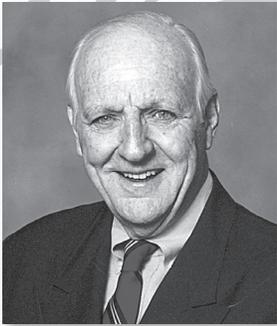
1

1st Place ~Stories

Unpublished

BY BOB NATIELLO

A Favorable Impression



BOB NATIELLO After a career as a Madison Avenue ad executive, New York native Bob Natiello retired to Sedona to write fiction and creative nonfiction. His *Dog Fight* won First Prize in Manhattan Media's 2009 fiction contest and appeared in *Our Town*, *West Side Spirit* and *New York Press*. That same year, AAA awarded *El Caballo Blanco* First Prize in Fiction. *How Jiminy Cricket* took Second Place in AAA's Memoir category. In 2010, AAA gave Special Mention to his *Ticket to K Street*. Tucson's Society of Southwestern Authors has honored his *J.D. Salinger's Tobacco Dependency* with First Prize in Literary Humor. They also anthologized his nonfiction, *Hollywood Marines* and gave Special Mention to several of his other short stories.

FOURTEEN—THAT WAS the exact number of jazz standards Queenie St. Laurence had sung during the first forty-five minutes of her Empire Room performance. Barry Gunderson, seated among the glittering Manhattan Saturday-night audience, was certain of his count. He'd ticked off each song with an anxious glance at his illuminated wristwatch. When Queenie removed the onstage mike from its stand and strolled toward the piano, he sensed his moment had arrived.

She lifted a card from the spray of American Beauty roses resting atop the Steinway, held it at arm's length and announced above the clink-clink of highball glasses, "Well, mercy lord. This is just such a wonderful surprise." Like the stereotypical Hollywood Indian brave, she shielded her eyes and searched the crowd. "Barry Gunderson, you dear Southwestern Renaissance man. I just know you're out there, darling'. You stand up right this very minute."

Finally, Barry thought.

"Now don't you dare be shy.

We're just aching to recognize you for these absolutely beautiful flowers. Not to mention the great work you're doing to support jazz and art in far off New Mexico." Shapely in a clinging ankle-length dress, she won scattered urbane laughter when she spanglicized New Mexico into New May-hico.

Unwinding his slim, six-foot frame, Barry stood, surrounded by white-clothed tables and the scent of expensive perfume. He acknowledged the warm audience response with a smile, and a self-effacing hand wiggle that masked his serious preparation. Just before the cocktail hour, he'd chosen two-dozen long-stemmed roses from the Gotham Hotel florist. After scribbling "We-heart-you-Queenie" on his business card, he strode into the lobby, and slipped the concierge a twenty-dollar bill.

"Place these on Miss St. Laurence's piano before tonight's nine o'clock show, will you?" He shifted the roses, wrapped in standard florist-green tissue, into the man's outstretched arms. "And make sure my card here is

positioned where she won't miss it."

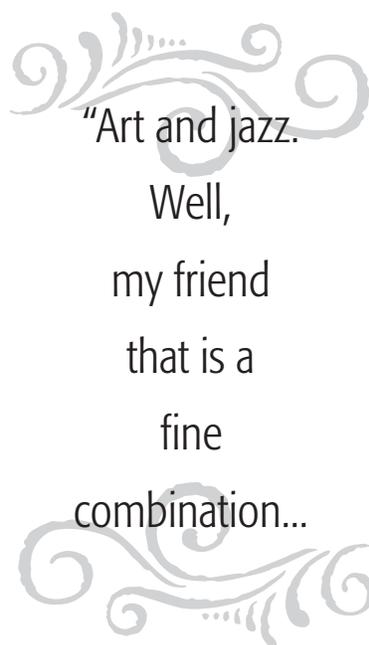
The concierge, name-badged Kelvin, responded with a Caribbean lilt. "I will take proper care of the entire matter, sir." Barry saw himself in the hands of an experienced service provider, a silver-haired veteran who appeared to sense his need to make a favorable impression.

But it wasn't who Queenie Barry had hoped to impress. It was Savitri Amin, the exotic, New Delhi-born beauty sharing his table. Barry had met this thirtyish New York art buyer when she dropped by his gallery--Santa Fe's oldest--seeking rugged southwestern landscapes for her eastern customers.

Their business affiliation bloomed like a desert flower. Confident he'd built a strong professional bond, he'd flown to New York aiming to win her personal affection. Since his divorce, he'd been searching for a new relationship. Eighteen months without companionship, caring, and good hard sex was too long. If tonight went as planned, it could be the start of a new life.

When he resumed his seat, Savitri edged closer and whispered through the clapping, "You never told me you knew famous entertainers." She steered her manicured fingertips around the after-dinner demitasse cups and caressed his hand. "And jazz? I thought your whole world was built around painters and sculptors."

Savitri spoke with the unique British-Indian inflection she'd absorbed as a child and sustained throughout her art-student days at Cambridge. The music of it charmed Barry from the first moment they met. Her hair, drawn straight back to accent her smooth forehead and delicate features, shone jet black. Her dark eyes, glistening with admiration, told him all his preparation had been worth the effort. They remained hip-to-hip through Queenie's final



number and beg-off exit. When the applause faded, the house lights rose and Barry inadvertently locked eyes with a grinning man at the next table.

"So are you one of those jazz aficionados?" the man asked. Barry, certain he'd heard "afishy-ondos," reacted with a boyish smile, his most attractive feature.

His questioner, fifty-some and tieless, displayed a gold medallion nestled on a triangular bed of

exposed, graying chest hair. He and his goddess-shaped female companion appeared friendly enough for Barry to launch an explanation.

"My Santa Fe art gallery keeps me pretty busy," he said, scanning the room for the waiter and his check. "But I make time to volunteer for the hospitality committee during our annual jazz fest. I had a ton of fun hosting Queenie last year."

With Savitri at his side, he thought it best to avoid any details of that brief, but unforgettable, encounter. It drew him and Queenie together for just enough time to reveal a mutual chemical attraction--yet with too little time to fulfill its exciting promise. Without letting on that he still kept in touch with Queenie through occasional e-mails, he continued. "I always have some idea of what's going on in the world of jazz."

"Art and jazz. Well, my friend that is a fine combination. Lidajane--that's my wife here--and I would admire to hear more about that. Why don't you and your girlfriend come up to our room? We'll have a drink over it."

"Girlfriend" fell awkwardly on Barry's ears. He hoped Savitri hadn't heard it above the clatter of dish removal. "Thanks, but we have to leave as soon as I pay the check."

"Now don't you go giving that checks another thought? I already paid it."

"You paid our check?"

"Hell, it's no big deal. Just

our way of getting to meet good people.”

“Very generous of you. But you have no idea who I am.”

“Well, we’re gonna fix that right now. Floyd and Lidajane Hembroke. Sweet Home, Arkansas.” He extended his hand and smiled. “Just outside Little Rock.” His thin upper lip peeled back to expose perfectly capped teeth and a good quarter-inch of upper gum. “You come right on up, seventeenth floor. One drink, some art and jazz talk, and we’ll be gettin’ on like down-home folks. Wha’d you say your name was?”

Barry felt suffocated with obligation. He estimated his check at two hundred dollars, minimum. He considered his new acquaintance a clod for putting him in this position. But he felt he’d be the bigger clod if he stuck him with the tab and walked out. He sought guidance with a glance at Savitri. Seeing nothing negative, he addressed her, loud enough for Floyd to hear, “It can’t do any harm to stay for one drink.”

A steady rain shrouded the lights of Manhattan. From the Hembroke’s hotel-room balcony, Barry heard the hiss of late-night automobile tires speeding along the wet streets, seventeen floors below. In the distance, the East River boats floated by, their foghorns groaning, their running lights fuzzy, as though wrapped in gauze.

Chilled from the late-night dampness, Barry struggled to make conversation. “Our common love for Georgia O’Keeffe—that’s the

magnet that pulled Savitri and me together.” He slid back the glass door, and stepped into the living room, eager to finish his drink and leave.

Floyd spun the ice in his glass and laughed. “Sounds like you two have Georgia on your minds.” Barry winced. He tried to catch the attention of Savitri, who appeared



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to be making small talk with Lidajane at the coffee table.

“You got to tell us more about these jazz connections of yours,” Floyd went on. “Lidajane and I are in the film business—always on the lookout for jazzy film scores. Something that don’t cost

more than the whole goddam production.”

Before Barry could answer, the door opened. Kelvin entered, carrying a flat, silver box. He walked directly to Savitri and Lidajane, raised the hinged cover and displayed a dozen tightly rolled marijuana joints. Barry caught Savitri’s arched eyebrow and sensed her uneasiness.

While Savitri declined Kelvin’s offer with a headshake, Lidajane dipped her ring-encrusted fingers into the box. “I just don’t know how we’d get along in this big old city without Kelvin. He’s our good Samaritan.”

“He’s a Jamaican, Lidajane. How many times I got to tell you?” Floyd boomed. “And the smoothest one in this whole town—takes good care of you right down the line. ‘Course you got to take good care of Kelvin.” Reaching into the silver box, he softened. “I guess we do a pretty good job of that. Right, Kelvin?”

Kelvin agreed with widened eyes, a slight bow, and a sharp snap of gold lighter. He extended the flame to Lidajane and Floyd, who toked and then exhaled. The grassy aroma spread quickly. Barry, sniffing as though catching a cold, broke the silence. “You’ve been more than generous; Floyd, but Savitri and I must say good night.”

“Hell, you can’t go now. Not when I’m fixin’ to offer you and your girlfriend a business proposition.” The door clicked behind the exiting Kelvin.

"I'm afraid it's going to have to wait." Barry strained to be polite. "We have to be at our best tomorrow. Sunday art auctions attract very competitive buyers."

Floyd discounted Barry's concern and ignored the deteriorating effect of the gathering smoke on his draining sinuses.

"When we were down there in that Empire Room, Lidajane leaned over and whispered something about your girlfriend. She said you got something right special there."

"What I said," Lidajane cut in, "was that she'd make a real cute co-star in one of our films. We'd make such interesting contrasts--her dark skin would be absolutely adorable alongside my blond coloring."

For the second time Barry saw Savitri raise her eyebrow. When her mouth turned down at the corners, he felt like a scolded schoolboy.

"My Lidajane don't ask for a hell of a lot, but when she does, I'd re-route the Arkansas River to get it."

"We employ the best cinematographer," Lidajane said. "And the lighting? Why we'd make it just as soft as a down quilt. So artistic." The words rushed out in a dramatic whisper. "So . . . woman-to-woman."

"Huge appeal to both sexes," Floyd assured. "The boys aren't the only ones who like all that licking stuff. The gals love it, too. And with your girlfriend supplying all that dark skin and eastern mysticism, we'd have a video that would blow the doors off, worldwide."

Lidajane rushed to support her husband. "Oh, it's all anonymous. We don't give out the names of the

cast, or anything like that."

Barry abandoned all show of politesse. He took Savitri's arm and made for the door. Before he could open it, Kelvin, wheeling a room-service table bearing glasses and ice, re-entered. With Kelvin blocking one side, and Floyd declaiming from the other, Barry felt trapped.

"Hell, Barry. A man like you ought to have an interest in an art film like this. Can't you hear your girlfriend's high-class accent doing

Without warning,
a white stretch limo
pulled up
to the curb,
spraying
Barry's black,
wing-tipped
shoes.

Kama Sutra love poetry in the voice-over? We'll have one of them big Indian guitars strum up your jazzy musical score while the girls go at it."

Barry saw Savitri shudder. He circled her shoulders with a protective arm and shouted. "I don't know what they use for sensitivity down in Sweet Home, Arkansas, but whatever it is, it needs redefining." He lifted a white handkerchief from his breast pocket to stifle his running nose.

"You and your wife are a couple of crude, tactless vulgarians."

Lidajane smashed her marijuana into the ashtray and jumped to her feet. "I'd like to know just what makes you so high and mighty. It's not as though we're asking you to do this for nothing."

"Goddam right. There's a nice finder's fee in this for you, Barry. And we'll work out an arrangement for your girlfriend--a capitation fee. So much for each unit."

Barry tightened his grip around Savitri. He squeezed past Kelvin's cart and led her into the corridor. Stepping into the elevator, he punched the down button with a fury he hoped would speed its descent. Savitri, arms folded in a self-hug, massaged her freed shoulders. "You should not have been so quick to accept his hospitality," she said.

"Dammit Savitri," Barry flared. "Don't put this on me. I gave you every opportunity to say no."

"You should have protected me from that beast. I am not an indentured servant--a piece of property to be bargained over."

Barry struggled to calm himself. He fixed on the overhead indicator and silently counted the declining electronic numbers: sixteen . . . fifteen . . . fourteen. Floor-by-floor, he grew aware that he was ending the evening the same way he began it--counting.

At street level, the hiss of the late-night taxicab tires struck Barry much louder than from Floyd Hembroke's seventeenth-floor balcony. He

hailed cab after cab, only to watch their wheels sizzle into the darkness with endless predictability.

Without warning, a white stretch limo pulled up to the curb, spraying Barry's black, wing-tipped shoes. The side window rolled down to disclose a familiar face.

"Hey darlin', the bus doesn't stop here. And on a night like this, cabs don't, either. Climb aboard."

Barry helped Savitri into the jump seat and clambered alongside to face Queenie St. Laurence. Her warm welcome moved Barry to introduce Savitri.

"I so appreciate your saving us," Savitri said. "This soaking rain--it's almost a New Delhi monsoon." The wounded look in her eyes told him his explosion inside the elevator had been too harsh.

"Don't thank me, thank my hard-working agent," Queenie said. "This vulgar display they call a car comes with his compliments. If the Empire Room doesn't agree to provide chauffeured transportation to my apartment, he won't let me sign the contract. Don't you just love it?"

"We owe your agent, big time," Barry said while the car eased away from the curb. "Now if you can get us to Savitri's hotel, we'll owe you, too." He turned toward the window and watched the street lamps fly by. Like flashing strobes, they splashed their light on Queenie's face, and then quickly abandoned it to the shadows.

Barry thought she looked even prettier than she had at last year's jazz fest. With her stage makeup removed, her natural beauty

brought back those unexpressed feelings. Her chestnut hair, zigzag parted, fell to the collar of the fur coat thrown over her shoulders. His roses rested alongside. Rewrapped in their standard florist-green tissue, they brightened and faded with the same metronomic regularity as her



She picked up

the roses

and plopped them

in Barry's arms.

"And you

can help me

arrange

your beautiful



flowers."

face.

Queenie reached under her fur collar and adjusted an errant spaghetti-strap. Seeing Barry dab his nostrils, she broke through his drifting thoughts. "Why, you've caught your death of cold waiting in all that rain."

"Allergy," he said, while the car drew under Savitri's hotel marquee.

"It'll disappear as soon as I get Savitri up to her room."

"That won't be necessary." Savitri's eyes blazed. "I will have no problem finding my room." She tightened her grasp on her evening bag, wrenched the door open, and exited with a frigid, "Good night."

The slam of the limo door confirmed the night's total failure. Embarrassed, Barry hurried to distract Queenie. "After that performance you gave tonight, you must be exhausted."

"Why, to us struggling cabaret singers, this is just the shank of the evening. You come right on up to my apartment, and I'll fix you a drink--help you get rid of that allergy." She picked up the roses and plopped them in Barry's arms. "And you can help me arrange your beautiful flowers."

He silently congratulated himself on managing to get one thing right tonight. "They are pretty," he said.

"Pretty? Why, they're just supremely gorgeous. On stage, I concentrated so hard on my material that I took forever to notice them."

"You can't imagine how anxious I was," Barry said. "Wondering whether you'd ever get to them."

"Well, I am so tearfully sorry about that."

"That's okay. No apology necessary"

"Course, when I finally realized how beautiful they were, I just thought right then and there--that renaissance darlin' sure does know how to make a favorable impression on a girl." ■

2

2nd Place ~Stories

Unpublished

BY MICHAEL FREEMAN

The Death of Strack Benson



MICHAEL FREEMAN was a US Army field surgeon stationed at Khe Sanh during the incursion into Laos in 1972. Since his retirement from the practice of General Surgery in 2003, he has been writing full time. His debut novel, *The Education of Jake O'Brien*, was a 2007 Pacific Northwest Writers Association Zola Award finalist and received favorable reviews from Kirkus Discoveries and Notre Dame Magazine. He lives with his wife Vickie and three Australian Shepherd puppies in Sanger, California.

*And Hector burns to take it more than anyone—
to sever and impale Patroclus' head
on Trojan battlements.*

—*The Iliad*

CONSIDERING ALL they'd been through—Strack, Slick, Pusher, and the rest of them—and all that they'd done, I guess I shouldn't have been shocked by everything that happened after the poker game at Khe Sanh that night in February of 1971. But I was new in country then and on loan besides from the 18th Surgical Hospital to Company B Med. I wasn't even sure of the real names of the men I was playing with, and—though I liked them instinctively—I knew only the outlines of their personal histories.

All except Goldman: he was a 91 Charlie medic that I shared a bunker with. I had several conversations with him apart from the nightly poker games. He was a college graduate with plans of going to med school as soon as Vietnam and the US Army finished with him. Goldman didn't have a

nickname to penetrate. Goldman was spelled out in the black lettering above the right breast pocket of his fatigues. That's how I knew him; that's what I called him.

He wore a Star of David on a gold chain around his neck; his fiancé had given it to him. After a few weeks in Vietnam, he added a St. Christopher medal and a miniature statue of the Buddha to the chain.

"Can't be too careful, Doc," was how he explained all that to me. He was right about that.

The poker game always started about an hour after the evening meal. We usually played in the hospital bunker, but the evening all the bad stuff happened we set up outside. The South Vietnam heat and humidity, which could be oppressive, had backed off and left behind a soft, warm feel as tempting as a bad girl's invitation. We took an olive green portable table and some wooden folding chairs out to a spot between the personnel bunkers and the perimeter and set up.

We were on a little rise out there and had a nice view of the

surrounding hills. The five of us took off our fatigue shirts and sat around the table in fatigue pants and green Tees. We all wore our dog tags outside the Tees, except for Pusher and Strack. They wore theirs secured in the lacing of their boots like the infantry soldiers did. Goldman had on his talismanic chain in addition to the dog tags.

I sucked on a beer while the rest of them drank Fanta grape soda from aluminum cans. We could have been five guys on a vacation somewhere nice like Florida or Cancun, just knocking back a few cold ones and shooting the breeze at the end of a pleasant summer day. Every once in a while, Slick picked up the deck of cards and shuffled them; then he placed the deck back in the middle of the table. He did that several times. No one seemed too eager to start the game.

The men talked about what they were going to do when they got back to the World. Strack said he was going to rent a hotel room in St. Louis, where he lived, and order champagne and enough red roses to cover the surface of the double bed with rose petals. He would do that before the scheduled time—he called it the ETA— of a date with his best girl. When she arrived and he opened the door to let her in, she would be beautiful, surprised and bubbly, and favorably impressed by what she saw.

After a little talk and champagne, they would get naked and lay among the rose petals, finally making love while being caressed

all over by the roses' satiny fragrance. Strack averred that no sex in the world had ever been or would ever be as good as what he and his lady were going to do when he got back.

"There it is," Pusher said. I had been in country long enough to know that meant he agreed. But I noted just then that Pusher looked



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from



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at the world through grey eyes set in a face that had long ago decided not to reveal anything behind the mask.

The men were all silent for a time after Pusher's comment. I wondered if they might be imagining what it would be like to make love to your best girl on a carpet of rose petals.

I watched a low-flying airplane

defoliate a hill to the north of us. It flew back and forth in parallel paths over the surface of the hill, spitting out some kind of agent that erased the green of the forest and replaced it with a canvass of solid black.

When the job was finished, the whole hill was black with curling wisps of smoke rising up from it. The white-grey columns thinned out and, in the end, dispersed to become one more hostile force occupying the tropical air.

What I had learned in two weeks of listening to those guys at the poker games was that Strack—his last name was Benson; I remember that now—and Pusher were best friends. They were infantry medics with the 101st Airborne during the first six months of their tour in Vietnam, and they had seen some pretty bad stuff from what I could gather.

They both had been awarded bronze stars for gallantry, and even the officers of Company B Med spoke of them in reverent tones. Strack wore the Screaming Eagle patch on the right shoulder of his fatigues. He had the Red Diamond insignia of the Fifth Infantry Division on the left shoulder just as you were supposed to do. That way everybody knew your present and your last assignment. Pusher wore nothing on either shoulder.

