



wisconsin
writers
association

Creative Wisconsin Magazine

Develop your craft. Discover resources. Expand your network. Build your audience.

September 2022

Calendar of Events

The Jade Ring Gala

September 22, 7 p.m.
Zoom

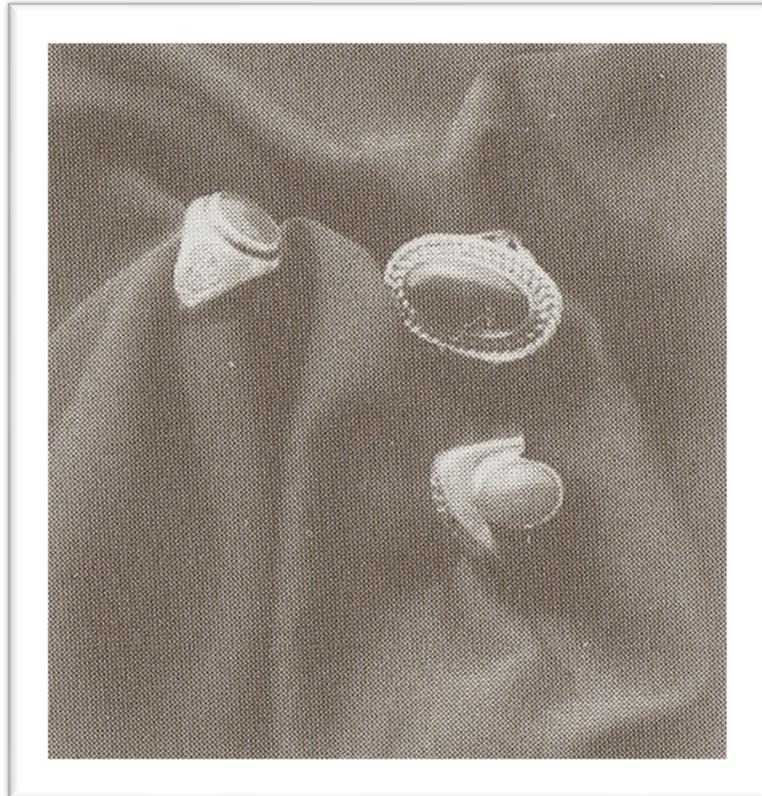
Register Now!

Sept 30 – Oct 2
**WWA Fall
Conference**

New this fall – coming
to a bookstore near you
Pop-up author visits!
Watch wiwrite.org
for details

**Open Mic
November 3**
Theme: Poetry
Stay tuned for
registration
information

www.wiwrite.org for
specific information
and registration details.



In this edition: The Jade Ring and Youth Writing Contest winners and placers!

News from our members and friends, our member spotlight on Joan Bauer, upcoming events, contest news, book reviews, Meet and Greet author Rod Vick, and your wonderful, thoughtful, hard work.

Founded in 1948, the Wisconsin Writers Association is a creative community dedicated to the support of writers and authors. WWA sponsors and hosts year-round workshops and events throughout Wisconsin, offering discounts and exclusive resources.

We aim to share experiences and knowledge while encouraging our members in their pursuit of this most noble art. Images in this edition are courtesy of WWA stock, Pixabay.com, stocksnap-894430, and Ryan Schaufler. Thank you.

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From the editor

I'm an historian by nature and university degree. I love to see how what came before influences and guides our current decisions. Next year, 2023, will



be Wisconsin Writers Association's 75th anniversary. As I'm going through the beautiful 50th anniversary book in preparation to add to our WWA Press release, *Windmill Man*, second edition, I came across an expanded WRWA creed. While the entire version is too long to reproduce here, these paragraphs speak particularly to our purpose with this edition of Creative Wisconsin Magazine.

"Man's deepest experience of life is essentially solitary; at the same time he desires to communicate to others his moments of intense feeling, his present experience, the rich memories of the past.... Let us believe in each other, remembering each has tasted bitter with sweet, sorrow with gladness, toil with rest. Let us believe in ourselves and our talents. Let us believe in the worth of the individual and seek to understand him—whether he be great or small, young or old, rash or deliberate, brilliant or plodding—for from sympathy and understanding will our writings grow.... Let our purpose be to encourage literary expression...."