This is what I remember most about Benson: the way he wore his fatigues, always clean and sharply creased—even out in the field at Khe Sanh; I don't know how he managed that—and the pants always correctly bloused just below the knee. He had the division labels on

each shoulder as I mentioned; he could have stepped right out of a recruiting poster.

There was another thing too—a thing that, personally, I would like to forget. That was his smile. It started in the middle of his chin and went up on either side, tight and perfect like the way he wore his fatigues. It was as if he knew something very profound that the rest of us would only stumble upon after a long while. When we did, we would realize that he knew it all along, and, at that moment, the smile would get longer, not broader—the corners of his mouth just inching up a little bit more toward his eyes.

I would like to forget that smile not because it irritated me in any way but because it keeps asking questions I'm not sure I want answered. He wore it right up to the time, and even after, when the purple-black circle appeared on his forehead—suddenly, like a silent explosion.

I was sitting next to Pusher with my back to the perimeter. In my hand was a full boat—tens over kings—in a game of straight draw. There had been some heavy betting initially. Then—as I raised—Slick, Pusher, and Goldman folded. Benson saw and raised my bet the maximum three times at the end, and I couldn't understand that. He had drawn three cards, and early on he stayed in the betting with little conviction. Now all of a sudden, he was betting with what I thought was unmerited bravado. I called his raise, and he laid down the three

aces and two jacks.

When he did that, when he knew I understood his strategy and appreciated it, he smiled into my eyes from where he sat almost directly opposite. He held that smile even as he slumped off his chair with the perfectly round hole placed exactly in the middle of his forehead, as if the sniper knew him



He held that
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his forehead...



personally and took pains to kill him in a way that was altogether appropriate for Strack Benson.

Then everything got loud and crazy. Pusher pulled me to the ground and led me in a low crawl to a slit trench.

The sniper's shot must have been the signal for the VC sappers to start their assault. When they did, our troops answered with their M-16s.

For a while the firefight sounded like strings of firecrackers going off on both sides of the perimeter. But when our quad-fifty machine guns opened up, the din became so loud you could feel it vibrating through your soul. It was like being in the middle of an angry swarm of screaming, razor-winged locusts, only a lot worse.

In the slit trench, I fumbled with my side arm while Pusher fired the M-16 he had dragged along with him from the poker table. He squeezed off his shots with precision. There was no crazy, twenty-round burst from a rifle clicked on in panic to fully automatic mode—just a steady pop, pop, pop as he aimed and released one round at a time. He did that about eight or ten times; then he stopped shooting.

“Burn in hell forever, you zipper head motherfucker,” I heard him say. The enunciation and cadence was as precise as a priest's benediction—Bless you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and may you burn in hell forever, you zipper head motherfucker.

Then he was quiet, and he didn't fire the rifle anymore. He just stared out at the perimeter. I had no idea what he was thinking. By the time I managed to empty the magazine of my .45 in the general direction of where I thought the VC were, the firefight was over. In the silence, I could still hear the pop of M-16s and AK-47s as well as the staccato from the quad-50s rattling through

my brain. After a while, there were commands to lock weapons.

I waited in the trench for a bit. My T-shirt, soaked through with sweat, sucked on my skin at the slightest movement. Then some troops, with M-16s at the ready, eased through the narrow gaps in the rolls of constantina wire that separated the Red Diamond position from the elephant grass on the other side.

Off to the west, there was a stand of banana trees, and Pusher walked toward them. A high ranking NCO yelled for him to stop, but he just kept walking. Some other men, their torsos bobbing on the undulant sea of elephant grass, watched him for a few seconds then went on with their survey.

There weren't a lot of them; the way they went about what they were doing suggested a purpose that, now, I doubt they believed in. They were supposed to be looking for bodies of the enemy, hoping to find some intelligence. Later the engineers would bury whatever corpses the VC left behind.

The reconnaissance troops stopped what they were doing after about twenty minutes, and they all looked out toward the banana trees. Pusher was returning from his mission. His right hand steadied the M-16 slung over his shoulder. In his left he held, suspended by its hair, the head of the VC sniper. The survival knife that he carried from his time with the 101st was in a scabbard strapped to his right thigh. I hadn't noticed that he had it with

him at our earlier poker games, but, from what I came to know about Pusher, he probably did.

I looked over at the E-6 who seemed to be the leader of the recon group. He was staring at Pusher and chewing on his lips. He didn't say anything. Pusher kept walking toward the B-Med camp, staring straight ahead as if he were in deep thought.

The sniper's eyes were open—terror frozen on his face forever. He looked to be very young. Pusher walked on by.

Goldman and Slick were standing beside me. Slick had rescued the deck of cards; he shuffled them in his hands without looking, like a worried mama-san fingering prayer beads. After Pusher passed, Slick caught my eye and smiled.

"Want to cut cards for a quarter, Sir?"

Slick was from Arkansas, and he had a drawl that was somewhere between a whine and a plea. I forced a smile.

"No thanks—maybe later," I said. Slick nodded and put the cards into a pocket of his fatigue pants. I turned to Goldman.

"What's going to happen next?" If this was a tribal ritual, I thought Goldman might have seen it before.

"I don't know for certain. But knowing Pusher, it won't be pretty. It might be the right thing to do, but it won't be pretty."

There was a corridor of level ground that separated the hospital tent and the officers' bunkers from the enlisted men's bunkers; our boys were lined up along the sides

of it. Pusher lowered the sniper's head to the ground, put his rifle off to one side of the corridor, and then centered the head—taking great care to be sure that it was equidistant from each side of the path. When he finished, he stood up and looked at the troops with a face that offered little in the way of explanation.

"There it is," he intoned.

"There it is." The chant from the troops was almost in unison, but not quite. I think I would have understood things better if their cries had been in unison.

Pusher took a few steps back and to one side of the head. He skipped forward and dribbled the head as if it were a soccer ball, from one side of the corridor to the other, all the way down to its far end. He did it with an expertise that suggested he had played the game somewhere, sometime before—maybe in St. Louis with Benson.

When he reached the opposite end, he turned and gentled the head several yards back toward the perimeter before advancing forward with quick, purposeful steps. He planted his left foot firmly and swung his right leg through in a gracefully powerful arc. There was a sharp thud, and the head lifted off the ground and sailed through the air, describing a trajectory that ended just beyond the constantina wire some twenty yards from where the head started its flight.

Pusher followed up the kick with a jog to where his M-16 lay. He picked up the rifle and walked out through the barbed wire barrier. He stopped after a few steps and

looked down. There was a burst of automatic rifle fire and then a few clicks before Pusher straightened up.

“Burn in hell forever, you zipper head motherfucker,” he said.

I looked at Goldman, who was watching Pusher walk from the perimeter back into the encampment. The expression on his face was hard to read.

“You still think that was the right thing to do?” I asked.

“Absolutely.”

Goldman didn't change the direction of his gaze. I had the feeling that everyone in the world was watching Pusher right then. I heard Goldman's challenge.

“What do you think?”

“It seems a little extreme.”

“That's the way it is out here.

Extreme quiet followed by extreme violence; extreme boredom followed by chaos so extreme you want to close your eyes and hide from it. But you can't.”

“An emotional roller coaster.”

It was a lame comment, but I was just trying to feel my way into the discussion, or whatever it was Goldman and I were doing.

“It's good life training.” Goldman finally turned his stare away from Pusher and looked at me. “My father fought in WWII. When I got drafted, he didn't like it any more than I did, but he told me this: ‘Every man should go off to a war because every man should have the opportunity to return home from a war.’”

“I think that begs the question about all those men who don't

return—no one wants to be one of them,” I said.

“That's the point. When you come home—if you come home—from something like this, you'll enjoy every day for the rest of your life in a way the guys who stayed home never will.”

“It's a big price to pay for a little extra enjoyment, if you ask me.”

“Yeah, it is. But the thing about it is most of us don't have a choice.



I imagined

then it

wasn't such

a bad thing

for him to

slip into



eternity...

So you just accept it and hope you don't wind up like Strack.”

We were quiet then while we watched Pusher help two enlisted men from Graves Registration put Strack on a litter. “We'll take good care of him,” one of the men said.

“Okay.” Pusher nodded; he walked back to his bunker and disappeared. That was a signal for normal talk and movement to start up again. It was like a movie

that had been stopped at a certain frame—no movement, no sound—and then somebody pushes a lever; and the action resumes.

Goldman grinned at me for the first time since the poker game was interrupted. He and Slick walked out to retrieve the folding chairs and what was left of the poker table; I followed. We put everything back in the hospital bunker.

Pusher kept pretty much to himself that night. I don't think he spoke to anyone then or the next morning either and we all tried not to look at him. In the afternoon, they took him in a chopper back to Quang Tri and from there back to the World, I learned later. He didn't fight the evacuation; he smiled his mirthless, inscrutable smile and gave a little wave as the chopper lifted off from Khe Sanh into a Vietnam sky that had seen so many helicopters carrying boys—dead, wounded, or crazy, or about to be one of those things—it was no longer interested.

That evening I walked over to the Graves Registration tent and filled out documents of identification on the bodies that had been brought in over the prior forty-eight hours. Some of them were pretty messed up. You do the best you can—matching up dog tags, names on fatigues, and any other ID the dead soldiers have on them until you're pretty sure who's who, or who was who.

It was easy to recognize Strack. He just lay with his eyes closed. The smile hadn't changed. He could

have been taking a nap and having a pleasant dream. I imagined then it wasn't such a bad thing for him to slip into eternity in a moment of triumph with the description of how he was going to make love with his girlfriend on a bed of rose petals still a fresh memory. He could wear that smile forever.

When I got back to B Med, the mess sergeant was ladling out chili he had cobbled together from C-ration cans of spiced beef and chili beans and some onions and rice he had bought in Quang Tri. He had thrown in some Crystal hot sauce and a few other Army-issue spices. I got a bowl of the stuff and walked over to where Goldman was sitting on the wall of sandbags that protected the entrance to our bunker.

He had a bowl of the chili balanced on his lap and was sipping from a can of soda. We exchanged greetings and ate in silence until we were nearly finished with our meals. Goldman took the last spoonful of his chili and moved it around in his mouth a long time before swallowing. After that, he spoke.

"Pretty good chow, isn't it?"

"Damned good—just like home."

"Unbelievable," he said.

"Unfuckingbelievable."

"Absolutely unreal." The way Goldman was looking at me, I knew we weren't talking about the chili.

"You step onto a plane at Travis or some other airbase back in the World, and a half dozen

time zones and twenty-three or twenty-four hours later you're part of the greatest show on earth. Unfuckingbelievable."

Goldman got up and reached back with his right hand. I gave him my empty bowl and watched him walk to the cauldron of boiling water that the mess sergeant used to sterilize dirty plates and bowls.



I hope
Goldman
hired a
hotel room
when he got
back and
made love
to his fiancé
on a bed
of rose
petals.



He and I talked about the war in general terms in the weeks that followed, but our exchange after the chili was as close as we ever came to a philosophical discussion about what went on the evening the VC sniper interrupted our poker game.

When Operation Lam Son 719, the incursion into Laos, was

over, the Red Diamond Brigade returned to their base camp in Quang Tri. I went back to the 18th Surgical Hospital and never saw Goldman or any of the other men from Company B Med again. Back in the states, I thought a lot about what went on out there at Khe Sanh, and I came to a funny conclusion about Pusher.

What he did was about vengeance—swift, terrible, and final. But he may have done the VC soldier a favor. The face of the sniper I saw had the expression of a man who has heard the bullet and already knows he's dead. Were it not for Pusher, he would stumble through eternity with his face and memory locked in horror. The way I came to see it, Pusher destroyed the physical evidence of his enemy's final seconds of terror on this earth and released the man's spirit. Of course Pusher had expressed a different desire for how the sniper should spend his eternity.

I almost looked Pusher up to see if he had changed his mind about that, but I thought better of it. Nevertheless, I still think about him and Goldman occasionally. I hope Goldman hired a hotel room when he got back and made love to his fiancé on a bed of rose petals.

I can't see Pusher doing something like that, not even to honor Strack Benson's memory. He didn't seem the type. Also, in his mind he probably figured he had already done all the appropriate memorial rituals at Khe Sanh and then resolved to think no more on the matter of Strack Benson's death. ■

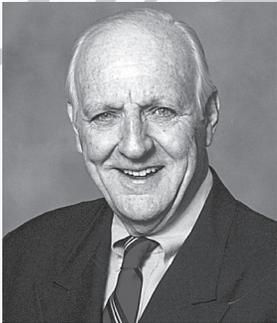
3

3rd Place ~ Stories

Unpublished

BY BOB NATIELLO

Escape from the Jingle Jungle



BOB NATIELLO After a career as a Madison Avenue ad executive, New York native Bob Natiello retired to Sedona to write fiction and creative nonfiction. His *Dog Fight* won First Prize in Manhattan Media's 2009 fiction contest and appeared in *Our Town*, *West Side Spirit* and *New York Press*. That same year, AAA awarded *El Caballo Blanco* First Prize in Fiction. *How Jiminy Cricket* took Second Place in AAA's Memoir category. In 2010, AAA gave Special Mention to his *Ticket to K Street*. Tucson's Society of Southwestern Authors has honored his *J.D. Salinger's Tobacco Dependency* with First Prize in Literary Humor. They also anthologized his nonfiction, *Hollywood Marines* and gave Special Mention to several of his other short stories.

TYREO ROBINSON WAS the most honest record producer on the New York music scene. You have to keep one eye on him and the other on your wallet. Still, the guy has given birth too so many gold and platinum records that a dozen leading bands place him at the top of their list when they need a musical mid-wife.

This morning, while pitching him a demo tape of my newest song, I wasn't surprised when the entire E.S.P. band--four rockers, and their manager--charged into his studio. They were jiving, high-fiving, and clamoring for Tyreo to produce their new CD. In two minutes I was out, and so was my song. A big downer, but this was predictable. With the prospect of fresh production money, Tyreo obliterates all other priorities.

"Tony, you understand," he said, leading me toward the studio door. "If I don't attend to these matters at once, they evanesce, and before you know it, they don't re-materialize. You see what I'm saying, Tony"

I hated being ushered out, but I did see what he was saying--despite his bewildering syntax. The guy could sit at a console for twenty-four hours mixing, splitting, stretching, squeezing a seemingly endless number of voice, and instrumental tracks into a hit record. He possessed a special talent for giving a band an almost tangibly different sound, then making it punch right through the fabric of America's stereo speakers. Genius like that had bands fighting for his attention.

I wanted his attention, too. While scratching out a living as an independent composer of advertising jingles, I ached to become a hit songwriter. If I could get him to listen to one of my songs, he might convince one of his bands to record it. Okay, I'd have to come up with some money. To win Tyreo's approval, you always had to include money. Like everyone in the music business, he possessed an almost criminal sense of avarice.

Exiting his studio, I found

myself face-to-face with his assistant, Courtney Jacobs. Courtney is the quintessential, straight-from-central-casting female nerd, a squint-visioned, high-forehead, stick-figured twenty-six year-old who owns a pair of exceptionally discerning ears. Odd, but in a business renowned for sex, every guy I know lusts after her least erogenous body part--her ears.

At one of our first recording sessions she did something I'd never witnessed in the music business. I was recording a jingle for Harrison and Wakeby, the ad agency whose music department she headed at that time. Deeply involved in conducting a singing quartet, I was surprised by her loud tapping on the glass partition that separated us.

"Check your chart, Tony," she said through the intercom. "You've written a C-sharp here, yet one of your singers is hitting C-natural."

It's my job to catch these vocal shadings, yet I completely missed this one. I told the engineer to roll the tape. After a couple of reruns, I had to agree she was right. "Four voices and you pick up the one that's a half-step off. Nice, Court."

"It's no big deal," she shrugged. "You could do it too if you had the same teachers I had." She added a shy half-smile and next instant she was back on the couch, buried in my vocal charts.

Following that C-natural

incident, Courtney and I became good buddies. We stayed close even after she anklebitted Harrison and Wakeby for a higher paying job as Tyreo's assistant. Now, outside Tyreo's studio, I took advantage of our friendship and asked, "Court, what do you know about these E.S.P. guys?"



I hustled up

to my apartment

and sat down

at the piano.

Within

twenty-four hours

I had a

new song.



"A little." Her eyelids fluttered while she gathered her thoughts. "They're from Canada. They have a big hit in the UK, and with Canadian oil money backing them, they believe they can make it in the U.S."

"Where'd they get that E.S.P. name?"

"Their manager. They believe he has this crazy gift of extrasensory perception. Can you believe it?"

Interesting. I had just written a song titled, *Déjà Voodoo*. Before you say that's the weirdest title you ever heard, you should have been around when I wrote *Don't Do the Heimlich Maneuver on a Man with a Broken Heart*. A small record label paid me good money for that song. It was never released, but the money was tangible proof that no song title can be too crazy.

Déjà Voodoo had a lyric that drew on those unexplainable I-knew-we-were-going-to-fall-in-love-even-before-we-met feelings. It seemed to fit into the same bag as extrasensory perception. Maybe, I thought after bidding Courtney goodbye, I could paraphrase some of those *Déjà Voodoo* chords, re-work the lyrics, and come up with a song to capture Tyreo's fancy--and E.S.P.'s, too.

I hustled up to my apartment and sat down at the piano. Within twenty-four hours I had a new song. The beauty part was this--it was not only about extrasensory perception, it was actually titled "E.S.P."

Iwasted no time in phoning Tyreo who suggested I come in and play it for him right away. That was a switch. Tyreo held a wide reputation for evaluating new material only when it came to him on tape or a CD--a convenient way to rack it up any time of the day or night

and make a fast decision.

When I told him I needed time to lay my song down on a quick rhythm track, he cooed, “Tony, come up and sing it yourself.” When I hesitated, he came on even more syrupy, “But Tony, there’s no one better suited to sing a new song than the person who wrote it. When the writer gives a live performance of his own song, the words and music have a way of cohering. It becomes so much more impactful.”

I saw nothing to be gained by arguing. With the vision of Tyreo’s toothy, mustached, con-artist smile in my head, I hung up. The music game was loaded with slippery people, and Tyreo was ninety percent Pennzoil. Sure, he might try to steal it. But his access to so many good bands gave me no choice. It was make or break.

Next morning, I jumped into a taxi and headed for Tyreo’s studio for a live rendition. I aimed to persuade him that *E.S.P.*--my song--was worth recording by *E.S.P.*--his band. If it worked, I’d not only have a hit song, I’d also have a way out of the jingle jungle. I paid the turbaned cab driver, strode into Tyreo’s building, rode the elevator up to his studio, and laid a warm smile on Courtney.

“He’s still contrite for short-cutting your last meeting,” she said. “You may be dealing from strength.” She rolled her eyes toward the studio door, a sign Tyreo expected me.

Outlined against the Styrofoam, egg-carton textured, soundproof walls, Tyreo sat intent above his multi-track console. The sharp odor of over-brewed coffee told me he’d been editing all night. Seeing me, he cut the pounding music, rose, and gave out a warm, “Tony. So good to see you, Tony.”

Tyreo held a charter membership in the repeat-your-name-as-many-times-as-possible club. With each repetition, he would take his listener’s name

“I don’t like
the idea
of giving up
half the
royalties,”
I muttered.

and make an imploring, smiling five-second production of it. My name always came out, “Tonnee.” When the “Tonnee” stuff got too heavy, I’d respond with a mimicking “Ty-Ree-O.” But I didn’t want to lose any time today. I sat right down at his Yamaha grand and positioned my music. After riffing a few warm-up chords, I spun around to face him.

“This song clicks on a couple of levels. People can sing it and they can dance to it. But what

makes it unique is the title. The Beatles never had a song titled, ‘The Beatles.’ And ‘Aerosmith’ never had a hit titled ‘Aerosmith.’ If *E.S.P.* records this song, they’ll be the first band with a hit tune named after their band.” I played an up-tempo introduction while letting that idea sink in, then I sang:

*Though you’re dancing with
another man
I feel intense vibrations
From you to me across the floor
In steady, strong pulsations
Your eyes send me a tender plea
I sense communication
I know you want to dance with me
It’s no hallucination*

He’s listening for the hook, I thought, that easily remembered melody you can’t get out of your head. Record producers swear it’s the one song component that motivates listeners to run out and buy the CD or download it from some music website. “*E.S.P.*” had a very singable hook. Backing it with a heavy left-hand, I segued into it:

*My E.S.P.
Tells me that you wanna dance
with me
My E.S.P.
Senses your pulsating energy
Your warm vibes are comin’
through
Your message says so true
I wanna dance with you
I wanna dance with you.*

I reprised it twice more, each time softening it before the final fade.

“It’s nice Tonnee, but you haven’t credentialized yourself.

You haven't earned the respect of the artists in the musical community."

"You concerned about my reputation?" I asked. "You don't believe E.S.P. will like the song because it was composed by a jingle writer?"

"No, Tonneee, no. Your talent is good, but it's still metamorphosing. Now you need someone to alchemize it."

"What will that take?"

"You've got to pay your dues. If I endorse your material, a song written by a jingle writer, I'll be laughed at."

"You just said my jingle writing didn't make any difference."

"It doesn't. But if I tell them I'm the one who wrote it, it will escalate their confidence level. Look, we are both registered with ASCAP. Why don't we copyright the song as a team, and when the royalties come in, their computers will automatically split the money between us?"

I had expected Tyreo to make a grab for something, but half the royalties? Jesus, the guy hadn't written a single word or note, and he had his greedy hand in my jeans. Still, if giving away half would ease me out of the jingle business, maybe it was worth it. But I felt I had to draw the line somewhere.

"I don't like the idea of giving up half the royalties," I muttered. My need to be recognized as a published songwriter was ripping me one way. Pulling in the

opposite direction was my desire to hang on to sole authorship--not to mention my own greed. I wanted as big a cut of the royalties as I could get.

"Tonneee, this isn't about money. It's about my good name. I'm putting my reputation on the line for your work. Half the royalties isn't really a lot. It's a small way of recompensing me for

...and I
saw myself
at long last
having a song
accepted
by a
hot band.

the risk I'm hazarding."

I was about to give in when Courtney--propelled by the entire E.S.P. band--flew through the studio door. With one hand clamped on top of her slipping headset, she gave me a wild, can-you-believe-this-is-happening-again look.

E.S.P.'s manager, throwing his arm around Tyreo's shoulders, offered me his free hand. "I'm Cliff Landy, mate. I manage this mad bunch of musical geniuses."

Convinced Tyreo was about to

oust me again, I clung to Cliff's hand and uttered an implausible, "Great to meet you."

Tyreo separated us and grasped my elbow. Leading me out, he found Courtney blocking the studio door. "I'm so curious, Tyreo" she said, only a tone or two below an outright bellow. "Make Cliff tell us how he came up with that wonderful E.S.P. name for the band."

Before Tyreo had a chance to form the question, Cliff took off. "I'm new-age. I'm sensitive, transcendental. Before others see the beginning, I see the ending. While others are deciding, I've already made the move. Our original name? Moose Jaw. Moose Jaw, the little Saskatchewan town where we started. Received my first messages there. Messages came through the rocks, the air. Told me to drill for oil. We struck it rich when the oil chaps backed us with big bread. More messages.

Head for the UK and our first big hit. The Brits told us to make new connections. Call Tyreo. He's the man. Known all over the world, eh? On the way here, I received a paranormal directive. Change the band's name. I went to the source, the very source of all our good fortune--extra-sensory perception. E.S.P. That's how I arrived at it. Exactly, exactly."

All four band members, towering over their jockey-sized manager, supported him with a smiling, backslapping spontaneous

chorus of yeah-yeas and right-ons. If he'd been a football coach, they'd have hoisted him on their shoulders.

Courtney broke in again, as loud as before. "How fascinating. Did you know Tony just wrote a song with the same title?"

"I knew it. I felt it in his handshake," Cliff said, chin thrust forward. "Is that the music there on the piano? I sense that's it. Tyreo, have him play it for us. A song title with the same as the band. Serious hit potential."

"But Cliff, these are not the best conditions," Tyreo soothed. "Let's back it up with a rhythm track, and put it on a CD. It will be so much easier for you to opioniate it that way."

"But Tyreo," I shot back, "I thought you actually preferred hearing the author sing it live. The same way I just sang it for you."

That turned out to be the smartest thing I'd ever said. Halfway through the hook, the entire band was standing, circled around my shoulders, and moving to the music. I finished with a snappy riff leaving everyone applauding except Tyreo.

"Tyreo, you old pack rat. Where have you been hiding this amazing talent?" Cliff asked. "It's the first time I've ever heard anyone tie a song so tightly to a band's name."

"There is a certain contextualization there," Tyreo responded. I could see him

slithering.

Still at the studio door, Courtney removed her headset. Her eyes, fastened on mine, were alive with a glistening go-for-it look.

"I'm glad you're so high on the song, Cliff. You don't have any problem with my taking full credit for it, do you?" I asked.



"Tyreo,
you old
pack rat.

Where have you
been hiding
this amazing
talent?"



"But Tonneee, this isn't about money, Tyreo cut in. "This is about working together."

"On another song, you mean?"

"I'm not talking about music," Tyreo said. "I'm talking about working on the band's image. The band can't make it in this country without a complete image makeover. They must be supported with the proper symbology. You and I must liaise in some type of way, team up to re-composite a new image for them, one in keeping with the E.S.P name."

"Sounds interesting. It might be fun to re-architect their image." I laughed to myself, wow, re-architect, that's as good as a half-dozen Ty-Reee-Os.

I took Tyreo's switch to image-building talk as a sure signal he had surrendered on the royalty split. Courtney ducked out to answer the insistent phone ring, and I saw myself at long last having a song accepted by a hot band. Amazingly, it happened without having to contribute one cent to the Tyreo Robinson Foundation for Rapacious Record Producers.

I finished stuffing my *E.S.P.* into my briefcase and headed for the door. "I'll phone you tomorrow," I said to Tyreo over my shoulder. "If we're going to liaise on this project, we don't want to lose any time." I beamed inside. I'd finally found a route into the songwriting world.

Bouncing toward the elevator with Courtney alongside, I suppressed a victory smile and asked, "How about lunch? I owe you--big time."

"I've already made reservations for us," she responded, extending her stride to stay abreast.

The musical nerd I'd grown to know and appreciate appeared to take on a new, soft glow. "Hey, you're growing pretty self-confident, aren't you," I kidded.

"Sure looks that way, doesn't it?" She laughed, easing one arm inside mine while pressing the elevator button with her free hand. ■



Oak Creek Canyon



BILL HENDERSON Weaned on Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour, Bill Henderson wrote his first western short story in 2008, as a retired construction foreman. Since then, he has written over fifty shorts stories and a novelette, mostly based on his beloved Arizona. He is also working on his first full length western novel, a tale of gold, greed, and murder, situated in the deserts south of the famous Vulture mine.

IT WAS A PLEASANT CAMP, situated on the banks of Oak Creek, a few miles south of Flagstaff, where he had delivered a prisoner, just yesterday. He had spent the night under an overhang, enjoying the sound of a soft rain and the burbling of the creek water. He found some dry wood under another overhang, built a small fire, heated a pot of coffee, and fried some bacon. He was a contended man when he rolled into his blankets and drifted off.

The dawn brought a warm sun and a clearing sky. He was breaking camp when he spotted the opening to a small cave, just above the overhang. It was barely visible through some brush, and then, only visible from the point where he was standing after washing out his frying pan.

Big Jim Donaldson may have been a deputy sheriff, but he was also an adventurer at heart, and there was never a cave he was willing to pass up unexplored. The location was at least a mile off the main trail, so there was

a chance that his eyes may have been the first to explore this one. He checked on his horses, stowed his gear under the overhang, and prepared to scale the rock wall to the cave.

He was disappointed to find rocks piled up at the entrance, obviously put there by human hands, meaning he was not the first to find it. Sighing, he pulled the rocks aside, enlarging the entry considerably, and peered inside.

The cave was small, and the rear wall ended abruptly, with a hole no larger than his fist where water may have flowed to create the cave eons ago. The ceiling was no more than four feet high and was bare of any formations. On the floor was the long dead body of an Indian.

Jim Donaldson's father had been an Indian agent, and he had grown up near Shiprock, with Navajo boys as playmates. He knew their dress and customs almost as well as they did. The man in the cave was a Navajo from his jewelry and his clothing,

and Jim was wondering how he came to be so far south, only to die alone and in a lost cave. And, since Jim knew the Navajo customs and respected them, he was faced with a dilemma. He must now carry out a Navajo burial. He sighed and climbed back down to his fire.

Jim dug his moccasins out of his saddle bags and undressed. He then covered his nakedness in ashes from the fire to ward off the evil spirits that Navajos associated with death. Wearing only his moccasins, he again ascended to the cave, and began to prepare what was left of the body.

If a Navajo dies in his Hogan, then the Hogan is collapsed on top of the body and burned, along with his weapons and jewelry. This man was wearing silver bracelets, and a heavily tarnished, silver Concho belt, studded with embedded turquoise stones. It was beautiful, but tradition demanded that it be buried with its owner. Jim found no weapon, but did find a place where a bullet had passed through a rib and into the man's lung. Perhaps he was a shaman.

After retrieving all the bones, clothing, and jewelry, Jim carried them to a small knoll where he dug a grave. Afterwards, he sang as much of the ritual as he could remember, and then burned the shovel he had used to dig the grave, also demanded by Navajo tradition.

He bathed in the creek,

washing off the protective ashes, and cleansing himself from the evil spirits of handling death. It was now late afternoon, but he could no longer stay in this camp. It had become sacred ground, so he dressed, and mounted up. He did not look back at the grave. That too was forbidden. He was a white man, but he had long ago learned to respect the ways of the Navajo, although he had forgotten much of it.



She
stopped
and buried
her head
in her hands,
sobbing.
That further
alarmed
Jim...



Two hours later, he found a good camp location under some cottonwoods, and built a fire for his supper. Later that night, the wind moaned through the branches over his head, and he thought he could hear far off voices chanting a death song. A shiver traveled up his spine, and much later, he slept.

The doctor's buggy was in front of Jim's house when he rode into Prescott, two days later. He put the horses up in the stable

and slapped the dust off with his hat before entering through the back door.

"Oh, Jim! There you are!"

Margie was a tiny woman, but someone to be reckoned with. Jim had met her at a barn dance, and had fallen in love immediately. They had married ten years ago, and she had given him a son David, and four years ago, a daughter, Mary. She was smiling at him now, but there was also a faint look of worry.

"I see Doc Waters' buggy out front. Is someone sick?"

Margie sighed. "I don't know what to think, Jim. Right after you left, Mary took sick with a high fever and had convulsions. Doc came right away, but we couldn't bring the fever down, and Doc thought we might lose her. It got worse and worse, and then last night, she slipped into a coma. When Doc left, he told me that she would probably not last the night."

She stopped and buried her head in her hands, sobbing. That further alarmed Jim, because she was not one to cry. Even when her mother had died, she had shed only a few tears, and then carried on. Now she was almost inconsolable, so Jim knelt beside her and held her until she finally sat up and dabbed at her eyes with her kerchief.

Jim hesitated and then quietly spoke to her.

"What has become of Mary, then?"

Margie turned her face up to

him and shook her head.

“That’s just it, Jim. I sat up with her last night, but sometime after three this morning, fatigue took over and I nodded off. When I woke, she was sitting up and smiling at me, and wanting something to eat! Doc came by this morning and couldn’t believe

“Damnedest thing
I ever saw.
Excuse my
language ma’am,
but frankly,
I thought I
had lost a
patient when
I left
last night. ...”

it. He’s in there with her now.”

Doc Waters was wearing his usual rumpled black suit, and unconsciously tugging at his beard, as he always did while thinking. Mary was sleeping, but she seemed peaceful and not feverish.

Doc shook Jim’s hand, nodded at Margie, and then thoughtfully glanced back at Mary.

“Damnedest thing I ever saw. Excuse my language ma’am, but frankly, I thought I had lost a patient when I left last night. Now she has no sign of fever, and whatever consumption she had is gone. She was jabbering and happy until she drifted off a moment ago.”

He studied Mary a moment, and shook his head.

“The only sign this morning that she was ever sick was when she told me about a delirium dream she had. Something about a strange man giving her something to drink to make her better.” He grinned at Jim and Margie. “She said it tasted even worse than the medicine I gave her. But if a fantasy made her feel better, I’ll not complain.”

After the doctor left, Mary slept until noon, when she woke up hungry. As Margie left to fetch her something, Jim entered his daughter’s room.

“Daddy!”

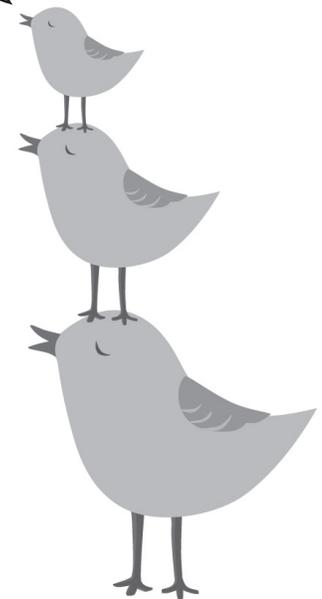
Mary held her arms out to her father, who sat on the edge of her bed. He started to reach for her, when he felt something under the covers. He stood and pulled back the blankets. Margie entered the room with some soup and saw the object lying on the bed. She looked at Jim with a puzzled frown.

“Is that yours? Where did it come from?”

Jim bent over and picked up the heavily tarnished, silver Concho belt, studded with embedded turquoise stones. ■

Children
are made
readers
on the laps
of their
parents.

~Emilie Buchwald





The Promise



SHERRY LEDINGTON

participated in the Avon Fanlit contest in 2006 where her entry was chosen as the first chapter in an Avon Regency e-novella. One of the most exciting things about that contest was the feedback she received from well-known Avon authors. In 2007, Sherry won third place in the Arizona Author's Association literary contest for her essay entitled, "Turnabout is Fair Play". She is a current member of the Romance Writers of America and a student of the Long Ridge Writers Institute.

FEW PEOPLE WERE ever as inappropriately named as Jubilation Jenkins. Coming up on eighty, a more negative, cantankerous woman than Jubilation a body would be hard pressed to find. In a world of glasses that were either half-empty or half-full, Jubilation's had sprung a slow, steady leak.

On the fateful day her world changed forever, Jubilation was sitting in Doc Brown's reception area ranting about how long the good doctor always seemed to keep her waiting. Suddenly, she got a sense that someone was watching her. She turned her head, a ready rebuke on her lips, to see a young child sitting alone on the other side of the room.

Somewhere between seven and nine years of age, the girl looked like she'd just stepped from the pages of a turn-of-the-century Sears catalog. Her eyes, as soft and blue as a summer sky, shone with a wealth of knowledge far beyond that of her tender years. Long black ringlets had escaped

the confinement of a violet ribbon to tickle her cheeks and call attention to a face of ethereal beauty. An ankle length lavender gown, crisp white petticoat, and shiny button-up half boots similar to those Jubilation had worn at the same age completed the picture.

Undeterred by Jubilation's scowl, the girl flashed a smile. Jubilation had to bite down on her lower lip to keep from grinning in return.

"Where did you come from child?" she snapped. "Didn't your mother ever tell you it wasn't polite to stare? What's your name?"

"Bridget." the child answered. "Bridget O'Meara."

The lilting Irish cadence of her voice sent a tingle through Jubilation's veins. She hadn't heard an accent like that for ages. Not since ... a door, long shut and covered with cobwebs, creaked open in the back of her mind. The drab walls of the waiting room faded away as a memory fought its way to the

surface.

It was the Christmas after her mother's death. Jubilation had just turned seven. Walking home from school, she'd chanced upon a display of pink sugarplums, glittering like fairy dust in a shop window. To her fragile heart, the delicate confections represented all that was magical and joyous about the Holiday season. She wanted one ... prayed for one ... more than she had ever prayed for anything except her mother's recovery.

She ran home, the soles of her well-worn boots barely touching the ground. As he'd done every day since his wife had died, Da met her at the door and swept her up in his strong, warm arms. The smell of tobacco and coal dust from the mine clung to him as he hugged her close and dropped a kiss on top of her head. Jubilation squeezed him tight and nuzzled his stubby cheek. Words tumbled from her mouth as she pleaded with him to buy her just one of those delectable sweets.

"Ah, me darlin'," he'd said, "Ya know your Da would buy you the world if he could. But your Ma's illness took all the money we had. There's nothin' left." The pain in his beloved voice resonated within her soul, and just as she had done many times in the past, she hid her disappointment behind a cheerful smile and assured him it didn't matter. They had each other; that was more than enough.

But later that night, after he'd

tucked her in and turned out the light, she climbed out of bed, dropped to her knees and uttered a fervent wish to Santa Claus. She'd be good forever, she swore, if he'd only bring her that one perfect present.

But times were tough in those days, especially for immigrants. And on that cold, dingy



parents watched

their own

children.

They didn't

expect everyone

else to do it



Christmas morning, when she awoke to find nothing but an orange and a handful of nuts in her stocking, Jubilation accepted the fact that prayers always went unheard and that nothing precious or beautiful would ever have a lasting place in her life.

The feel of the back of the chair against her shoulders brought Jubilation back to the present. She hauled herself upright and shuffled over to the nurse's station. Mary Beth Monroe, Doc Brown's snooty nurse paid her no mind until she brought her fist down as hard as she could on the white laminate counter. Needles of pain raced through her arthritic fingers and up her arm, but it was worth any amount of pain just to see the look of shock on Mary Beth's haughty features.

"What is it Ms. Jenkins?" the nurse asked on a sigh.

"I am not a babysitter, Mary Beth." Jubilation replied matter-of-factly. "If Doc Brown is fool enough to let people use his office as a home for young girls, then it's your job, not mine, to entertain the little beasts. In my day, parents watched their own children. They didn't expect everyone else to do it for them."

The nurse shot her a strange look. "I'm sorry you're having to wait, Ms. Jenkins, but if you'll just resume your seat, the doctor will be with you shortly." Without another word, she turned her attention back to the papers on her desk.

"Twit!" Jubilation muttered, just loud enough to be heard. "You never were long on charm, Mary Beth Monroe; did anyone ever tell you that?" Slumping down in the nearest chair, Jubilation buried her head in a magazine.

“This magazine is four months old, Mary Beth. You tell Doc Brown that I said for what he charges for my weekly sessions, the least he could do is update his reading material once in awhile.”

“**Y**es, ma’am!” sassed the nurse, “Now that I know you’re such a big fan of *Popular Mechanics* I’ll be sure to restock before your next visit.”

“You do that, Missy.”

“I’m sorry you’re suffering.”

It was the child again. To Jubilation’s surprise, the girl had moved to the seat beside her. Bridget leaned over and placed a tiny hand on top of Jubilation’s gnarled, liver-spotted knuckles. For the first time in forty-three years, the constant aching in her joints was gone.

“Henry doesn’t like to see you so sad.” Bridget continued.

Jubilation recoiled and snatched her hand away as if she’d touched a hot stove. “Who are you?”

“I’m Bridget.”

“Well, so you said, didn’t you, young lady?” Though her voice shook, Jubilation pinned the girl an intimidating glare. “I don’t know what kind of cruel stunt you’re trying to pull here, or who put you up to it, but my Henry’s been dead for nigh on ten years.”

“Yes, I know.” Bridget said, “But even though he can’t be with you right now, he still loves you.” She opened her fist. Cradled in her palm was a gleaming silver wedding band.

“He wanted me to give you this to remind you of your promise.”

A chill ran up Jubilation’s spine. Her breath caught in her throat as she snatched the ring and turned it over to read the inscription. H & J Forever Happy Ever After.”

It was Henry’s all right. She



we meet again

I’m going

to describe

it all to you

in such vivid detail

that you’re

going to swear

you were right there



closed her eyes, and, for the first time since his death, allowed herself to remember her husband as he’d been before his illness. Outside of her Da, Henry had been the sole source of joy in Jubilation’s life – a joy that

burned as brightly as a firecracker and, like a firecracker, fizzled out too quickly. Tall, handsome and larger than life, Henry Jenkins was Jubilation’s polar opposite; he’d never met a person he didn’t like. And everyone who met him felt the same about him. His optimism had known no bounds. Not even a diagnosis of terminal cancer had put a damper on his indomitable spirit.

Jubilation opened her eyes. “Where did you get this?” she croaked. Her heart stopped beating as she waited for the girl’s answer. “Henry was wearing it when I buried him.”

“Death is but a doorway, Jubilee.” Bridget smiled.

Jubilation’s jaw dropped. No one but Henry had ever called her by that nickname.

Gently, the girl recaptured her hand and the pain of her arthritis, like the past, became a distant memory.

“Someday you’ll go through that doorway as well.” Bridget continued. “And when that happens, Henry will be there to greet you. But it’s not going to happen for awhile. There’s still time...”

“Time!” Jubilation scoffed, tears leaking into the creases on her face. “What good is time to an old woman? I didn’t ask for it and I don’t want it, do you hear me? I’d trade it all for one more minute with my Henry. I’m tired, do you understand? I’m sick and tired of being all alone.”

“But don’t you see? You’re not

alone.” Bridget released her hand with a gentle squeeze. “Henry is with you, in spirit. All he asks in return is that you enjoy the time you have left. Have fun. Be happy. You promised him you would ... remember?”