"Encouraging" and "Believing" in ourselves and each other are powerful phrases, aren't they? As a former contest manager and editor of CW, several of the winners and placers in this year's Jade Ring contest are familiar. They're longtime WWA supporters and encouragers, and, most of all, believers in contributing to our common experience of literary expression. They continue to avail themselves of opportunities to grow their craft and help others no matter how often they win or place, or publish. My advice? Go and do likewise. But enjoy these works of art first.

From the president of WWA



So much going on around here. Top of the list is our bidding a grateful farewell to WWA's wonderfully capable Director of Operations for the last two years, Julia Nusbaum. She's about to begin work on her MFA at Columbia College in Chicago. Julia

has helped transform WWA and we will miss her can-do spirit and know-how. Words fail.

Lucky for us, we have Ken Humphrey arriving on the scene. Ken is the author of eight novels and has an MFA in graphic design. A long-time program manager for Abbott Laboratories, he too is wildly capable, versatile, and looking forward to helping WWA support the writers of Wisconsin. Welcome Ken, WWA's new Director of Operations. [See more on page 69.](#)

Okay, folks. This is it! Time to act. Although early-bird fees closed on September 1, you can, of course, still register to attend WWA's Fall Conference, **The Craft of Writing: Celebrating Northland Diversity and Nature** to be held **September 30 – October 1 at Barker's Island Inn and Conference Center in Superior**. Register [here](#) and discover all this great conference has to offer. Virtual attendance is also an alternative to experiencing this fabulous event in person. You won't regret signing on to gain the tips, tactics and tools shared by award-winning authors and outstanding literary trade professionals. Join us for the inspiring program in the equally inspiring Northland setting on the shore of Lake Superior. Enjoy the drive as you travel north during the peak of the fall color season. I want to see you there!

The **Jade Ring Writing Contest Awards Gala** (Zoom) will be on the evening of September 22, 7:30. Jade Ring winners (1st, 2nd, and 3rd place) as well as the Wisconsin Student Writing Contest first place winner will read their award-winning pieces and will bask in much honor and glory. As you know, first place winners of the Jade Ring will be awarded winter writing residencies at the *Shake Rag Alley Center for the Arts* of Mineral Point. Very cool. Tune in! And remember, formal wear, black tie is suggested – break out that fancy gown or tux! A glamorous night for Wisconsin writers!

Keep on writing, and keep in touch.

Barry

Plan ahead for these Conferences and check out ongoing events



Untitled Town
Features several author visits
in September
See the full schedule on
[Facebook](#)

[How to Finish a Novel with Samantha Chang](#), Thurs Sept 8



September 23-25 - **Central Wisconsin Book Festival**
<http://www.mcpl.us/cwbf>

September 30-October 1 **Wisconsin Writers Association Fall Conference**
<http://www.wiwrite.org> – See page 70

October 7-8 – **Sheboygan Children's Book Festival**
sheboyganchildrensbookfestival.org/



Sept. 15-17 -
Washington Island Lit Festival
Oct. 14-16 - Children's Literature Conference
<http://www.writeondoorcounty.org/events>

Shakerag Alley Center for the Arts

October 8 - Gathering Gold, a Poetry Workshop/
<http://www.shakeragalley.org>

October 13-16 – **Fox Cities Book Festival**
foxcitiesbookfestival.org/festival/2022-fox-cities-book-festival/ & **Wisconsin Book Festival, Madison**

October 20-25 – **Chippewa Valley Book Festival**
www.cvbookfest.org/

Drop-In Writing Sessions with Driftless Writing Center

www.driftlesswritingcenter.org/

Editor's Note: please send your news to submit@wiwrite.org by Feb 15 for the next edition of Creative Wisconsin

Meet Joan Bauer



Joan Bauer's work is forthcoming in *Amethyst Review*, and her unpublished novel *THE BICYCLE MESSENGER*, was longlisted for the 2022 Virginia Prize for Fiction sponsored by Aurora Metro Books. Joan holds a master's degree in English from Marquette University and has worked as a trust officer in a bank. In the course of raising three children, she has chaired fundraisers, served on boards, and volunteered frequently at church and school. She writes occasional book reviews for fellow WWA members.

How long have you been a member of WWA and what do you most appreciate about Wisconsin Writers Association?

I have been a member of WWA for more than three years. One of the things I've enjoyed most about being a member is reviewing other people's books. I've read some lovely things that I never would have encountered otherwise, and each book introduced me to a distinctive authorial voice. It's a real pleasure to craft a review that will help another writer promote their work. WWA is also a great place to learn about publishing opportunities and contests. I've entered some of these, and I was thrilled when my as-yet-unpublished novel **THE BICYCLE MESSENGER** was longlisted for a prize this year. Although I didn't advance beyond that point, I continue to query that book and am at work on another one.

What do you write?

I write literary novels and short stories, and my first publication is forthcoming this fall in *Amethyst Review*. I don't necessarily write about religion, but my Catholic faith definitely informs my work. Lately I have discovered some excellent literary publications with a decidedly spiritual bent, and I'm very interested in becoming part of that conversation.

Share a little bit about your writing process.

When I'm working on a novel, I keep at least three documents going: the text itself; a "scraps" file where I place deleted material that I might want to recover later; and a page of revision notes, where I jot down my agenda for the day's work and my concerns as to how it's going. I'm not good about outlining, but I do prepare a chapter-by-chapter summary to help me keep track of the plot.

I usually prefer to complete a full draft of a piece before I share it, but I know I can benefit from feedback earlier in my process. This June, I attended the Priory Writer's Retreat sponsored by the Chippewa Valley Writers Guild in Eau Claire, and I can't say enough good things about it! I had the opportunity to work with writer-in-residence Nickolas Butler on my novel-in-progress, and I met many other talented writers who generously offered their feedback. A few of us are planning to exchange pages on a regular basis going forward.

What would you like to see WWA do more or less of going forward?

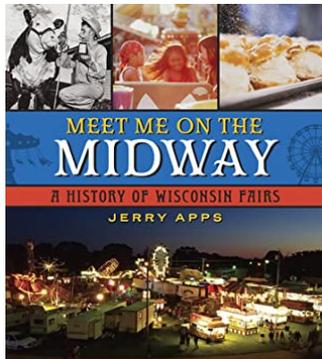
I love hearing about conferences and retreat opportunities. Keep them coming!

What advice do you have for aspiring and seasoned writers?

I try to work on my writing every day, even if I can only devote fifteen or twenty minutes. This keeps me in touch with the project and prepares me for the next opportunity to sit down and work. Often, the story continues to evolve in my mind while I'm busy doing something else! I've also started reading in the genre where I'd like to publish. This helps me imagine where my work would fit in at the bookstore or on the library shelf. But if I had one key piece of advice, it would be this: don't give up!

###

Book Shelf Reviews



Meet Me on the Midway: A History of Wisconsin Fairs

by [Jerry Apps](#)
Nonfiction, history, 264 pp
Published by Wisconsin Historical Society Press
Reviewer: [Victoria Lynn Smith](#)

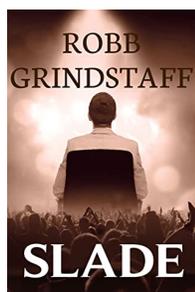
Meet Me on the Midway: A

History of Wisconsin Fairs by Jerry Apps presents an engaging and informative history of Wisconsin's state and county fairs. His book focuses on the stories of agricultural societies, county extension agents, fair organizers, judges, volunteers, exhibitors, workers, and 4-H and Future Farmers of America members. Because Apps never forgets that history is the story of people, he pulls readers into the fascinating behind-the-scenes world of state and county fairs. Readers will also appreciate the generous servings of photographs, which are as delectable as fair food and as eye catching as the midway.

Read the entire review [here](#).

Slade

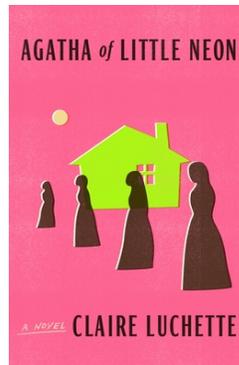
by [Robb Grindstaff](#)
Fiction, 234 pp, Evolved Publishing
Reviewer: [Michelle Caffrey](#)



A study of unintended consequences
This irreverent, clever, and uniquely crafted novel examines the life of protagonist Slade Bennington before and after a traumatic accident that catapults him to fame and fortune. Written as a series of interviews, Slade and other quirky characters close to him respond to the interviewer's questions with often conflicting perspectives. A modest man, Slade seeks only to understand the second chance he's given after a miraculous recovery and writes a book to share his rebirth's lessons. Millions grab hold of his story and make it their own, sometimes with disastrous results.
Read the entire review [here](#).