A heavy silence descended on the room, as if the world had ground to a screeching halt.

“I remember.” Jubilation whispered after a moment in which the events of her life with Henry played out like a kaleidoscope in her mind. She dragged her smile out of the mothballs. “I’ve been so wrapped up in grief and self-pity that I completely forgot our last conversation.” Excitement bubbled up inside her, spilling over into joy. She wanted to laugh. She wanted to cry. But most of all, she wanted to live.

“Ah Bridget, me darlin’,” she said in a jaunty imitation of her father’s brogue, “How could I have forgotten? If there’s anything Henry and Da taught me, it’s the importance of keeping a promise.” Her body fairly hummed with new-found energy. “But what should I do? It’s been so long ... I don’t know where to begin.” All at once it came to her and she shot up in her chair and clapped her hands together. “I’ve got it. Henry always wanted to see the Eiffel Tower. It was the one thing he regretted not having done when he took sick.”

Jubilation raised her eyes to the ceiling. “Henry, my love.” She

whispered, “I can’t change the fact that you never got to Europe. But I can do this. I can go there myself ... for both of us. And when we meet again I’m going to describe it all to you in such vivid detail that you’re going to swear



Jubilation
whispered after
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with Henry
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like a
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in her mind.

you were right there beside me.”

“Did you say something, Ms. Jenkins.” the nurse asked.

Jubilation shook her head and tried out a rusty smile. The nurse

blinked, eyes widening in surprise. “I believe the doctor is ready to see you now.” she said after a momentary hesitation.

Wrapping the ring in the white lace handkerchief she kept tucked up her sleeve; Jubilation dropped it into her bag, got up and headed for the exit. Hand on the doorknob, she turned.

The waiting room was empty.

“Where did she go?” Jubilation asked.

“Who?” said the nurse?

“The little girl.”

“Little girl?” Mary Beth eyed her warily. “Maybe you’d better sit down, Ms. Jenkins. I’ll just go get the doctor and bring him to you, shall I?”

“Land’s sake, Mary Beth, don’t be daft. I can’t remember a time I ever felt better. I’m talking about the child who was in the waiting room just now.”

“Ms. Jenkins,” said the nurse in the slow measured tones an adult uses when talking to a child, “you were the doctor’s last appointment for the day. There was no child in the waiting room. You’ve been muttering to yourself this whole time.”

“Is that so?” Jubilation chuckled. “Well I guess that proves you’re not as observant as you think you are, Mary Beth Monroe. You go back in there and tell the doc I said he can run along home. I won’t be needing his services after all.” She opened the door and thrust one foot out in the bright sunshine. “I’m off to Paris. I got me a promise to keep.” ■

1

1st Place ~Novel

Unpublished

BY COLLEEN M. STORY

Loreena's Gift

Chapter 1 ~

THE REVEREND'S house stood exactly twenty-two steps from the back door of the Stillwater Community Church. Not straight back, but kitty-corner, easy if you kept to the rounded stones that marked the way. Loreena Picket could remember how the house looked in her mind, a two-story white-paneled cottage that would fit well on a Christmas card. Evergreens guarded the home like sentinels, watching over a marble statue of the Virgin Mary secured to a cement pedestal on the left side of the front yard.

She took hold of the railing and used it to guide her up the three steps to the porch. Overhead the wooden awning sheltered her from the light summer rain. The geraniums bloomed from four hanging baskets, fragrant roses lined the perimeter of the porch in a border of blooms. The lawn behind her flowed from the house to the back of the church, an uninterrupted curve of green shaped like an angel's wing and

often used for church barbeques and potlucks. She paused a moment, listening for voices, and heard her uncle speaking to Ms. Enger. She smiled to herself. As usual, the old woman was the last to leave.

"I just don't know, Reverend," she was saying. "I really think a bake sale would be better than a banquet. People love my homemade brownies, you know. They sold like hotcakes last year!"

"You're right," her uncle said.

Loreena could imagine him nodding while his gaze drifted elsewhere.

"Well, I'll leave it up to you ladies to decide. Maybe we can do both."

"That would be an awful lot of work, Reverend. I'm not sure how I would do both, what with keeping the books and the membership records and all."

"Oh yes, I'm fully aware of how much you do."

Loreena could hear the sigh in his voice.

"Perhaps you could put Miss Whitmore in charge of the banquet, then? She's very good at



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coordinating such things. Does it for the mayor all the time.”

Loreena covered her mouth to keep from laughing out loud.

“She’s never done any such thing for the church,” Ms. Enger snapped.

“Under your guidance, then. Perhaps?”

Ms. Enger mumbled to herself as the reverend’s boots echoed off the cement walk. He was going to the parking lot.

Anywhere to get away, Loreena mused. She looked up in the direction of the church itself. The outside matched the white paneling of the house, but it stood a story taller, with eight-foot stained glass windows, forest green trim, a short bell tower on top, and oversized double front doors stained mahogany with copper accents. It all sat on more than an acre at the top of Mary Hill Lane overlooking the town below, a picturesque crown on the head of Stillwater featured on many of the postcards stacked in the tourist shops.

All these years later, Loreena still remembered it, the sense of peace the whole place seemed to exude. Mary, most of all, was like a protective spirit hovering nearby. Loreena remembered her best because she had vacant eyes, with only the outlines of the lid carved into the white marble. When Loreena thought of her own useless eyes, she pictured Mary’s, and imagined they must be similar.

She stepped inside and closed the door behind her. The grand central fireplace sat cold in the

living room, the wood floor making a silent entrance impossible in her dress shoes. She left her light jacket on the coat rack and moved to the kitchen for a glass of milk. Antique plates garnished the walls, the countertops clear. Her uncle was a neat freak, and never left so much as a dirty glass sitting about. She’d learned to follow his example and



She’d worn

the pastel skirt

that morning

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perspiring



she’d done.

rinsed and stored hers after the milk was gone, then made her way to the upstairs bathroom, which still had a pull-handle toilet and a freestanding claw foot tub.

Washing her hands in the low basin, she thought about how this home was nothing like the home she and her brother Saul had lived in before. Before her parents died. Before she went blind. Before they came to live with Uncle Don.

That home looked more like those featured in real estate brochures—wide, modern and spacious, set on a rise surrounded by elaborate rock and flower landscaping, the kitchen ten steps across with bare walls and a tile floor, and the rest of the house covered in plush carpeting that cradled your toes. Loreena had only a few lingering memories of living there. The ones she’d managed to hold onto were all bathed in yellow light, as if she’d once lived in Heaven itself.

She changed clothes in her bedroom, the second-story hideaway that looked out on the back yard. She’d chosen it when they’d moved in because of how it sat off by itself, with a cozy low ceiling and a view of the duck pond between the two tallest evergreens. She could still see that duck pond in her mind, though her uncle had told her it dried up four years ago.

She’d worn the pastel skirt that morning in church, but it felt grimy after all the perspiring she’d done. Her body tensed, her thoughts straying to the ceremony taking place that evening. It had been over a year. Could she still do it?

She turned her hands palm up and tried to feel the power there. These fingers were blessed with a gift from God, her uncle had told her, but she always wondered if God might take the gift back—or if he thought of it as a gift at all.

The floorboards creaked under her bare feet as she sifted through the clothes in her closet. Pushing several items aside, she came upon the velvet skirt. It felt heavy and

warm on her legs, and she imagined the deep purple color to be like that of the pansies her mother used to grow. She smoothed the material over and over again on her thigh, up to ruffle it, back down to smooth it again. It was always at these times that she thought more of her parents, her mother in particular. Her face came up again and again in her mind, smiling, then frowning, then smiling again, auburn hair waving away from her cheeks. What would she have thought of what Loreena was doing? Had she ever suspected her daughter of being able to do...such things?

“Loreena, are you ready?” Her uncle called from downstairs.

“Coming.”

On top of her walnut dresser lay the brush her mother had always used on her hair. It was the one sensation she could remember as if it had happened yesterday—the feel of the bristles against her scalp, the gentle pull against her head, the faint hissing sound as the strands separated. Taking her hair in her hands, she pulled the brush through, letting it make its way in an easy flow from the top of her head down to her elbows. Up, down, and out. Her blouse was sleeveless, so the hair settled soft against the skin of her arms.

She put the brush back and stood in front of the mirror. The face she saw was still eight years old, the last time she had seen her own reflection. She tried to imagine what she must look like now, over twelve years later. Taller, she knew. Rounder, too. She could

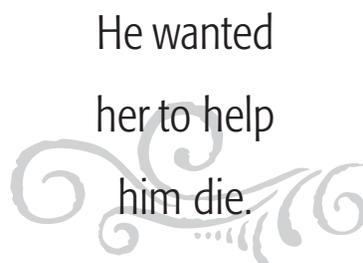
feel the indentation at her hip and the swell of her breasts. But her face she couldn't exactly picture. Did she look like her mother, with high cheekbones, pouty lips and dark brows? Her nose she remembered looked more like her father's—even, with a slim bridge and rounded nostrils. The rest had always been likened to her mother. Even her eyes were still the same according to what everyone told her. Wide-set



He wasn't
a member

of the
church.

But it
didn't matter.



He wanted
her to help
him die.

and deep brown. Except for the way her gaze tended to wander, no one would know she was blind. But she couldn't imagine it. She could see only the vacancy there, like Mary's eyes. Transparent. Ghostly.

She straightened her blouse and again smoothed her skirt.

Her mother had worn makeup. The image flashed in Loreena's mind, her mother's chin close to the

mirror as she applied her lipstick. Loreena touched her own lips with the tips of her fingers. She was old enough now, but dared not try it. How would she know how it looked? Uncle Don wouldn't be much help with such things.

“Loreena? We have to go now.”

She opened the top drawer. Inside lay several pairs of cotton gloves. White, her uncle had told her. She took one pair and slipped them over her hands, bending her fingers to secure the fit. It was the second pair she would wear that day, the first already discarded in the laundry basket. When she played the piano in church was the only time she didn't wear them. Otherwise they felt as necessary to her wardrobe as her underwear. Like a sheath for a knife or a holster for a gun, they were her assurance that her hands would never accidentally hurt anyone.

Her uncle's old Dodge Ram was red, like cranberries. This one was green, he'd told her. The step was the same distance up and she managed it with ease, finding the grip on the ceiling as she slid over the cloth seat. The air had cooled now that the sun was setting—she could feel the orange glow on the horizon to the left of the distant mountain peaks. It would be nighttime by the time they reached the location of the ceremony. This time it was a seventy-three-year-old man with lung cancer. She didn't know him. He wasn't a member of the church. But it didn't matter. He wanted her to help him die.

The truck coasted downhill into

town. Reverend Don was a good driver, maneuvering the vehicle along with gentle movements of his hands and feet. With him, Loreena hardly ever felt a jolt. Stop signs and stop lights were so gradually approached that one could barely tell the difference between stopping and going.

“He’s staying with his sister,” he said, “on Benning Street.”

He smelled like soap. Loreena knew he was wearing his tweed jacket and forest-green collared shirt. He’d described it to her before, every time they went to a ceremony, until she no longer needed to ask. She wasn’t sure why the tweed jacket was his favorite for such occasions. She suspected it had to do with the weight of the garment. Perhaps it gave him a sense of shielding, a piece of armor with which to go into the valley of death.

The others wouldn’t see it that way. With his broad shoulders and trim waist he wore it well, his neatly cut black hair highlighted in flecks of silver—maybe more now than Loreena remembered. And his cowboy hat, of course. He always wore it outside of the church walls. Looking like an old fashioned western hero, he would help them feel comfortable, like this was all perfectly acceptable in God’s eyes.

“Does his sister know?” Loreena asked. “What he wants?”

“I don’t think so.”

Loreena twisted her fingers. “What does she think is happening?”

“That he wants to see a man of

God.”

The truck bounced over the railroad tracks at E Street. Loreena counted the stops. Don clicked on the blinker and turned left after the third one, putting them on highway 36, headed north out of town. The sounds of traffic faded behind them. Somewhere nearby a cow bellowed, as if calling for her calf.



“... God
gave you

this gift
for a reason.

You are who
you are,
Loreena,
and that’s a
wonderful



thing. ...”

“Are you all right?” he asked.

She curled her legs up underneath her, hugging her ankles in close.

He squeezed her shoulder. “This man’s been going through hell for months. You’re doing God’s work.”

“The doctors can’t do anything else for him?”

“It’s lung cancer.”

She brought her hands near her stomach to still their fidgeting. Why couldn’t God have given her a healing power instead? Wouldn’t that have been more useful?

“What’s the matter, Chipmunk? You’re awfully quiet.”

She looked sideways. At times she felt she could see the outline of his figure there, like a gray shadow hovering just beyond her reach.

“What if I can’t do it?”

She heard a smile in his voice. “Why would that happen?”

“I don’t know.” She shrugged. “I never know if it’s still there.”

“Listen,” he said. “I’ve always told you. God gave you this gift for a reason. You are who you are, Loreena, and that’s a wonderful thing. You don’t need to be ashamed of it. If one day it changes, it changes, but I don’t think that’s going to happen. Look at the evergreen tree. It doesn’t just lose its green spines all of a sudden, does it?”

She shook her head, though she didn’t feel much like a tree.

“Have faith. God made you as he wanted you.”

Faith. After all his talk about it, she still didn’t know how to tap into that place of certainty he seemed to access so easily.

The whistling wind dropped pitch as the truck slowed and turned left. A dog barked and chased them around the corner.

“What about his sister?” she asked. “Won’t she wonder what happened?”

“She will never know, remember?”

It will look completely natural. And she'll be glad I was there to help him find his way home."

The truck picked up speed again. Home. Did this man have an idea of the home he was going to? Did he have a Heaven in mind?

She thought back to the last one, the old woman in the nursing home. Her picture of Heaven had been one of the most beautiful Loreena had ever seen, full of beach-ball-sized flowers growing everywhere she looked, and the woman walking on a red dirt path amongst them all, inhaling their sweet scents and closing her eyes under the bright rays of the sun.

But the one before that. Loreena shuddered. The rich man who lived in the giant house that smelled like cigars. His version of the hereafter still haunted her nightmares, full of slimy insects hovering at the edges of his bed, black icicles hanging from the roof, and a monstrous spider web over the door that wouldn't let him leave. Strange, how they were all so different. Uncle Don preached a single version of Heaven, some place where Jesus and God were supposed to reside among puffy clouds, carpeted mansions and winged angels with golden halos, but Loreena knew—it all depended on the person experiencing it.

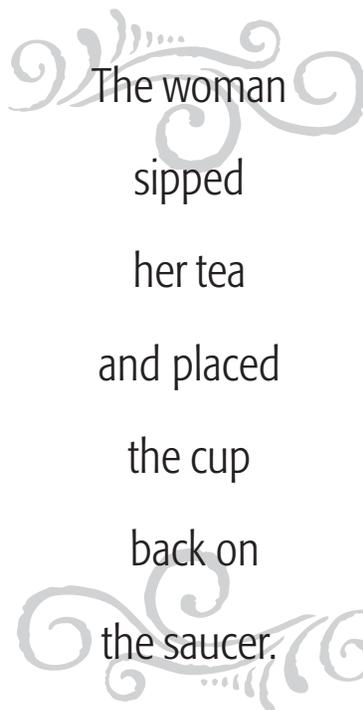
The truck bounced over two potholes and then slowed again, this time to a near stop before turning right. They parked. "We're here," Uncle Don said. "Ready?"

She held onto his arm as they walked across the gravel driveway

and through a metal gate into the front yard. Her heels clacked on the cement sidewalk.

"Three steps," he said.

In front of the door lay a straw mat. Loreena imagined it said "Welcome" with sunflowers on the edges. The house was quiet inside. No music, no dog barking. Uncle Don opened the screen door and knocked.



The floor of the house vibrated with approaching footsteps. Light ones. The sister, Loreena guessed. A slim woman.

The door squeaked open.

"Reverend Clement. I'm so glad you're here." Her voice shook with a vibrato, as if weakened with age.

"Call me Don. This is my niece, Loreena."

"Come in, please."

Uncle Don guided her up the last small step and onto a carpeted floor. The woman was wearing cheap hairspray, the scent of lilac

and alcohol assaulting Loreena's nostrils. She walked past and encountered a whiff of cooked chicken. Soup, maybe? The woman closed the door behind them with a whoosh.

"Can I offer you some tea?"

"Fine," Uncle Don said.

The woman's footsteps retreated as she headed for the kitchen, short, quick steps like a nervous waitress.

"How long do we have to stay?" Loreena whispered.

He patted the back of her hand.

"You found the place okay?" the woman called.

"Your directions were perfect."

Uncle Don took a few steps forward. Loreena realized she had an iron grip on his arm and let go, standing alone in the entryway, arms slightly out from her sides. She sensed something interesting resting just to the right, against a wall. She took a few steps, arm extended. As she thought. A small, upright piano. Her fingers hungered for the keys but the lid was down. She felt sorry for the instrument. It was like her hands, locked away in the gloves.

"Do you take sugar, or honey?"

"Black," Uncle Don said.

"And you, hon?"

Loreena jerked toward the voice. "Um, sugar." She laced her fingers in front of her. She didn't like tea.

The quick footsteps approached again. "Please, have a seat."

Cups rattled against saucers. Uncle Don moved forward. Loreena followed and sat beside him on a musty couch with raised seams and puffy corner pillows. He guided her to

the tea on the coffee table in front of them. The woman sat to their right.

“So,” Donald swallowed, “how is Russell?”

The woman sipped her tea and placed the cup back on the saucer. It clicked three times. Her hands were shaking. “He’s, um, he’s not good, I’m afraid.” Her voice cracked. “Hospice has been here, the last few weeks. Very helpful. They’re very nice.” The cup rattled and she placed it on the table. “I...I just don’t now how much longer he can do this. He doesn’t like how he feels on the morphine, but without it...” Her voice trailed off and she sniffed.

“Deborah!”

The command came from beyond the kitchen, further down the hallway. It sounded rough, as if spoken by a man with a raw throat. Russell?

“I’ll be right back.” The woman hurried away.

Loreena put her cup down and stood up, turning toward the door. “Can we get started? I hate sitting here like this.”

“Relax, girl. You’ve done this many times before.”

“Shouldn’t we say something? Give her some indication?”

“There’s nothing we can say. These are his wishes. It’s his life.”

And his death. Loreena flexed her fingers and moved toward the piano. “Do you think she’d mind if I played?”

He took another sip of his tea, swallowed. “No.”

It was like being freed from a

cage. She slipped off the gloves, lifted the lid, and sat on the bench. For a moment she considered what to play, then picked a longing folk tune that spoke of better days in a far-off paradise.

The keys moved lightly, though the sound was thin, some of the hammers hitting dead strings that



Loreena

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the woman

sizing her up.

She wished

she’d reconsidered



the lipstick.

had lost their will to vibrate. Still, she hardly noticed when Deborah came back into the room. It was only when the song was finished that she realized she was being watched.

“You play beautifully,” Deborah said. “Russell loves the piano. It hasn’t been played in so long.”

“Do you play?” Loreena asked.

“My daughter played, and my granddaughter, Natalie.”

“Do they live nearby?”

“My daughter passed away some years ago. She had cancer, too.”

“I’m sorry.” Loreena pulled her

hands into her lap.

“Natalie stayed with me for awhile. She lives in an apartment now.”

“Does she know—?” She stopped.

The woman sat down again. “Russell didn’t want her to worry.”

Wouldn’t she want to be around when her great uncle was dying? Loreena put on her gloves.

“Well.” Deborah sighed. “I think he’d like to see you now, Reverend.”

Don stood up from the couch and started across the room. Loreena fell in behind him.

Deborah followed them. “Reverend, I think he wanted to talk to you about—”

“Loreena often assists me at these times,” Uncle Don said, “with prayers.”

Loreena could feel the woman sizing her up. She wished she’d reconsidered the lipstick.

“It’s the last room at the end of the hallway,” Deborah said.

The further they went the more Loreena could smell antiseptic, as if the bathroom had just been cleaned. The carpet felt thick under her boots, the heels sinking in. It reminded her of the carpet in her parent’s home. Strange, the sensation returning after all these years.

Don paused and knocked on the bedroom door. “Russell. It’s Reverend Don.”

“Reverend.” The voice was muffled, as if under a sheet. The bed creaked, blankets shuffling. “Come in, sir.”

Music hummed from the far side

of the room, country songs. A small radio? Uncle Don took her by the arm and guided her to the bed, five steps in. The air was stuffy, as if a window hadn't been opened in months. The scent of chicken soup overwhelmed everything else. She waited where her uncle placed her while he moved to Russell's side.