Agatha of Little Neon: A Novel

by Claire Luchette
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
August 3, 2021, 288 pp
Reviewer: Evelyn Ann Casey



In Claire Luchette's debut novel, Agatha comes into her own like a pot coming to a slow boil. The Catholic sisterhood seems a safe place for her to enjoy the camaraderie of other women, pass her days with spoiled students and recovering

addicts, and quietly hide from questions she dares not ask. But the simmering crisis of priestly abuse finally roils her into asking questions she's held back far too long—and finding answers that lead her back to her true self.

Agatha's community lives in a dilapidated house painted neon because the hardware store had leftover cans of the color to donate. She is the unassuming fourth to three religious sisters who crawl through their days almost like the parts of one insect—the head makes decisions while the midsection is busy about food. When Agatha's assignment to teach high school girls forces her to spread her wings, she is surprised to find she can fly. Yoda-like Mother Roberta, with chin hairs that often need trimming, offers Agatha cryptic words of wisdom.

Luchette's humor is subtly delicious, understated and never expected. The reader is well rewarded for turning the page.

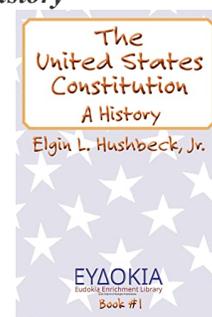
The United States Constitution: A History

by [Elgin Hushbeck](#)
Reviewed by [Kathleen \(K.M.\) Waldvogel](#)

Nonfiction, US history, 86 pp.
Published July 26th 2022 by Energion Publications

Hushbeck discusses why our Founding Fathers created this document and what the document outlines. Readers will find that the book is not intimidating but instead interesting and informative.

While a lot of the information was covered in my history and civics classes, I found the book to be an enjoyable refresher for me. The author pulled me in with quotes from the Founding Fathers.
Read the entire review [here](#).



The Jade Ring

Join us for the
Jade Ring Gala September 22 on Zoom
Black-tie suggested

*Special thank you to Kathleen Waldvogel and
Julia Nusbaum for managing the contest*

2022 Jade Ring Winners and Placers

Nonfiction

First Place – “Mormon Girl and the Styrofoam Harem” by Adrianna McCollum

Second Place – “A Message in a Cyber Bottle” by Robert (R J) Kinderman

Third Place – “Snow Over Grass” by Ann Zindler

Honorable Mention – “The Dummy Never Showed Up” by Victoria Lynn Smith

Honorable Mention – “Water Sprites” by Nancy Jesse

Honorable Mention – “Intricate Pattern” by Aleta Chossek

Fiction

First Place – “Notes to the New Facilitator of the Reminiscence Writing Group at Sunnyvale Retirement Community” by Nancy Jesse

Second Place – “Larmet Lunker” by Steve Fox

Third Place – “Chapter Three: An Avatar is Born” by Sherry Lee Feig

Honorable Mention – “Two’s a Crowd” by Silvia Acevedo

Honorable Mention – “Come Ye Wanderin’ Goats” by Ryan David Fleming

One Honorable Mention was withdrawn due to publication, congratulations to Hardy Griffin for “Elbistan”

Poetry

First Place – “Reflections of a Poet as a Young Girl 1969” by Yvette Viets Flaten

Second Place – “ALICE Drill by Sylvia Cavanaugh

Third Place – “Love” by Lynn Aprill

Honorable Mention – “Missing” by Sara Sarna

Honorable Mention – “Letter to My Mother in Winter” by R.B. Simon

Honorable Mention – “Marriage” by Lynne Shaner

NONFICTION

Thank you to our judges Sean Malone, author and editor, and Kaeley Dunteman, Art director and submissions reviewer, both from Orange Hat Publishing Ten 16 Press

The judges had this to say about the winning piece: “An arresting recollection of the unique environment of the author's upbringing, full of insight, commentary, and a peculiar wonder.”

First Place: Mormon Girl Hair and the Styrofoam Harem

Adrianna McCollum, Oregon

My father kept his wigs on Styrofoam heads and scattered them around the house in curious places. The one I hated most patrolled my bedroom door like a bodiless sentry. I knew she lurked, but my midnight pee runs always began and ended with flashes of home-invader terror. The dining-room head, with her chipped nose and blank eyes, terrorized my little sister, Mackenzie, each morning as she poked at her Cream of Wheat.

He arranged his wigs on the pocked white faces with little flourishes of the hand to get them just so. But the salt-and-pepper helmets invariably slid to one side and remained askew like freaky hair berets. And he never bought male styrene heads. Our house was a harem of silent foam women foundering under the weight of his hairpieces. They suffered but continued to offer him puckered lips.

My father’s imperiousness had driven away three wives (serial, not sister). By the time he was fifty-eight, the last one—my mother—fishtailed it out of icy Salt Lake City for the warmer climes of San Diego. She left a closet packed with dinner-party dresses and two young daughters. “I’ll come back to get you as soon as I can,” I wished she had said.

Left to parent on his own, my father's approach to full-time fatherhood was a wonky combination of novice caregiving and demands for excellence, with generous dabs of irrational anger. Despite our tender combined age of twelve, my sister and I learned to ride the swells and crashes of his moods and adapt to his shaky care.

"I don't like that," Mackenzie growled, as my father dragged his flat wig comb through her long hair. Except she pronounced the word *wike*. She couldn't mold the L sound with her soft four-year-old palate. She grasped the sink with pudgy hands while he conquered her tangles. My father set his jaw and swiped his tongue over a dash of errant stubble that looked like tape-dispenser teeth. When he finally smiled in triumph, Mackenzie walked her fingers to the pocket brush and smuggled the plastic disc into her dollhouse. She giggled the next day as he ransacked the house in search of his nubby comb.

On the first day of third grade later that year, my wild hair tendrilled down to the butt of my jazzy velour pants. My teacher secreted me to the echoey tile bathroom before class started. As she pulled away sections to unsnarl, she asked, "Don't you have a mother?" On the second day, she didn't ask again but pointed me back to the kids' lavatory that smelled like powdered soap and wet rotating-dispenser cloth. By the end of the week, the school secretary rotary dialed my father to discuss the matter.

After that my father outsourced the work to my adult half-sister, Liz. He ejected Mackenzie and me out of the house early each school morning so we could trudge to Liz's home for painful ministrations. She raked the metal bristles of her hairbrush so forcefully that our heads whiplashed backwards with each stroke. Mackenzie clung to the blue porcelain sink like the rim was a life-preserver and she would drown if she let go. As Liz

performed her morning duties, her short, permed hair bounced invitingly. I always counted the wayward straight hairs that had escaped her narrow perm rods.

Liz told me that when our father's hair had started to thin in his twenties, he began daily rituals of supplication in front of the mirror. Alternating between cursing and begging, he clutched his threadbare pate and ordered his hair to grow back. He yanked on what strands he had left to awaken the process of regrowth. "We think he was kicked in the head by a horse when he was a boy," she offered in explanation.

My father followed a strict bewigging protocol every morning. The first, and most important, step was selecting the lucky hairpiece. Not able to tell the difference between them, I assumed his choice had more to do with which Styrofoam head he favored that day. The yellowed one that stared uninterestedly at his collection of National Geographic magazines downstairs received the least amount of attention. The oldest, she lived out her days with a few others who didn't make the cut to live upstairs in the light. Sometimes he seemed to wake up knowing which wig to wear; other times he had to visit a head or two before deciding.

Once he positioned himself in front of the gold-framed bathroom mirror, he pulled out his giant wheel of tape and carefully snipped four longish pieces. He lined the adhesive strips along the sink edge vertically like four pillars that would hold his ego up all day. Then he cradled his hair helmet (which looked like a giant half coconut shell when I squinted my eyes) and pressed in the strips of double-sided tape. For the penultimate step he rubbed a terrycloth hand towel over his shiny head, making three full rotations. Then, finally, he placed the wig on his head, setting the hairpiece down like a dome on a temple.

By the time I was born, my father had not only been excommunicated from the Mormon

church for adultery with my mom, but—what was worse for him—he was completely bald. Handsome, intelligent, and charismatic, he had lived a Don Juan youth, surrounding himself with pretty ladies. Now approaching sixty and completely smooth-headed, his fair-featured Styrofoam collection wasn't just wig stands but proxies for the real thing. And the sacramental care of his hairpieces had replaced his youthful incantations and pleas.