"How are you feeling?"

The man coughed and cleared his throat. "This thing's eating me up from inside."

His voice rattled with the remnants of a thousand coughs. A smoker, Loreena thought. Or at least he'd been one in the past. She imagined his face with deep forehead wrinkles and a large round nose.

"You don't feel any better?" Don said.

"Not going to get better. Don't need a Ph.D. to see that." He coughed again, harder this time. Don helped him to a sip of water. When he settled down, his voice was softer. "Is this the young lady?"

"My niece, Loreena." Don took her hand and pulled her next to him.

"That you playing the piano?" Russell said.

"Yes," Loreena said.

"Haven't heard it since Natalie left."

Loreena licked her lips. She felt suddenly parched. "Are you sure you don't want to wait, until?"

"No waiting." He coughed again and shifted on the bed. "Waiting won't help."

Loreena fiddled with the fabric of her skirt.

"Mr. Pearson," Don said, "what we talked about before. You remember?"

"I'm dying, Reverend. Not delusional."

"Then this is the right time?"

Russell sighed. "I could wait 'til tomorrow, or the next day, but there's nothing left, you know? I'm just something else for Deborah to have to take care of." He inhaled,

Loreena moved
to the wall.

It was a relief
to lean against it,

to feel

the solid wood

next to

her shoulder.

wheezing.

"Nothing in God's word says you have to suffer without purpose."

"It says we're not supposed to kill."

"The cancer's doing that, Russ, not you. The cancer already decided that."

Loreena felt lightheaded. She longed to sit down.

Russell's next few breaths were heavy, filling the room with their

raspy wind.

"Everything okay in here?"

They all turned with a start. Deborah stood at the door.

"Fine." Russell pushed the word from his chest.

"Can I get you anything?"

No one answered.

"Well I'll let you be then—"

"Wait, Deb." Russell called.

The door squeaked open again.

"You sign up for that class?"

"The art class?"

"You said you had to call today."

"I told you. I'm too old for that."

She paused. "Why do you bring that up now?"

The air thickened around them. Loreena shifted from one foot to the other. She didn't belong here.

This was a family matter.

"Call them," Russell said. "Sign up for it."

Deborah hesitated. "I'll think about it." She turned to leave.

"Deb!"

Everyone jumped.

"Sign up for the damn class, for chrissake. I'll be fine." His voice had a desperate edge.

Deborah came back to the side of the bed. "All right, all right. I just don't like leaving you here alone."

Russell coughed twice. "What am I going to do? I can't go anywhere. I'm the easiest guest you ever had."

"Yeah, right." Deborah chuckled.

Loreena moved to the wall. It was a relief to lean against it, to feel the solid wood next to her shoulder. This man was alive. How could she imagine him dead within the next few minutes? How could that be okay? ■

1

1st Place ~ Novel

Unpublished

BY JAMES DORAN

Crowheart

CHAPTER 2 ~

THE YOUNG COLT fought the idea of getting into the back of the truck. No matter how hard Lee pulled on its lead rope, the twenty-day-old colt would not step across the seam between the loading dock and the truck bed. Finally, Lee let go of the lead rope and grabbed the colt with both arms around its soft torso and hoisted it squirming on his hip and carried it the four steps manually into what must have seemed like some strange contraption to the animal. Once in the truck he let go of it. The black colt bounced out of his arms and onto the rubber mat that covered the flat steel bed of the truck. He leaned on his mother and looked out of the side of his eyes at Lee. The twelve-year-old boy Evan grinned with delight. Lee turned around and stepped off the back of the truck onto the ground to put the tailgate in.

“He’s a cute little guy, ain’t he?” Lee said.

Evan, the son of Alene, climbed up on the stock truck racks to look at the colt nuzzling its mother’s

belly looking for a snack. The colt, Stormy, was happy with mother’s milk as if nothing unusual was occurring even though a few moments ago it was bug-eyed scared to get in the truck.

Evan’s horse, a gelding named Joker, stood on the other side of the mare and waited, tied by the lead line to the front rack of the truck. The pack animal, a mid-sized mule named Jackson, stood against the far sideboard also tied to the front rack of the headboard. Lee started the motor and the two grown horses and the mule shifted their weight from one foot to the other, ready for the jerk that would come when the truck started to move.

Lee laughed and said, “Look at them dance, Evan. They’re so excited to go to the mountains that they’re dancing.”

Evan peered through the window in the back of the cab of the truck and watched the animals shift their feet as the truck hesitated and lurched out of the loading dock. The little colt, Stormy, was not tethered at all and danced like the three others and literally



JIM DORAN was raised on a cattle ranch in the Okanogan of Washington state. He raised a family there, practiced law in a small town and participated in many community projects. He was the Mayor of Twisp, Washington, from 1996 to 2000. Jim has been a visionary and activist for the forest restoration efforts in the interior west. He is currently living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, but yearns for the deep, wet green of the North Cascades.

bounced off the belly of his mother and the side of Jackson as the truck rolled out the driveway towards the highway. Evan laughed.

Lee shifted up through the gears as they approached the Town of Twisp and then shifted back down through the gears as they slowed at the intersection and turned off the highway and up the Twisp River Road. He was glad to have the boy with him for this ride. He wanted some time together with Evan alone in the woods with horses and no one else to get in the way. Evan was his pride and joy and it brought a sense of well being to Lee just to be with him. The twelve-year-old would be able to help with some of the work, like cutting deadfall with the small chainsaw and splitting firewood. Lee treated him and talked to him like a man and Evan became a man when he and Lee did things together.

They arrived at the corral on a dirt spur road at the bottom of Slate Creek. Evan jumped out before Lee asked and stood at the back of the truck and pointed his right hand to the left or to the right as Lee backed the truck to the loading dock at the trailhead. Evan used his left hand to beckon Lee further back and then quickly put out his palm in the sign for “stop” just as the back of the truck bumped into the log at the loading ramp.

Lee stuck his head out the window and shouted, “Good?”

Evan did the thumbs up sign like he was a full-grown logger with a load choked down.

Lee turned off the truck, set the handbrake and stepped down. This spot, fifteen miles up the Twisp River, was one of his favorite places in the world. Whenever he turned up the Twisp River Road he left the other world behind. It didn't matter what was bothering him. He was at ease with this boy and the horses and the gear for three days of work and play in the mountains. He hoped that some of his inner

Lee laughed
and said,
“Look at them
dance, Evan.
They're so
excited to go
to the mountains
that they're
dancing.”

turmoil would settle out while busying himself at this refuge.

Evan took the tailgates out to show his uncle that he was helpful and with the program. The tailgate was heavy for the boy. He rocked it back and forth and pulled upwards and strained. When it came out of the slots the weight nearly pushed him backwards to the ground. Lee pretended not to watch and let the boy do the chore. At the very first moment that the gate came out

of the slots the colt poked its nose through the crack and squeezed out of the truck.

“Uncle Lee,” Evan shouted as he regained his balance with the tailgate in hand. “Look at Stormy.”

The colt pushed past Evan and romped freely around the corral.

“I think he likes it here,” Lee said.

The two of them brought the other animals down the ramp and tied them at the hitching post. They hoisted the panniers full of food and gear onto the mule and lashed the lightweight top pack filled with sleeping bags and clothing down tight and then buckled the saddlebags. Lee checked each animal and pulled as hard as he could on the belly cinches. Each one bloated its belly as best it could against his strength.

Lee led the small group up through the ten-foot tall ninebark brush to the hidden trail that would take them to the cabin five miles nearly straight up the mountain. Evan sat proudly on Joker and steered him into line behind the pack animal that followed Lee on the mare. The first part of the trail was steep. Lee was actually glad for this. The animals had to get in step and pay attention and work hard right off the bat. The sudden lurching as the mule humped up the trail tested Lee's packing job. The gear held tight.

At the top of the first bench they dismounted and tightened the cinches. Evan did exactly what Lee did. He tied his horse's reins to a branch of a Ponderosa Pine and

flipped the stirrup up on the right side of the saddle and pulled as hard as he could on the cinch strap. The horse was winded and was unable to bloat out its stomach as usual and four inches of strap were gained by his effort. He was proud of himself but did not look at Lee.

Lee tightened the cinch on his own mare and on the pack animal and carefully watched Evan from the corner of his eye. As Evan gained on the cinch Lee decided to leave it to him. They both stood for a moment on the rock ledge a thousand feet above where they had started. They looked out across the valley to the opposite canyon that ran up to Williams Lake in the jagged and snow capped-Chelan Sawtooth Wilderness.

The colt came up behind Evan and sniffed at his shirt between his shoulder blades. Evan jumped and Lee laughed and the colt pranced backwards and stood and looked at them. Evan put out his hand and the colt stepped towards him. Evan did not move and the horse, out of curiosity, came to him. With two uncertain half steps Stormy edged close enough for Evan to rub him on the smooth side of his nose with an open hand. The horse quivered its lip with pleasure and after a moment curled its lips back and rolled its nose just enough to get a nip at Evan's hand with his teeth. The boy snapped his hand back from the glistening white teeth and the colt jumped sideways and danced off throwing its head. It stopped and turned back towards Evan and they looked at each other.

Then the colt came two steps closer and stood still.

"Uncle Lee. He likes me."

"You two are bound to each other. Yessir."

They rode another hour up the trail and came to a thicket on the north side of the mountain where the wind had snapped a dozen small trees across the trail. Lee put Evan in charge of the pack mule and his mount that were tied together with baling twine. He took the sixteen-inch chainsaw off of the pack mule and began cutting the downfall so they could proceed. They came to large pine across the trail and rather than cut it, Lee found a way off the trail to skirt the log. It would waste the whole day if they tried to cut through these twenty-inch-sized logs. Sometimes it's easier to go around a problem than it is to take it on.

They rode through an old growth stand of red pine at the fourth mile of the ride. The magnificent trees were spaced fifty feet with a tan carpet of bunch grass between them. There was not enough water on the south slope for anything but ponderosa pine, buck brush and bunch grass. In the draws out of the sun, the fir trees and aspen took hold. The pine this high up had never been logged, not even by helicopter. They rode through the red pine like going through the vestibule of a cathedral before entering into the holy chamber of worship. Silence came over them as the columns reached towards the sky and the gradient up the slope led them higher into the church with the granite rimrock

above them as the altar.

The lower branches of the magnificent pine were twenty feet or more off the ground and bright fluorescent green moss covered them and glowed. They reverently rode up the switchbacks of the incline through the temple and let the horses graze a few bites on the bunch grass amongst the trees as they paused to rest. Stormy nibbled the grass like a big horse and left a sprig or two hanging out of his teeth even though, at twenty days old, he was still living solely on mother's milk and a little grain. But he was learning.

At the top of the old growth stand they sat on a weathered gray log uphill from the horses and took a long rest and ate the sandwiches that were in their saddle bags. The animals wandered a few steps and ate bunch grass with their reins tied to the saddle latigo so they wouldn't step on them and break them when they stepped to reach a clump of grass. Stormy nosed up to Evan and extended his neck as if he wanted to try a bite of Evan's sandwich. Evan pushed the horse's nose away and held the sandwich off to his right.

"I never met a horse who likes tuna fish sandwiches," Evan said and looked at Lee.

"Here, give him this." Lee tossed Evan an apple and the colt took it from his open hand with his teeth and bit through it. Half of the apple fell to the ground and rolled down the hill twenty-five feet. Stormy watched it roll with a look like he was shocked. Lee and

Evan cracked up laughing as Stormy snapped out of his horse thoughts and bucked and threw his hind feet in the air and chased the apple down the hillside. He was so caught up in showing off that he passed right by the apple and was left looking at the ground wondering where it was.

“He’s like a big dog, Uncle.”

“Yeah, but dogs are smarter.”

“He’s smart. He’s just a boy. Like me. Give us some time Uncle. We’ll get it.”

Lee thought about the boy and the horse. They had similar dispositions. The boy, Evan Morrow, supposedly his brother’s son, was here to please no matter whose son he was. Lee believed that about this boy. He wanted to be with him and show him what to do. Evan ate up his uncle’s attention like candy. The boy just wanted to know how to do things and Lee was always glad to have his company. He never let Evan get in any real danger, but he didn’t coddle him either. For instance, he could have checked the cinch back at mile one, but Evan knew about saddles sliding under a horse if the cinch was too loose. He had to let him become his own man.

They never talked about things like “becoming a man.” Lee didn’t want to talk about it. He also didn’t want to talk about the “secret” with Evan. These things, like becoming a “man” came with time. Lee just wanted to have the pleasure, and it was pure pleasure, of being with this young man who had all the grace

and beauty of his mother and the strong bloodlines, meaning mostly self-assuredness, of his Morrow kin.

Lee continued with the mule down a set of switchbacks into a ravine and looked back up behind him regularly to check the status of the gear and rig and saw that Evan had fallen back fifty yards. Stormy walked alongside him on the uphill side, off the trail. The two of them were engaged in boy-to-colt communication. Evan stopped Joker and reached out and down to Stormy. Stormy faced Evan and reached his nose up to Evan’s hand and then brushed Evan’s leg with his lips and tugged just a little at the loose fabric of his jeans. Evan quickly pulled his leg back and half-heartedly yelled at Stormy, “You little brat!”

Stormy was full of mischief. He backed off from Evan and looked around for his mother. She and Lee were four switchbacks down the grade. The twenty-day-old black colt paid no attention to the trail and cut down the steep shale hillside across the switchbacks and slid through the rough rocky dirt down to his mother.

Lee knew at that moment that this colt would grow up to be the best horse that Evan could ever want. He was as natural in the mountains as any horse Lee had ever known. Lee felt the warmth in his heart of a father who sees the goodness in his son. He let the joy sit in his chest. He knew that this would be a good experience for the boy. He only wished that he could hug Evan and tell him that he was his father, not his uncle, but

that story would have to wait for another day. For now he took every moment he could to be with the boy. He wanted Evan to like being with his father, even if Evan did not know that he was his father. He wanted the boy to feel relaxed and able to trust his father, something Lee had never had.

They worked through another set of deadfall with the small chainsaw. It was slow going. They finally arrived at the small cabin set in the trees below the rimrock of Midnight and Three A.M. Mountains in the late afternoon. The log cabin had been built in the 1940s after the war by locals who were hired by a man who wanted a mountain hunting cabin to escape to. The man disappeared a few years after the cabin was built and faded into history. Some said he was a war veteran who never really recovered from the shock. Nobody local knew who he was and when he didn’t come back the cabin became theirs. Lee knew one of the old local guys, Bucky Buckmaster, who claimed to have built the cabin along with Ole Scott and Ide Smith under the direction and pay of the stranger. Bucky was a heavy drinker in those days and Lee doubted that he had ever done anything to actually help with the cabin building. But the cabin was exactly where Bucky had said it would be, so there was at least an ounce of sober truth in the poor fellow.

It was no more than a survival cabin, about twenty-feet-long and twelve-feet-wide, made from the

twelve-inch fir trees that stood on the bench on the shaded cold side of the mountain where a stream bubbled out of the rocks. Lee first came up to the cabin with his hunting buddies using Bucky's directions. They began the task of cleaning it up and repairing the door, the chimney, the shelves and the wooden furnishings that the porcupines had gnawed away and over the last thirteen years they brought up boards and wire and plumbing fixtures and lanterns and tools. The cabin had a fireplace built into it and a full-sized wood cook stove and a cast iron sink. They lined it out with a full set of kitchenware, iron skillets, a large enamel blue coffee pot, cooking pots and pans, silverware and Pyrex plates. After thirteen years of regular fall hunting trips Lee and his two hunting friends had the cabin completely ready for their visits and they did not have to pack much more than their food and clothing into the wilderness.

Lee and Evan unpacked the mule and took the saddles off of their riding horses and stashed all the gear on the porch under the roof or inside the cabin. Lee led the mare and the pack animal across the creek and up to the grassy meadow where they could roam free and range for the night. Evan followed with his horse Joker. Stormy followed last. They passed through the narrow set of downed logs and stumps. Lee stopped the group. He tied the mare to a tree and came back behind them all with some manila

line and tied a weave several times across the trail between the trees on either side of the narrowest part of the trail to make a corral gate to keep the animals from coming back down the trail at night and going back home to the barn which they would. This had happened before and Lee had learned the hard way to make this gate and to put a bell on the lead mare, the one most likely to try to escape. If she forced her way through the gate or found a way across the ravine in the night, he would hear her come past the cabin, the only way she could go.

Lee took the animals across the creek and up to the beginning of the meadow. He hobbled two of the horses and turned them all loose for the night. The horses knew where they were and tromped up the trail into the grassy meadow below the rimrock where bubbling water surfaced as it came down the rocky mountainside. They were, humans and horses, all quite happy about being out in the mountains in the cold clear late June air with the scent of wildness all about them.

In the evening after dark Lee cooked chicken with onions, garlic and mushrooms and mashed potatoes for the two of them. He sipped from a small glass of whiskey now and then. The cabin was dimly lit with the glow of the fireplace and three candles in reflecting holders. There were two single bunks, one above the other, at the far end of the cabin and two more stacked perpendicular to them. With just the two of them they threw their personal gear on the top bunks and lay out their sleeping bags on

the metal springs nailed across the lodgepole bed frames. They were comfortable and cozy. Evan sat on a chair with his feet at the hearth of the fireplace and poked at it with a stick. He took his hat off and Lee could see the fire glint off of his face and spark in his eyes from the prodding of the stick. The boy's reddish brown hair was mussed and wild.

“How 'bout some grub?” Lee held out a Pyrex plate and motioned Evan to come to the small table just under the window of the log cabin. Evan sat at one of the plates and Lee opened the door to the cabin and grabbed a Coke from the “refrigerator” apple box nailed to the side of the cabin just outside the door.

“When can I come up with you hunting?” Evan asked as they ate. “I can shoot.”

“I have to clear that with your mother, you know. I think you'd be a fine addition to the camp. I don't think the guys would mind at all.” Lee was proud of his boy. “I'll have to clear it with your mom, though.”

He recalled how much fun it was when Mike, his hunting buddy, brought his thirteen year old son up for a hunt and the boy shot a beautiful four point buck. It had been a ritual, though they never called it that, for the thirteen year old boy coming into his manhood. It was also a satisfaction for the three men to be the men that the boy would model. They treated Mike's son as a man. They talked

rough and saw his eyes widen at some of the language. They expected him to do his share of work and he did. They teased the boy about sleeping out in the woods with cougars and bears when the day drew on towards night and they hadn't reached the cabin yet. The boy was scared at first and then scoffed at them when they turned the next bend to see the cabin.

Lee envied the boy on that trip. The boy felt so comfortable with his dad. There was true affection between them. Lee felt the empty hole in his heart again. He was afraid of his father and always had been. He had never recovered from it. All through the years when he was young, and then as a teenager, one of his brothers was always chosen by his father for hunting trips or campouts. Even as a grown man, Lee did not care to be with his father and his father tried not to do things with him either. They never spoke about it but it was an ever-present tension between them. Lee never had figured out just what it was that put such a wedge between him and his father.

To see such an innocent bond between Mike and his son nearly made Lee cry. At least with Evan they had reciprocal feelings and he took absolute care to never hurt or scare Evan. He wanted Evan to have the love of a father that he had not had. Lee loved Evan and his love for Evan gave him hope for himself. He thought that with Evan he got to be the father that he always wanted and that Evan got to be the son that

Lee always had been.

After dinner Evan lay in his sleeping bag with the fire light dancing on the cabin walls. Lee sat in the rocker close to him. They both stared into the fire. He reached out and rubbed the boy's head and left the palm of his hand at the back of Evan's head just a little bit longer than he thought the boy might be comfortable with. But Evan had become sleepy and was tired and well fed and warm. He didn't mind.

He squished his head into the pillow and looked up at Lee and said, "Uncle. I love you."

"Yeah. I know. Get some rest."

Lee looked into the fire and felt the tears well in his eyes. He rubbed his nose to hide it from the boy but he didn't have to. Evan had closed his eyes and fallen asleep. Lee sipped his whiskey and thought about Laney, Evan's mother.

The boy was twelve years old, almost thirteen. Had it been twelve years ago? What had he done with his time? He tried to keep her mostly out of his mind. The times he spent with Evan always brought him heartache and a sense of deep joy at the same time. Life was not fair, just like his father had said and proven to him when he was a boy.

Evan had the Morrow family features. No one had ever suspected anything. No one knew except Lee and Laney and his brother Neil. They knew that on that summer night twelve years ago before the wedding the power of their lovemaking had produced this wonderful boy.