Unable to halt the aging process by flagellating himself in front of mirrors, he transferred his magical thinking to health food. Performing a near-holy duty, the kitchen head guarded the foodstuffs of his peculiar eating habits. The cupboards contained his fountain-of-youth supplies: jars of wheat germ, cod-liver oil, apple-cider vinegar, bee pollen, and aloe vera juice. The drawers were strewn with produce bags filled with mysterious bulk grains and powders. Iced oatmeal cookies were his guilty pleasure, but they could only be consumed stale. He'd rip open the package, place the crinkly plastic tray in the oven for safekeeping, and start eating the frosted discs only when they had hardened to his liking. I figured the act was a calculated sacrifice: less flavor meant healthier. There wasn't a kid-friendly item anywhere. Candy and chocolates were verboten, so Mackenzie and I had to get our fix elsewhere.

We were five and nine, respectively, when we had a sleepover one night at Liz's house. There we got to partake in all the fun kid snacks we were denied at our father's. We never wasted any time. Mackenzie loved Hubba Bubba and fell asleep with a pink wad tucked inside her cheek. During the night, the gum slipped out of her mouth and glued itself to her dark-brown mane. She was terrified our father would find out. "Chewing gum will give you crow's feet," he had told her, inexplicably concerned about pediatric wrinkles. She chopped off the offending hair, hid the

evidence under Liz's bunk bed, and explained what had happened. "A robber broke in and stole it," she told him.

At some point that summer my unruly mop became too much for my father, so the problem was answered with scissors. I watched my locks tumble to the dirty floor like so much trash. That fall during the first week of school, the principal visited my classroom where I sat in the front. We were to file out for an assembly and he instructed me, "You can move your row now, son." I swiveled my head around to figure out who he was talking to. That night I bawled into the mirror for hours and resolved to wear skirts every day until I looked like a girl again.

My father loved taking Mackenzie and me out in our Gunne Sax Kids dresses to show us off. Now sixty-two years old, he acted as though his young children subtracted thirty years from his visible age. He bought us expensive clothing, forced us to perch like dolls in church, and dragged us on semi-annual pilgrimages to collect his bespoke wigs. At the end of the day he would say, "Come along, daughters," and the aperture would snap shut on his idealized image of our family.

By the time I was in sixth grade three years later, my hair had not only grown back but also appeared in shocking new areas of my body. After clocking the growth of my pubic hair with alarm, I snuck my father's haircutting shears into my bedroom and cut as close to my skin as possible. The next day Mackenzie spotted the bristly black wad in the trash can and asked me what it was. "Barbie hair," I told her.

Then one day when I was eleven—without warning—my sister was taken from me. For whatever reason, she was collected by my mother. I spent the next year fantasizing about my own exodus. I imagined myself on a jumbo jet with my hair flowing behind me, as if the airplane were pumped full of genuine California breeze. I didn't really know my mother, but I liked that she had an outdoor

pool I could swim in during winter. And she had Mackenzie.

I got my summons to join them a year later. I moved in with her and my sister after my seventh-grade classes broke for the holidays. I wasn't told why and the mid-year change made the move feel sudden. But that didn't matter. The moment I saw Mackenzie in the terminal in San Diego, I hugged her tight, buried my nose in her strawberry-scented hair, and didn't let go for a long time.

Back in Salt Lake City, my father had his wigs and his styrene replacement wives and even a new real wife. He probably carried on his rituals exactly as before, but with significantly less wig-product shrinkage. He would peer into the mirror, don a hairpiece, and get to the business of fending off Age for another day.

Second Place: A Message in a Cyber Bottle

Robert (R J) Kinderman, Trego

December 1944. U.S. forces fought fierce battles to reclaim islands invaded by the Japanese. To boot, on December 18, Typhoon Cobra struck, ravaging the Pacific Fleet commanded by Admiral "Bull" Halsey. At times the brutality of nature exceeded the brutality of men. Halsey lost three ships—the USS Hull, Monaghan, and Spence—and 793 sailors. My father, Machinist Mate 1st Class R. R. K. (MM1C RRK), was a survivor of the USS Hull.

Dad spoke little of his war experiences, and I knew only parts of his ordeal. That changed on October 5, 2021, when an email addressed "To Whom It May Concern" landed in my inbox. Like a message in a bottle, it contained a letter my father wrote to his fellow shipmate, J. J. Anselmo, more than seventy-six years ago. J. J.'s daughter, Chris, found the letter while going

through her father's war memorabilia and realized this was the same sailor whose story of surviving the attack on Pearl Harbor had been on the front page of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

Just as a bottle floats across the ocean, this message cyber-drifted on waves of seven decades to land on my shore. It filled in details of the Hull's demise and my father's survival.