Lee was not fond of his brother, Cyrus, yet he didn't dislike him

either. He would do nothing to hurt him but he did not trust him. He'd seen what Cyrus could do in a fit of anger. He knew that rage lay dormant in Cyrus and he was never comfortable with him, though he did not let it show. They smoked an occasional cigar and had a beer or two and talked about things that had to do with the Ranch or about Cyrus's pharmacy and variety store business but never anything that really mattered. They never talked about the horse incident that had happened when Lee was fifteen. Lee never brought it up. It was supposed to be "forgotten" and put in that black box of memory that was never to be opened. But Lee knew that, in a not so funny way, things never brought up and out into the open become stronger over time. The very things hidden away in wishful forgetfulness distill into an energy all of their own and when they do come up from the unconscious locker, they ambush the deceiver and play out stronger and clearer than they were the last time they arose. Yet secrets are meant to be secrets and Lee never put it on the table, though he would have liked to in spite of unknown consequences. Was the keeping of a dark secret more dangerous than the immediate repercussion of putting it on the table? The obvious fear that haunted Lee was that when dangerous behavior was condoned as acceptable and normal and not even commented on as objectionable, it was not confronted and no chance of correction would ever occur. The latent energy lay in wait. ■

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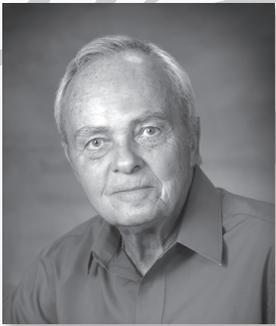
2nd Place ~ Novel

Unpublished

BY ROBERT L. EDGELL

Pegenkopf The Royal Connection

The Royal Connection
A Prussian Tale
Hohenzollern Family Crest
'Nothing without God'



BOB EDGELL was born in Goodland, Kansas in 1943 and later his family moved to Minneapolis. After high school he married and became a father. In 1966 Bob took a break from college and joined the intelligence branch of the U.S. Army. He served in Germany until 1969 and returned to the U of M to graduate and co-write a 'how-to' book that was published in 1974. Bob's career spanned 34 years in international marketing of software for the engineering community. He is now retired in Phoenix and working on his second and third historical novels.

PROLOGUE ~

THE AGING 74-YEAR-old king walked over to the table adorned with flowers, fresh fruit, and refreshments. His stout frame, immaculate uniform with the Iron Cross and his full, gray muttonchops were all his outward appearance required to convey that he was king. He and his entourage were in the gold-gilded Venus Salon, one of the enfilade of seven rooms that made up the Grand Apartment of the King of France. The barrel-vaulted ceiling of the salon was dome-shaped and the fresco painted on the ceiling depicted the Goddess of Love, Venus. All the salons that made up the king's apartment were decorated with a theme of a planet and the Roman deity associated with that planet.

The king taking refreshments in this year of 1871 was not the King of France; he was the King

of Prussia, King Wilhelm I. He was accompanied by his Prime Minister, Otto von Bismarck, and two sons, the oldest Crown Prince Frederick and youngest Prince Wilhelm. They were in the Palace of Versailles, twelve miles from the center of Paris, waiting for the ceremony to begin.

"It is hard to imagine this palace having the humble beginnings as a hunting lodge," Prince William said as he looked about the room.

"I must admit, it has grandeur greater than all the palaces of Europe," Bismarck said, glancing around the room, letting his eyes settle on the statue of Louis XIV dressed as a Roman general. The marble walls and floor-to-ceiling columns were symbolic of King Louis's quest for power and aggrandizement as a king. Bismarck looked up to view the arched ceiling adorned with paintings representing Venus and historical lovers Anthony and Cleopatra, Titus and Bernice, Jason and Medea, and others.

Bismarck stood and walked to the serving table where the King of

Prussia was standing. As he walked, his eyes rested on the gold gilding that adorned the furniture and the moldings that accented the room.

The king spoke quietly, “One can imagine the notables and dignitaries who have stepped through this room. Louis the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth occupied these rooms.”

King Wilhelm Frederick I of the Hohenzollern family paused. “I was in these same rooms twice before: fifty-six and fifty-eight years ago. It was another Napoleon and another finish to their attempt to force their will on their neighbors to the north.”

Bismarck touched the end of his mustache and gave it a slight twist. “This palace should be draped in red . . . blood red for the millions of lives the French have cost this world. I pray we will never have to return here again to sign a treaty.”

The king looked at Bismarck. “For some reason, I don’t believe your prayers will be answered. It won’t be us who return, but it could be my son Fritz or his heir.”

There was another brief silence.

“I have seen my kingdom occupied and ravaged by the French under Napoleon I for seven years from 1806 to 1813. Every time there is discontent in Paris, the people and governments north of France feel the threat of a French invasion.

“As elated as I am at this moment,” King Wilhelm continued softly, “I would only wish that my good friend Field Marshal Blucher were here for this celebration.”

Bismarck did not comment.

He knew that the aging king was pondering his youth and the fifty-six years between the battle of La Belle Alliance that was a great victory for Field Marshal Blucher and the historical event about to occur at the Palace of Versailles in France.

CHAPTER 1 ~ 1815: La Belle Alliance (Waterloo)

“What have we heard from Wellington,” the 72-year -old Blucher shouted at his aide as he

The Field Marshal
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His flowing hair
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entered his temporary command post, a wooden windmill on top of a hill overlooking the prairie below and the village of Ligny.

The Field Marshal was tall and imposing, adding to his authority as an appointee of the King of Prussia. His flowing hair and pointed mustache added to his symbols of strength and power.

“His messenger told us he will be here in the morning. The French army is marching toward Quatre Bras and we believe it is Napoleon’s main army.”

“Show me the map,” Blucher barked.

“Here is the best guess of our positions,” the aide said, pointing to the map.

Blucher spoke, “It is obvious the little Corporal wants to keep us divided and believes he can beat us in Ligny while Ney keeps Wellington in check at Quatre Bras. The battle for Ligny will be tomorrow. Rest your men and make a plan for our retreat to Wavre should it become necessary.”

The windmill turned slowly in the calm night air. Two cavalrymen groomed their horses in the dim candlelight glowing from inside the mill. They had been in battle with Blucher and had retreated with him. The first cavalry charge had filled them with Prussian pride and the second French charge had filled them with disgust, the disgust that accompanies the pain of retreating.

“We could have beaten them,” Heinrich said.

“Sometimes it is better to wait for another day,” Martin answered.

Martin Pagenkopf was sixteen-years-old and the vassal to Prince Wilhelm Frederick, second in line to the Prussian Hohenzollern throne. Like his father, Peter Pagenkopf, Martin had the muscular frame shared by most farmers. Peter Pagenkopf was barely six-feet tall and the years of working his farm in Pomerania shaped his build into the ideal frame for a cavalryman—thin

and muscular.

“How long have you been in the service of the prince?”

Martin looked at the young groom. “I joined the prince when I was fifteen,” he answered.

“Why did you choose the Hussar cavalry?”

“I didn’t choose the Hussars. I fought for a position to avenge my country.”

Heinrich moved to the other side of the horse he was brushing. “Did the French invade Pomerania?”

“Napoleon bypassed us on the way to Moscow and during his retreat stayed clear of East Prussia and Pomerania. This gave Prussia a chance to rebuild the army and cavalry. The French sent a group of light cavalry into our village of Kardemin to scout the area. During their stay they took what women they wanted and any goods they could carry. That is when I decided to become a soldier.”

“Did they take your sister?”

“No,” Martin answered slowly. “They took my mother.”

Both men knew the need for silence as Heinrich tried to empathize and Martin tried to block out the horrible memories.

Heinrich broke the silence. “But, how did you actually become a Hussar?”

“After the French left Kardemin, Prince Wilhelm arrived in our village looking for recruits—more men for his Hussar battalion. He was regrouping for the inevitable.”

“Prince Wilhelm?” Heinrich asked.

“Yes, Prince Wilhelm. My father had fought with him at the battle of Leipzig and the prince for some reason had a fondness for the people of Pomerania. In fact, my sister works at the Königsberg Castle in East Prussia as a seamstress.

“The prince chose me and during one of our conversations he explained his reason. He said the Monarchy wanted to build a strong bond between the Prussians and Pomeranians and he hoped that I would come to feel as a member of

The prince
looked at

Kreutz and smiled.

“Our future
on a plow horse,”

he said,

pointing
at Martin.

the Prussian family. He also revealed that Prussia was buying Pomerania from Denmark and we would be part of Prussia.

Martin remembered the day when Prince Wilhelm arrived in Kardemin to find recruits. A horseman had ridden through the village and into the neighboring farms commanding all men 16 years or older to assemble in the

village. Anyone who owned a horse was required to bring the horse and meet the prince in the village square.

Martin had heard the call and jumped on one of two horses belonging to the Pagenkopf farm, an eight-year-old work horse that only knew how to plow fields and how to ride with Martin through the woods. Martin and his father rode proudly through the village to the square. Many of the villagers pointed and snickered when they saw him approaching on the plow horse, wondering what this lad was going to prove to the prince.

The prince and his second in command, Lieutenant Kreutz, were on their steeds in the square, waiting for the villagers and farmers to assemble. They both wore the proud colorful uniform of the Prussian Hussars.

The prince looked at Kreutz and smiled. “Our future on a plow horse,” he said, pointing at Martin.

The prince had reason to smile for he was only eighteen-years-old and leading a cavalry company. Many people he encountered underestimated his abilities and thus the prince never prejudged on age. His company of men ranged from fourteen to forty.

“He seems awfully young, sir,” Kreutz said.

“We’ll see how he does. I especially want his father to rejoin our company. Their family name is Pagenkopf and if I have to take the boy to get the father, so be it.”

The prince motioned for Martin to approach him.

Martin saw the wave of the arm and hesitated.

“Come here, young man,” the prince shouted, seeing the puzzled look on Martin’s face.

Martin urged his plow horse forward and looked into the eyes of the prince. He was nearing a member of the Prussian monarchy and he could see in the eyes of the prince a demeanor he had never seen before in any human.

“Here, take my sword,” the prince commanded. “Run your horse to that post, make a cut in both sides of it, and return my sword to me.”

Martin looked at the sword in awe. It was a shiny metal weapon with jewels on its hilt. The prince threw it in the air in Martin’s direction. Martin held his hand up and caught the sword by the hilt.

He would have answered but he didn’t know how to address the prince in his first encounter with royalty. Jeweled sword in hand, he turned to the post on the other side of the village square. Many times Martin would take the plow horse in the woods and gallop him through the trees, slashing at the trees with a long wooden stick and reliving the stories his father told him about cavalry life. This time, it was not a stick but a royal sword and he was being tested for a position in the Hussars.

Martin urged his horse forward and the plow horse began a slow trot. The only time the horse had

performed was in the woods, away from the farm and other people. Martin leaned forward to the horse’s ear and whispered loudly, “Onward.”

The plow horse recognized Martin’s favorite command in the woods and began a rapid gallop. In spite of the horse’s size, his speed increased and by the time he reached the pole his speed was almost equal to the best steeds in the Hussars. As Martin neared the pole he reined in the horse in time



looked at him

with

tired eyes.

“We



to slash the sword on the front side and, turning, slashed the back side, then urged his horse back to the prince. As he neared the prince, he tossed the sword in the air, returning it the way he had received it.

Martin looked at Heinrich. “I like to think I was chosen by Prince Wilhelm for my horse sense. I, however, had the recommendations of my father who had served with the prince and my sister who works at the Hohenzollern Castle in

Königsberg.”

The two young men began walking their horses to the bivouac area.

Martin spoke first. “The prince is very good to his Hussars. They are paid well and they always have the best mounts. They have been training for this war and now that Napoleon is again the Emperor of France, determined to re-conquer Europe, we will be ready for him. We will stop him here, in Belgium.

“Today was not a good example,” Heinrich replied solemnly.

“Napoleon may have won the first battle, and he may win the next. But we will conquer in the end. My father marched with the Prussian armies into Paris over a year ago and we will again enter that city and throw out Napoleon.”

Napoleon stood in the center of the windmill ground room at Fleurus. His hard ride from Charleroi had tired him and he had chosen the windmill for the same reason that Blucher had chosen the windmill in Brye—to overlook the battlefield from a high ground. The map on his table was quite similar to the map that Blucher and Wellington were viewing on their tables.

“Take this message to Ney. He must hold Wellington at Quatre Bras,” Napoleon barked as he handed the paper to a messenger.

Napoleon turned back to the table with the maps and thought out loud, “We must not let Wellington and Blucher join forces. They have a superior number but if we keep them divided, we can

first route Blucher and the Prussians and then turn on the Duke of Wellington and drive him back to England.”

Napoleon walked over to a large wooden chair. His aide-de-camp walked over and sat next to him.

“Sir, I feel this is the final hour of our campaign here in Belgium. Either we will be defeated and return to Paris, or we will defeat the British and Prussian coalition and recapture what we lost last year.”

Napoleon looked at him with tired eyes. “We must win. I cannot allow the Prussian King and Duke Wellington to ever set foot in Paris again. The humiliating defeat last year and the final defeat at Montmartre will never be suffered again by the people of France.”

Napoleon walked to the door and reached into his coat pocket for a note he had written to himself, a note for his journal. It had rained the day before and he was waiting for two events to occur before assaulting the village of Ligny and the main army of the Prussians.

He read:

Ligny – June 16, 1815 – must wait for the fields to dry from yesterday’s rain and wait for word of Ney’s engagement with Wellington at Quatre Bras.

Grouchy is in position on my right with Vandamme and Gerard on my direct left. I am moving the three corps (including the Imperial Guard) and Milhaud’s IV Cavalry Corps in a direct line to Ligny.

Three generals walked into the windmill at Brye. Blucher looked up from his table to see his three

commanders:

General Ziethen of the First Prussian Corps.

General Pirch who commanded the Second Corps.

General Thielmann of the Third Corps.

Blucher shook hands with the three Generals and motioned them to his table.

Thielmann was the first to speak. “We have a very thin line between us and Grouchy. If we are going to hold our flank, we will need more soldiers.”

Blucher looked up at the door. The sound of galloping horses could be heard.

“I believe your answer has just arrived,” he smiled as the galloping stopped and footsteps approached.

Everyone turned to the door to see the Duke of Wellington, arrive with his aide-de-camp.

“What is your situation?” Blucher asked.

“I believe Ney will attack today. He is still moving his cannons into position on this muddy terrain. We are ready. How is your position?”

“Let me introduce General Thielmann, commander of the Third Corps facing Grouchy on our left flank, General Zieten of the First Corps, and General Pirch of the Second Corps. Generals Zieten and Pirch are facing Ligny and we believe will be doing battle with Napoleon directly.”

Blucher looked at Thielmann.

“Sir,” Thielmann said, turning to Wellington. “We have men all across this ridge supported with cannon. It is a very thin line and if we are to hold, we will need more soldiers.”

Wellington looked at the map. “What about Bulow’s fourth Corps?”

“Bulow won’t be here in time,” Blucher answered.

Wellington eyed Blucher with concern. “I can send you one corps of British and Dutch combined soldiers. The only other possibility is if Ney is routed and we can free up more support. May I speak with you, Field Marshal?”

The two men walked to the door.

At the door, Wellington turned to Blucher. “Sir, we are at the apex of this battle. Why is Bulow not here?” Wellington spoke softly, not wanting to offend this most important commander on the battlefield.

Blucher shook his head. “Bulow is not moving his corps fast enough. We have to go with the current Order of Battle.”

Wellington allowed a long pause before speaking. “General Ney is experienced and I am sure Napoleon is doing everything to keep our armies separate. We need to combine our forces so our superior numbers can defeat the French.”

“If Ney succeeds, we need to find a way to join our forces.”

“He’ll attack today, I am sure,” Wellington said somberly. “Can you succeed in Ligny if Bulow doesn’t arrive?”

“Only if we have one of your corps to support Thielmann.”

“And if you don’t?”

Blucher paused at this question. “If you can’t break loose from Ney

and we don't receive support, then we need to retreat to safety until we can join you."

Wellington thought about this last strategy statement. He had not been successful in past engagements with Ney and the outcome of the next battle was tenuous.

"There is a low ridge south of the village of Waterloo," he said, "north of my position. I can disengage from Ney and follow the road north. From your position, you should be able to move your army north to Wavre and then take the road west through a village called Plancenoit and be on the flank of La Belle Alliance."

"We will make our decision tonight," Blucher said with the authority of a field marshal.

Wellington nodded his head and yelled for his aide. "Good luck Field Marshal," he said with an outstretched hand.

The two men shook hands and Wellington mounted his horse. "Victory or disengage," he said, as he turned his horse and rode in the direction of Quatre Bras.

Blucher stood by the door and thought about the general who was missing from this campaign. General Bulow was a war hero, fighting Napoleon in Napoleon's first campaign in Prussia and was highly praised by the king for his command. He was honored with the title of Commander-in-Chief of Prussia and headquartered in Königsberg, East Prussia. He had to endure a long journey with his corps to meet up with Blucher in

Belgium.

"Sir," Blucher's aide asked, "do you want to send another message to Bulow?"

Blucher shook his head and for a brief moment allowed his age of seventy-two years to show.



"Execute
your attack,
General,"

he shouted,

as he rode past

the general

and waved to

the Regimental

band to

strike up

the



fighting music ...

Two riders approached the windmill at Fleurus and dismounted quickly as Napoleon appeared at the door.

"Sir, your messages have been

delivered to Generals Ney and Grouchy."

"They understand to begin the attack at 1430?"

"Yes Sir."

Napoleon walked to the side of the windmill and looked through his telescope to survey the village of Ligny and Grouchy's army on his right. "This will not be another Leipzig. My Prussian Prince and I will not be returning to my small Kingdom of Elba. It is my destiny to rule France and the entire continent again."

"Bring my horse," he shouted.

At 1430 hours on June 16 in the year 1815, the sound of cannon fire from Quatre Bras could be heard and Napoleon knew that Ney had started his attack.

Napoleon's cannons in the center of the battle began to fire on Saint Amand and Ligny as Grouchy and Ney began their attacks.

Napoleon looked through his telescope and said softly, "You have us outnumbered but we have you outmanned—the superior French soldiers. I beat you once Blucher and I will do it again."

Vandamme was moving his corps in position to attack the village of Saint Amand.

On the north side of the village, the third Prussian Brigade was reinforcing the Prussians who occupied the village that was now burning from the French cannon.

Napoleon raised his right arm to signal the cannons to cease fire and again looked through his telescope.

Vandamme's forces began to enter the village and the battle raged as Prussian and French

soldiers fought facing each other in the fire and smoke from the burning buildings. Wave after wave of soldiers entered the village and casualties grew in number. The main point of the battle remained the middle of the village, with neither side giving quarter.

Napoleon shouted at one of the many aides awaiting his next order. "Release the Eighth Battalion."

With that command, one of the aides spurred his horse in the direction of Saint Amand and Vandamme. He rode quickly to Vandamme's position and when he reached the French general, he reined in his horse and shouted, "Napoleon said to release the Eighth Battalion."

Vandamme spurred his horse and rode to General Lefol, commander of the Eighth Battalion who was waiting for his order.

"Execute your attack, General," he shouted, as he rode past the general and waved to the Regimental band to strike up the fighting music that would energize the soldiers. The band started to play "La Marche de la Garde" and the soldiers began their march to Saint Amand in step with the music.

The French troops were fresh and their uniforms, blue trousers with white upper coats, made for an impressive display on the battlefield.

The battalion quickly began moving through the village with their superior number and the Prussians began to retreat to the north.

Blucher was standing by the

windmill with his telescope and saw the retreat. "Steinmetz," he shouted.

The general looked up from his telescope. "Yes, Field Marshal."

"Order your first Brigade to take back Saint Amand."

Prince Wilhelm and Martin were on their horses just inside a stand of trees with telescope pointed at Saint Amand, watching the battle progress.

Napoleon
paced

his horse

slowly back

and forth.

"What are they

waiting for?"

"Steinmetz is pushing his brigade to the center of the village," Wilhelm exclaimed.

"The French are retreating to Fleurus," Martin shouted with excitement.

Martin was watching the battle through his own telescope. The smoke from the cannon and gunpowder was thick, yet he could see the soldiers on both sides falling. His stomach quivered as he watched the men fall and in some cases the enemy followed up with a bayonet

stab into the fallen soldier. He felt an odd pride when a French soldier fell and revulsion when a Prussian fell. Another sensation was dominating and he tried to keep it in check in the background of his emotions—fear.

Napoleon could see this through his telescope and shouted at the battlefield, even though only his aides nearby would be able to hear him. "Regroup Vandamme, regroup and attack. If you are going to do battle in Ligny, you must take St. Amand first."

He lifted his glasses again, in time to see Vandamme riding through his army and giving orders. The battle for Ligny had already begun. Napoleon motioned for his aides to join him and he began to race in the direction of Ligny so he could get a better view of the battle. He arrived on a small hill and lifted his glasses.

The Prussian cannon seemed to be perfectly sited on the village and the French forces were falling and withdrawing.

"Move up the cannon," Napoleon shouted at one of his aides.

The aide rode swiftly to the position of the artillery commander and relayed the order.

Napoleon paced his horse slowly back and forth. "What are they waiting for?" He shouted at no one and turned his glasses to Saint Amand. Vandamme's army was moving swiftly to retake the village and the Prussians were falling back. ■

3

3rd Place ~ Novel

Unpublished

BY THOMAS J. ZURICH

Davi-Khan

NICK KRAIT (A.K.A. THOMAS J. ZURICH) is an ornery, spiteful, lonesome bastard without the common sense of a lemming. Afforded the opportunity for extensive international travel early in his professional career, he somehow avoided insights of any depth, developing instead a wholly unwarranted superiority complex. A pathological liar from the earliest age, he rashly assumed himself possessed of all that is really needed to become a writer of fiction. He has since channeled his resentment and frustration into what is often regarded as the grammatically inept whining of a tom-cat on anti-freeze.

HE WAS BORN TO THE lowland swamps—the fetid lowland swamps. The mosquito infested marshlands west and a little north of Bharot-Nipur were often regarded, by those British naturalists stout enough—and perhaps just mad enough—to endure them, as a place only for outcasts of his kind. These inland lowlands offered little in comparison to the varied and prodigious game to be had in the lush mangrove jungles much farther south, or the dense forests along the foothills of the Himalaya, away off north. Here there seemed only disease, parasites, insects, snakes, fowl porcines and oversized rodents.

But he had been fashioned of better stock. His father had stepped down from those revered mountain forests of the north country. An enduring injury inflicted by an older, more cunning sultan of the northern reaches had forced him to relinquish the land to which he had laid claim, and set him wandering south. Only here, it seems, in these miserable swamps could he reclaim his former station.

His mother too could boast noble blood. Her mother—third daughter to an aging Mistress around highland forests much farther east of his father’s birthright—had been driven out while she was yet very young. It was only because of her youth that others of her kind were able to keep driving her until at last she found refuge in the fetid swampland.

Those of the mountain forests are typically larger than others of their kind. They must be. The prey upon which they depend is larger—and heavier. Antelope of those mountain forests include the Tibetan ‘blue bull’ and takin, whereas deer count among their number the barasingha and hangul, the largest among which can weigh in at around seven hundred pounds, and have massive thigh and hip musculature for bounding up the steep highland grades. Even the wild goats and sheep of that region, such as the makhor, thar, or argali are gargantuan, and can tip the scales at nearly four hundred pounds. And then there are seladang and Tibetan wild yak, non-domesticated oxen that can weigh over a ton. Those

that subsist largely on modest deer and antelope, such as the chital or jinka of the southern and central plains, would indeed be hard-pressed to manage a meal if ever they showed the poor sense to venture north.

In addition to being larger, those reigning among the highland forests must also be stronger, bolder, more tenacious, and possessed of greater stamina than others like them throughout the vast southern stretches of Britain's India Colony. Perhaps because of such necessities, one presumes to observe something of a noble bearing in their gait. They would be more confident in any case, but there seems as well an air of pride about them. Like others which come to embody, for us, concepts such as independence or self-reliance, one often senses in them a fateful recklessness.

Yet while those descended from the highland bloodlines are typically larger than others of their kind, he was an exception even among them. From the earliest age, his mother was daily challenged to quiet the plaint from her son's voracious tummy. Her persistence did little to curb the lad's unprecedented growth.

All too soon, through those telltale traces wafting across the surface of stagnant water, his father had become aware of the formidable challenge looming just beyond, in the domain of that big, feisty gal. And while he expected that big girl would back her son when he moved to redress this threat to his sovereignty, the old mountain lord

was rather determined not to go the way of Laius. He therefore crept in when the doting mom was at her demanding chore and imparted to his offspring a lesson no creature so young should have to endure.

Most young lads of his like are not encouraged to leave home until their eighteenth month at the earliest. The pampered ones may be tolerated for two full years or more. But our young heir to loftier terrain had been set to wandering at the tender age of just nine months. That the occasion be suitably marked, dad had bestowed upon the youth a deep gouge down through his left eyebrow. The brutal scar it would leave was hardly to be the lad's most distinguishing feature, however.

Having been well attended to this point, the boy made it to the fringe of the marshlands before hunger made it well up the list of priorities. His pace had, naturally enough, been helped along by others of his kind whose paths he had crossed along the way. His father's parting ritual had left an enduring impression where such encounters are concerned.

Instinctively, he turned due north, answering the call of his highland ancestry. The cultivated rice fields of the lowland plains failed to impress our young prince. There was a smell about them any creature with experience of the marshlands knew to avoid. It was the smell of decomposing waste and it meant a long period of debilitating illness if you kept that scent in your nostrils for very long.

These lands he moved through quietly and by night. Game was

terrible. It was sparse at best and he had no experience taking it down. One night, within a mile of a human settlement, the young regal had come upon a pair of half-feral curs which had managed to bring down a chinkara. At the time, he had been hunting one of the dogs. Yes, it had come to that. The tiny gazelle therefore whet his interest as well as his appetite. How was such game encountered? How is it stilled quickly?

The youngster was aware of man, but had thus far shrunk from trying his luck. Man preferred moving about during daylight. They liked to keep company when they moved about as well. They made a great deal of noise. They did not appear to graze, in any conventional manner, and occupied their time with unfathomable industry, which served no apparent purpose in the acquisition of food and also made a great deal of noise.

He had observed man only from a distance. It seemed there were many different kinds banding together in their foul smelling settlements. Many appeared virtually hairless. Others sported coats of light color over their entire bodies. A few even bore coats of brilliant color. Most featured some variation of head-crown—fur or feathers, the young adventurer could not be certain. These too ranged from plain, as atop most of the furless ones, to spectacular, as those with the flowing coats of dazzling color often displayed.

Through their scent, their sounds

and signs of passing, there were a lot of them around too. And so very few like him. Seldom, since having bid adieu to the swamplands, had he been challenged. The few times he had, he merely retreated. What was there in risking one's ability to hunt—let alone energy for it—by standing up for a patch of ground you expect to be far from by first light? But the challenges from his peers were few enough as he eked his way through forest and across plain.

One night, again passing close to one of man's many settlements, he caught sound of what must have been a heavy animal, snorting and wheezing as though in some sort of distress. Sensing opportunity, the large yet clumsy youngster followed the sound to an old bull water buffalo, tied to a fence post through a ring in its nose. As the slack in the bull's tether would not allow it to reach the far end of its feed trough, its persistent tugging had it huffing and moaning with an anger and frustration.

For some time, the hungry yet apprehensive youngster watched the old bull. Realizing that its range of movement was somehow constrained, he at last moved in. As he approached, the old bull caught the scent of a much more serious menace, reacting with a loud series of bellows of a very different kind.

As the young hunter moved forward, the old bull backed to the full range of its rope and lowered its head to ready its wide horns. But the inexperienced youth had no plan to charge his quarry. He hadn't much of a plan at all. Locking

eyes with the old bull, he circled, just beyond the limit of the tether, around to the hind end. Very quickly he realized that, with the tether fully extended, his prey could not turn around to meet him. He therefore strode up and leapt—ungainly though it may have appeared—onto its back. The old bull kicked backward furiously, bucking and bellowing in a frantic attempt to dislodge him.



And so
the hunter
held fast
to his prize,
trying to
work out
just how to
still this
thing.



But the famished and determined youngster was only mildly shaken as he jumped back to the ground and bounded out of the old bull's range. Now he had a plan. He began circling back as if to meet this beast head-on, when the old bull came forward to stand him off. The spry lad crouched low. Straining at the tethered nose ring, the old bull countered by bringing its horns down. Now the eager lad stretched out an arm and slapped his quarry

on the forehead. The bull jerked its head but held back retaliation.

Again the hungry novice slapped at the head of his prey, this time much harder and with five wicked daggers rigidly extended. Now the wide horns sliced upward, calculated to meet an assault coming from overhead. But the backside of the old bull's neck was never his target. Darting forward, the intrepid lad shot under the old bull's head and locked onto its throat.

Though a clever tactic, effective execution relies on proper administration of the throat strike. Those massive upper fangs this youth could boast had struck low and thereby failed to punch their way through anything terribly vital. Yet while in no immediate danger of going down, neither was the old bull going anywhere else. At the limit of its tether, the bull could not move forward to trample its assailant, nor could it move backward with the weight of a respectably proportioned tiger suspended from the base of its neck.

And so the hunter held fast to his prize, trying to work out just how to still this thing. As he had thus far succeeded in muffling the anguished bellows of this beast, silencing it altogether might well be a matter of a minor adjustment to the current proceedings. Reasoning that, perhaps repositioning those formidable front teeth might do the trick, the big cat loosed his grip in an effort to gain a more lethal one. Of course, the instant those savage teeth were withdrawn, the old bull bucked to drive its front hooves into the novice predator. Before those

hooves slammed into the ground, the agile young tiger bolted clear but was seemingly no closer to sating his want than he had been at the beginning of the evening.

The no less determined youngster now began slowly circling the old bull once again. More cautiously—albeit, accompanied by a fearsome snorting—the old bull advanced to meet him. Without quite crossing within the stretch of its tether, the prospective carnivore rapidly feinted to one side then another. Expecting it was being charged, the old bull once more lowered its horns. Now the cat began moving sideways along the limit of the tether, growling in a low tone. Confused, the old bull again backed up to the far reach of the tether line, its head still held low in anticipation of the coming charge. With the old bull's head pulling the rope to its full extent, and its hind end out beyond the front, the tiger raced in. Before coming within striking distance of those horns, the young hunter veered to the side, then, after clearing the beast's head, cut sharply back in, again leaping atop the back of his quarry.

This time, the apt pupil raked four sets of claws into tough old shoulder muscles while crouching low along his prey's back. As before, the animal bucked and reared but, its strength failing, could not dislodge its assailant. Now the tiger recognized the outstretched neck of the wildly kicking bull as the only bit he might be able to lock onto and, driving his gaping maw far down onto it, lock on he did.

Frantic to throw off its tormentor, the old bull threw its full weight sideways into the fencepost to which it was bound. A dull cracking emanated from the base of that post, but it held. Another sideways slam and it snapped free. The fence slats fell away quickly enough as the old bull bolted out toward the rice fields, dragging the fence-post and with the young tiger along for the ride, hoping those dense and savagely twisting neck muscles didn't damage his precious fangs.

Not fifty yards beyond its pen, the old bull suddenly collapsed. The tiger fled its back before it crashed into the ground, but turned to see it rising. Having shed itself of the attacker, the old bull was again frantic to flee the scene. Turning and leaping over his fallen quarry, the agile youth then spun and, once more driving those wicked upper fangs far onto the beast's neck, clamped down into its throat. The big bull thrashed over the ground, whipping its head from side to side, but the expectant diner would not be swayed. In not very many minutes, it would thrash its last.

A mother tiger might bring her cub a live fawn or perhaps a small red panda to help teach it quick killing techniques. No ten-month-old tiger takes down a full-grown water buffalo on its own, however. This youngster was fast learning to use his remarkable size and weight, and was capable of the speed, agility and daring of a kid who will simply never understand that you just can't do that.

But this victory would not be savored. Even before the old bull

stopped kicking, its young assailant had become aware of a strange, growing clamor in the area. Man. There was a sharp, repetitive, metallic clanking sound coming from the direction over which the fouler smells emanated. The din was getting louder too. A line of lights had formed up over that way as well and those lights seemed to be slowly moving directly toward him.

As the racket grew more intense, the anxious youngster realized that there were a lot of them out there. Though predispositioned not to relinquish such a valuable and hard-won prize, the relentlessly advancing cacophony sufficiently spooked the unseasoned youngster into backing off. From a distance, he watched as the noisy crowd drew around to claim his kill, and his hunger felt very like so much anger.

Returning to his quest, the burgeoning predator cut the village a wide berth as he continued north. Dawn found him at the edge of the forestland he had been traversing. He therefore decided to turn around and find a spot to rest back in the forest, rather than venture into the cultivated fields stretching before him during daylight.

Before noon, the haggard juvenile was roused by noises seemingly coming his way. Man. Village elders, along with those who made their living in the forests, had looked over the tracks surrounding the dead water buffalo and concluded that a rather large—therefore 'old'—tiger had turned to penned livestock as it could no longer chase down wild

prey. Such an animal was apt to cast an eye toward man, eventually and was thus best hunted down before his crimes mounted. The group of four village hunters had with them one vintage, long barreled, .50 caliber, flintlock musket. In addition, the band was armed with two long bamboo cutters (bladed implements, something like a cross between a long meat cleaver and a sickle), an eight-foot-long wooden staff, a sturdy length of rope, and a copper pot and iron ladle with which to make a great deal of noise.

The cranky youngster just might have begun to regard people as something of an annoyance, but the nagging want in his belly rendered them ever so less likable. And now, he realized, he was caught between the open plains just beyond and the men coming up the same way he had. He moved off eastward, vaguely along the inside edge of the forest. He was in no great hurry. He merely sought to put their noise out of earshot.

In a very short while though, it would occur to him that the noise was keeping pace with him. These men were tracking him. He broke into a trot and continued eastward, veering only slightly south, back toward deeper forest. All the while, the volume of the noise made by these men seemed to increase. Now he began looking for a likely area to create a feint, double back around behind the men, and then head west.

Entering an area of low hills, he charged on until he came upon a narrow clearing. The tall grass here would hide his tracks much better than the soil of the forest

floor. Recognizing the advantage, he bounded forward along the base of a long, low hill, then swung ninety degrees and cut over its crest, heading back in the general direction from which he had come.

But the hunting party had split up in the section of forest where the hills began. To increase their chances of spotting signs of their quarry, two men would take the low ground



The young
predator bolted
forward off
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opponent,
then spun around
to meet
the remaining
challenger.



along one side of the rise while the remaining two took the opposite side. As the young tiger was moving back along the far side of the ridgeline he had come up therefore, he ran smack into two men from the last village he had crossed, each armed with a well sharpened bamboo cutter.

Seeing the tiger not far ahead

in the tall grass, the men froze—as did the nervous youngster. Then the men began shouting. Within seconds, their shouts were answered. More men. Had the two stupidly standing off the tiger simply bolted right and left when he charged, the anxious youth would likely have beat a path straight between them. Whether out of courage or fear though, they'd held their ground too long, winding up in much too near proximity to a frightened while frightening-in-stature young tiger.

The unusual weapons the men brandished shied him away from leaping. Instead, he grabbed turf with all fours to check his speed, then, still crouching low, stretched out an arm and raked his claws into the shin muscle of one of the men. The man went over backwards as the impetuous youth wrenched back his arm. Before that one even hit the ground, a sharp stabbing pain was felt as the other man drove the curved point of his bamboo cutter into the far end of the tiger's shoulder. Then the man ripped the cutter backwards – in much the same move which had just crippled his companion—rending a deep wound along the upper part of the tiger's arm.

Reflexively, the tiger shifted his weight backward and sprung off his hind legs, his front nailing his assailant in the shoulders. The man toppled over backward, the full weight of the youngster slamming down on his chest. But there were two adversaries here with which he must deal. That meant this one would have to be dispatched quickly. And quickly it would be since men

are nothing like water buffalo, as he now discovered.

The young predator bolted forward off the body of his fallen opponent, then spun around to meet the remaining challenger. Even with his injured leg, the man was much more inclined to run, but the tiger now stood between him and his escape route. While seeing no reason for which the man could not flee in the opposite direction, the big cat was reluctant to encourage him, entailing as it must his having to rush another of those bamboo cutters.

At length, the man backed toward the hill and took a few steps up its face. As the two watched each other, the man then attempted to slowly circumvent the tiger by crossing past along the hillside. As he drew level with the rival hunter, the tiger bolted at him and the man raced down the slope at a wide angle, then fled along the path he had come. He was given leave by an adversary every bit as anxious to depart the scene as he.

Now the young victor rethought doubling back. Seizing the fallen man by the shoulder, he then dragged the body southeast, into denser and uneven forest. He still had the rest of the day to spend around here, and his hunger was yet unabated. Unfortunately, this fare was nowhere near as savory as buffalo, and it was sparse enough, considering all the bone with which one had to contend.

A reprisal party would not be swift in coming. After losing their comrade, the remainder of the

hunting party withdrew. When the effort was again taken up the following day, another rifle and several more cooking pot beaters were added to the team. The first recipient of their justice was a grown female, soon determined too small to have been the killer of the water buffalo and the cane cutter. The next was an adult male, just barely large enough to satisfy the local's yearning for a return to tranquility. They were anxious to make do though.

And so, even as preparations for the expected celebration in the village were underway, the young wanderer was putting them farther behind. He would continue to shun man. Owing to his youth, that gash on his shoulder would heal quickly. In the days before it closed though, he was reminded often enough about the unusual weapons of man. All the more reason to avoid them.

Had he returned to finish the carcass, it might well have been he who took the musket rounds instead of that unfortunate other fellow. And yet, hungry though he may have been, that kill was hardly worth dallying around the area over. Throughout the journey, his drive northward was pursued with single-mindedness not uncommon among his kind. Certain there was somewhere out there better suited to him, he was eager to put behind him this land of dogs and goats and man.

He would take one more man before reaching the expansive highland forests. It wouldn't have been necessary had the man simply fled. He hadn't taken the man as food in any event. It was the

sheep he'd come for. Though not particularly filling when taken one at a time, three generally made for a fair repast. And they were easy enough to still. Surely the poor shepherd should have parted with them, that having been his only other option.

Yet his long trek through the vast interior of Britain's India Colony left him woefully prepared for these majestic highlands. Though suited to his appetite, the game he encountered here was too big and strong for the meager talents he had thus far acquired. But the ample, smaller game might provide for a period of development here. Then again, the big, tenacious males of his kind, which dominate these northern reaches, allow no such quarter.

His present size, at right around twelve months, was already well beyond any other from Afghanistan clear across to Burma. Still, he lacked the shrewdness for strategy, along with the musculature and lung capacity acquired from bounding these steep rock formations since infancy. So too did he lack that blind savagery with which these sultans maintained their rule.

And thus it was many months that he was driven from one claim through another. But perhaps that was just as well. The demands imposed by his present state of development could easily exhaust the small and moderately sized game available in any given area. Kept on the move though, he found ample opportunity to dine along the way. ■

1

1st Place ~Children's Literature

Published

BY SUSAN L. KRUGER
(with Reba Grandrud)

Addie Slaughter, The Girl Who Met Geronimo

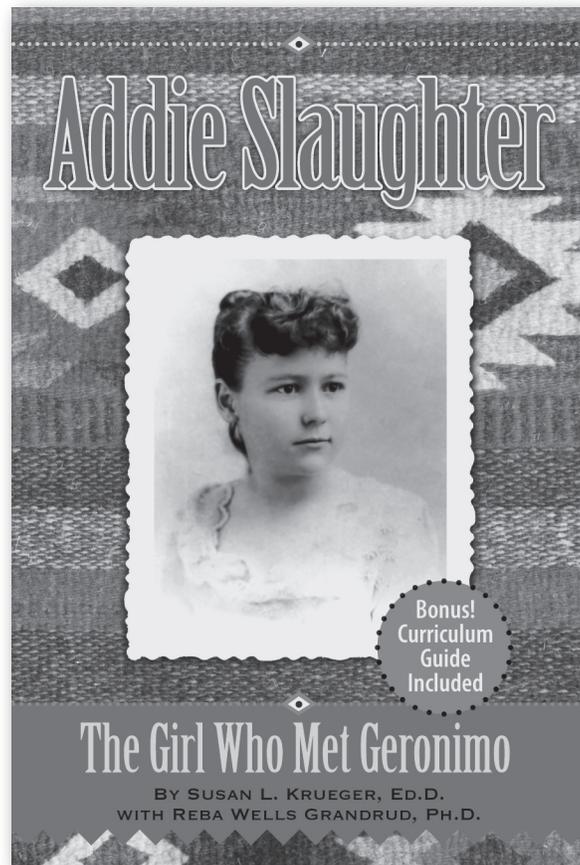


SUSAN L. KRUEGER

A Northern Arizona University graduate and Arizona-based teacher for 32 years, Susan L. Krueger, Ed.D., taught in Holbrook, Flagstaff and Phoenix and at Chapman University and Arizona State University West. After retirement, Krueger joined the Phoenix Art Museum docent program where she gives talks and writes research papers. After a visit to the Slaughter Ranch, she collaborated with Dr. Reba Wells Grandrud, the John H. Slaughter Ranch historian, and began writing *Addie Slaughter: The Girl Who Met Geronimo*, which was published by Five Star Publications. When she's not writing, quilting or gardening, Krueger enjoys travel.

FAMOUS SHERIFF JOHN Slaughter's young daughter, Addie, bravely travels from Texas to the Arizona-Mexico border, settling on the late-1800s Slaughter Ranch.

Along the way, her mother dies; she narrowly escapes a stagecoach robbery and murder; an earthquake destroys the ranch; her father's earlobe is shot off; and she meets Geronimo.



2

2nd Place ~ *Children's Literature*

Published

BY CATHY HUFFMAN

The Legend of Painted Horse and the Western Wind



Inspired by Native American lore, the author created *The Legend of Painted Pony and the Western Wind*. Follow the boy and his pony into the mysterious Superstition Mountain's of

south-central Arizona where they race the wind and search for the mountain's secrets. Find hidden canyons and listen to the memories of The Old Ones in this southwestern tale.

CATHY HUFFMAN was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona, where she gained a love and respect for the unique beauty of the Southwest and the rich culture of Native Americans. She now lives in the Upstate of South Carolina where she and her husband have a small farm. They grow berries and produce and care for their goats, ponies, and horses. The beauty of the land is a constant joy and inspiration. It is her love of horses and stories that move the heart that inspired the legend of *Painted Pony and the Western Wind*.

3

3rd Place ~Children's Literature

Published

BY NANCY SANDERSON

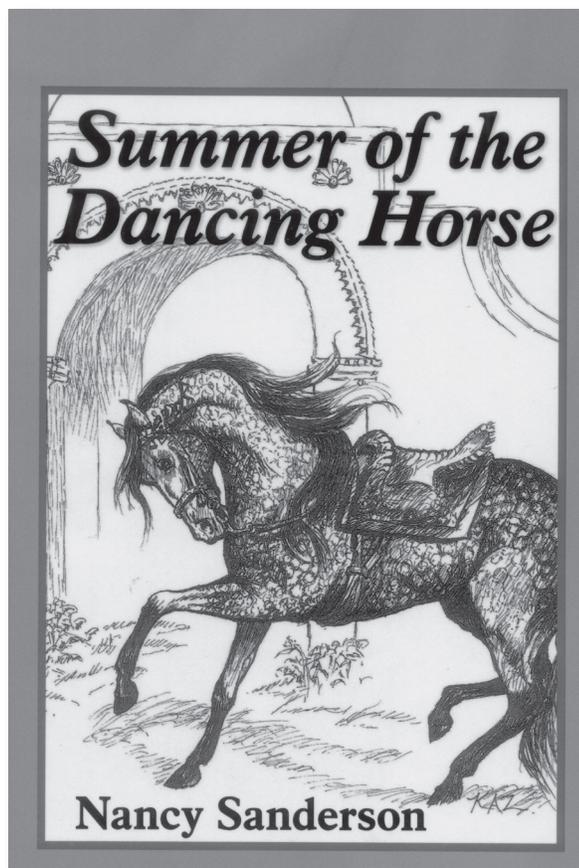
Summer of the Dancing Horse



Once again, award-winning author, Nancy Sanderson, has written an intriguing story about her favorite subject, girls and their horses. In *Summer of the Dancing Horse*, Sanderson brings together

the girls from her previous three books to help their new friend, Maria, rescue her horse. Readers will enjoy getting reacquainted with old friends and meeting new ones in this exciting story of horses, heartbreak and hope.

After retiring from the Riverside Press-Enterprise, **NANCY SANDERSON** decided to write books about her favorite subject, girls and their horses. *Summer of the Spanish Horse* was published in 2002, and *Summer of the Spotted Horse* was a finalist in the 2005 Arizona Author's Association Literary Contest. *Summer of the Painted Horse* is third in the series, and book four, *Summer of the Dancing Horse* has just been published. Sanderson lives in Yuma, Arizona, with Tom, her husband of 52 years; her Aunt Kelly; and an 18-year-old rescued toy poodle named Blackie.



1

1st Place ~Published Fiction

Published

BY BERNIE DUBOIS

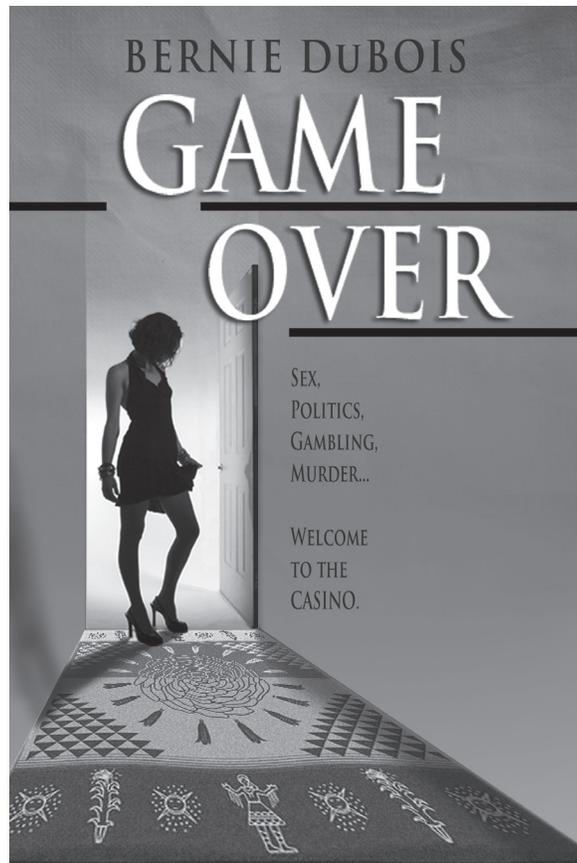
Game Over



A woman pitted against incredible odds, yet struggling to overcome her problem and take care of her children. A Native American

man needing to find his role in his tribe and the issues of tribal sovereignty. Both are intriguing, rich stories that collide in the modern-day casino.

BERNIE DUBOIS, has recently turned her energy and enthusiasm from college teaching to writing fiction. Dr. Dubois has also written an award winning children's series about her character Impatient Pamela, winning an American Library Association's Children's Choice Award, the National Parenting Center's Seal of Approval, as well as *Color, Color, Where Are You, Color*, which won the Writer's Notes Honors Award (now called Eric Hoffer Award). Her children's books, where she writes as Mary Koski, have been translated into five languages. She lives and works in the New York Mills, Minnesota area.



2

2nd Place ~Published Fiction

Published

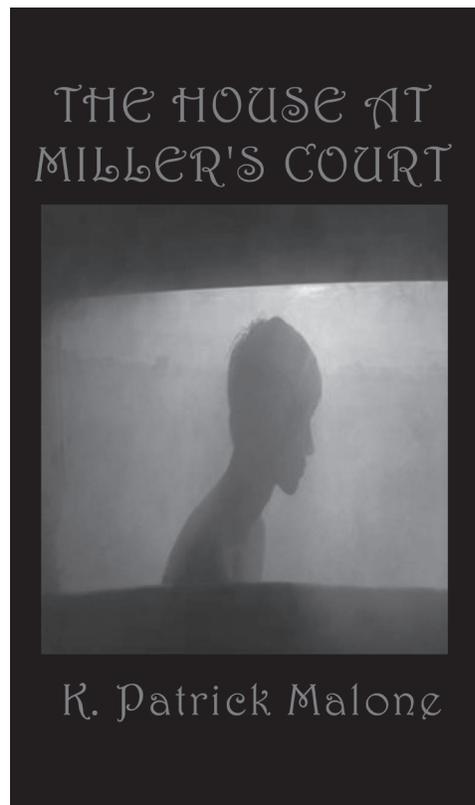
BY K.PATRICK MALONE

The House at Miller's Court

K. PATRICK MALONE is an accomplished writer and author of four multi-award winning horror novels: *Inside A Haunted Mind*, *The Digger's Rest*, *An Unfinished House* and most recently, *The House at Miller's Court*. Malone specializes in chilling tales of the supernatural, with finely detailed characters that tug at your heart or grab you by the throat and make your skin crawl earning him what can be most accurately described as an almost cult like following among mainstream readers and horror aficionados alike with endings that keep readers hanging by the edge of their seats until the very last word.

Big, handsome, All American football coach George Lathero and his pretty new wife, Renee, try to revive their lives by moving into the Reconstruction era house, Miller's Court, with her fourteen year old son, Robin. All seems glorious for them until Renee calls George at work with ominous

words. "*George, Robin has a fever,*" sparking a journey of love and loss, guilt and shame as they are confronted by the ghosts within themselves. But why is Robin burning? Once again, Malone has created a haunting story with an ending that is nothing less than. . . incendiary. "*Don't cry, George. It's only thunder.*"



3

3rd Place ~Published Fiction

Published

BY RICO AUSTIN

My Bad Tequila



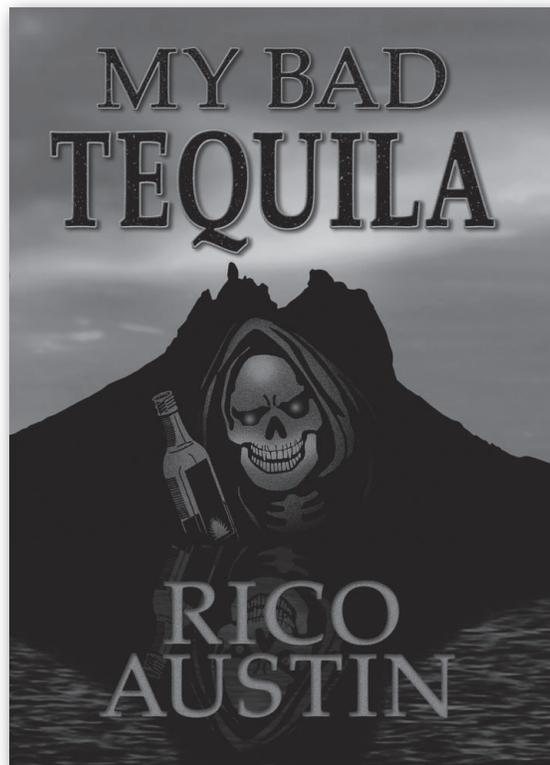
RICO AUSTIN, born and raised in Southwest Idaho, is the oldest of five boys. Rico's love of reading, exploring and traveling lured him to many parts of the globe including Lithuania where he taught English and Capitalism, the United Kingdom where he studied global business and played American football for the Staffordshire Stallions and Mexico to learn Spanish, dance with *Senoritas*, fish the open sea and drink tequila. Rico has undergraduate degrees from the Universities of Boise State (played for BSU Broncos), Grand Canyon, Staffordshire at Stoke-on-Trent and a Master's Degree from Thunderbird School of Global Management (T-Bird). He and his wife live in Scottsdale, Arizona and San Carlos, Mexico.

Mystery, mayhem, madness...margaritas & Mexico. "You'll see the true reflection of me when the Tequila bottle is empty," I shouted out to the sad, angry, bottle-shaped mirror to the sea.

I sat for a while and watched the fog slowly envelope the town, the surrounding mountains and everything else I could see minutes

before.

"What in the happened here last night?" I said trying to recollect the last thing I could recall. Searching, searching my memory bank, "Aw yes, it was coming back to me now; there was fog last night, real fog, I was drinking Tequila and was trying to wake Tina up, and, and....." my mind came to a sudden halt.





The Face Out of Time



New York native **ANN I. GOLDFARB** spent most of her life in education, first as a classroom teacher and later as a middle school principal and professional staff developer. Writing has always been an integral part of her world. Her freelance nonfiction can be found in trade magazines for Madavor Media and Jones Publications; but her real passion is writing mystery-suspense for young adult audiences. Time travel is the vehicle she has chosen to embrace. *The Face Out of Time* was her first venture into fiction, followed by her latest release, *Ripple Rider: An Anguillan Adventure in Time*.

Time doesn't always move forward. Sometimes it folds. And sometimes, people get stuck. On the morning of June 21, 1923, in a small city in upstate New York, high school senior Pearl Coveety walks across the street from her house to a city park and disappears, never to be heard from again. Fifty years later, on the same date, graduating senior Lee Capove leaves a class

party at the same park and vanishes for good. Can these possibly be the same girl? Present day sophomore, Liz, thinks so when she finds both pictures in old yearbooks. As she and her study partner Matt untangle the clues to these disappearances, they're faced with a startling discovery that puts their lives in peril and jeopardizes their friendship. Will they become the next victims of time?

1

1st Place ~ *Published Nonfiction*

Published

BY C.L. GILMORE

Of Roots, Shoes and Rhymes



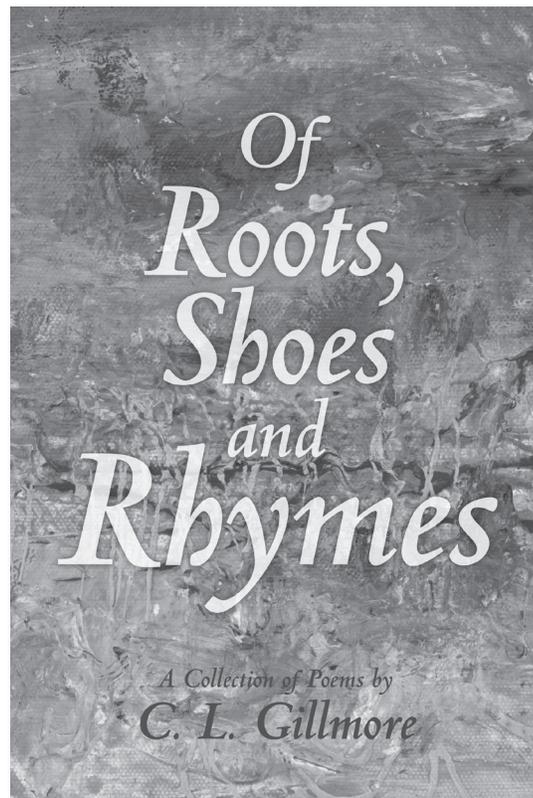
C.L. GILMORE was born in Muscatine, Iowa and resides in Surprise, Arizona. Married, with two adult children and five grandchildren, she recently retired after 25 years in education to devote time to writing novels and poetry. She and her husband share their home with Pitty Pat, a French Bulldog and Gracie Belle, an English Bulldog. As a Baby Boomer she finds inspiration for her writing in talking with and listening to the life stories of friends past and present. She believes each of us has a story or a poem yet to be written.

The 28 poems in this collection are from the heart of C. L. Gillmore. Some of you may know her as a teacher. To others she is a neighbor, a wife, mother, friend or colleague. Now, she's a poet and author.

Everyone has a different life journey, but few are able to capture the moments, memories and ideas

in words. Gillmore's poems cover her life experiences from pain in childhood through the true friendships of young adulthood, family care and maintenance to a career in service to the most special kinds of children.

As you read or listen to Gillmore's poetry, you may discover her truths exist also in your own soul.



2

2nd Place ~ *Published Nonfiction*

Published.....

BY DENNIS EUGENE RUSSELL



ARIZONA AUTHORS ASSOCIATION
WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE

Dennis Eugene Russell
on the
award winning entry

*The Portrayal of Social
Catastrophe*

3

3rd Place ~ *Published Nonfiction*

Published

BY JAN CLEERE

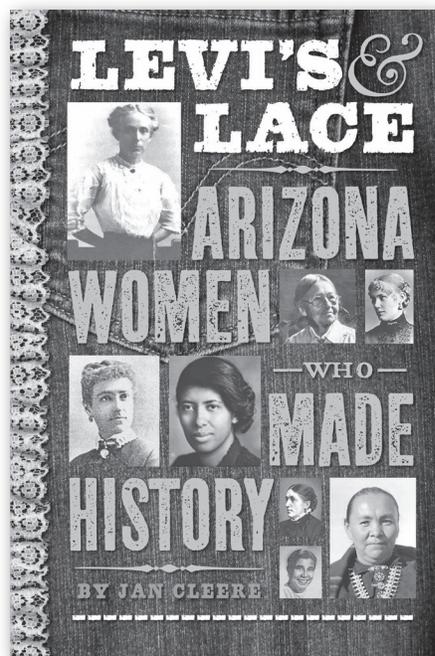
Levi's and Lace



JAN CLEERE has received national and regional awards for her historical manuscripts. She writes extensively about the desert southwest, particularly the people who first settled in Arizona Territory. Her books reflect her love of the west and her knowledge of western history. Her freelance work appears in national and regional publications. Jan serves on the Coordinating Council of the Arizona Women's Heritage Trail, an organization dedicated to linking women's history to historic sites throughout the state.

Award-winning author Jan Cleere brings her exceptional skills in research and writing to a new book about more than 35 heroic women of Arizona. Lozen fought beside her Apache people and healed them with a skilled hand. Saint Katharine Drexel gave her fortune to bring education and Christianity to the Navajos. Maria Urquides worked to create a bilingual teaching program, while Rebecca Dallis sought a quality education for her segregated

students. Mary Colter left her mark on the Grand Canyon and places throughout the Southwest with her architecture and designs. Lorna Lockwood paved the way for women to occupy the highest positions in law. From teachers and entrepreneurs to artists and healers, Cleere provides an informative text that highlights historical Hispanic, African American, Native American, and Anglo women who made their mark in the intriguing history of our state.

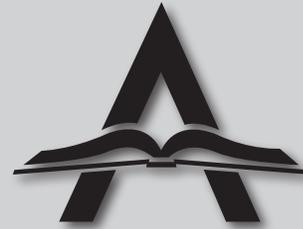


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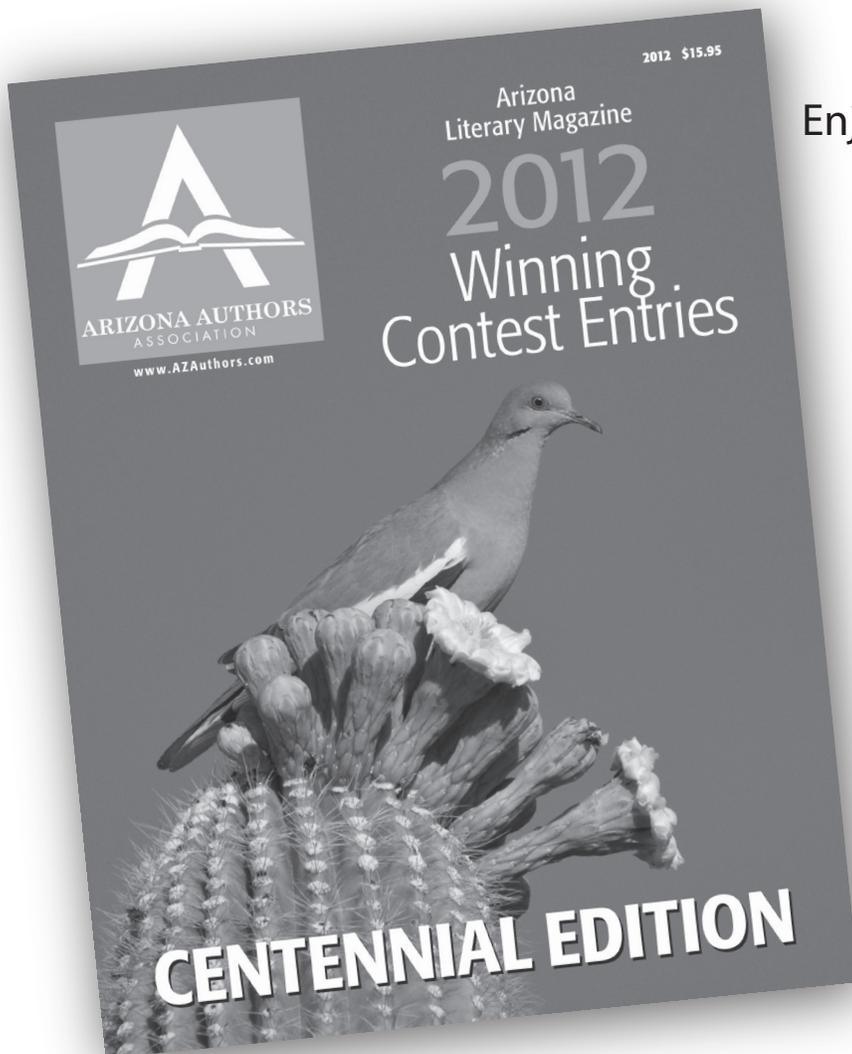
2012 Arizona Literary Contest Rules and Submission Guidelines:

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, 2012 and postmarked no later than July 1, 2012.
4. Unpublished categories: Three copies of each entry must be provided. No author name anywhere other than on the entry form for unpublished manuscripts.
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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.
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14. The 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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