With details Dad had shared with me and others, and information from the letter he penned in his own hand, Dad's story of epic survival during those fateful days, December 18–21, 1944, finally becomes clear. Using the format of Dad's letter to J. J., I hope this helps him tell it.

Hello J. J.,

It's time to answer your letter. I'll try to tell you what happened out there, but some is hard to put into words. I hope you get meaning from it.

December 16, we were headed west attempting to fuel the fleet. Ships were low on fuel, and with the building storm we would need the weight of full tanks to battle through towering seas and vicious winds. Three hundred miles off Luzon in the Philippines, we made multiple attempts at refueling but it was impossible as fuel lines were torn away. The destroyers failed to receive the lifeblood that would enable us to remain underway and afloat in the heavy seas.

The 17th and 18th, I couldn't stay in my rack at night. As conditions deteriorated, it was impossible to move fore or aft aboard the Hull. When my mattress and I were thrown on the starboard deck, for perhaps the tenth time, I decided to get dressed and head to the engine compartments early, certain they would need help. I had the 4-to-8 watch in the morning, with no sleep and no chow. As I dressed, the whaleboat was torn away and slammed into the aft deckhouse in a loud crack. I thought

about my lifejacket hanging in the engine room. My shipmate, Parrott, watched me, wondering what was going on. I told him I had been trapped belowdecks when the USS Oklahoma was torpedoed and capsized at Pearl Harbor. I didn't plan to have that happen again.

Almost everyone followed me up. The washroom heads and after-gun shelters had at least 50 to 60 men in them. The storm was hitting us hard and heavy. Few had life jackets. All the topside weather doors were dogged down, but the bulkheads were giving away and soon the starboard door tore off. I caught my first sight of seas that looked to be 100 feet high, and I knew right then we wouldn't make it. When we did sink, we had one chance in a hundred to survive. And that was with a lifejacket on.

I was plenty frightened but tried not to show it as I was the senior man, and it wouldn't do the others any good if they looked to me for direction. The last word we got from topside was, "All hands put on life jackets."

Shrieking winds and mountainous waves made communication impossible. Bracing ourselves in the cramped compartment, we endured vicious rolls of 70 degrees. Each roll flooded the compartment over our heads, and several more of us were dragged out and washed overboard as water rushed out. Our fear was intense as we could only stare at each other underwater, praying we would again right ourselves. I was pulled out once, but Parrott dragged me back in. The water tore my shoes off that time.

I found my first life jacket. It was outside, hung up on the lifeline and Y guns. No one wanted to get it, but I knew it was my only chance to survive. Parrott and I realized that ten more jackets were out there, and we were able to retrieve them; however, although Parrott had saved my life when he pulled me back in, he now lost his overboard as we attempted to help our shipmates.

I never thought the Hull could take such a beating. When the open hatch door was horizontal, I knew it was time to abandon ship.

I wasn't about to leave the Hull until I knew she was down for good. If you saw the seas, you would know why. I didn't think we would last ten minutes. When she was finally laid on her side, three of us held ourselves down underwater by hanging on to the dogs of the washroom door. If we didn't, our life jackets would float us up under the rest of the crew trying to escape through the port door and portholes on the heads.

The courage of all the men was incredible. They held up strong, even those who could not swim.

When she went over for good, it was every man for himself. The three of us went out starboard, as the portside escape looked too jammed up. Holding our breath, we waited until the compartment was full of water and we knew the Hull wasn't coming back up. Pushing clear of the door, I swam under the starboard side of the ship, but my life jacket became snagged. My two shipmates swam past me. I was starved for air. In a last-ditch effort, I braced my feet against the bulkhead and tore myself free but losing my life jacket as well.

With no life jacket and no air, I tried to surface but instead slammed my head three times. Opening my eyes, I realized I was under gun three and swam aft, finally breaking the surface.

Words can't describe this hell. Gasping for air, I got a mouthful of wind-whipped salt spray. Cupping my hands in front of my mouth, I was able to draw a breath. Wind screamed and waves crashed down on me. With the Hull now on her side and half underwater, she disappeared beneath the surface, fighting all the way, propellers still proudly turning. She was gone for good when her forward and aft boilers exploded from the cold water hitting them. She had been home the past four years,

protecting us from almost continuous frontline action in our fight against the Japanese.

Alone, without a life jacket, I was tossed like a toy driven deep below the surface, barely able to catch a breath. I was in for the longest, hardest fight of my life.

The only men I saw were in life jackets. Dead. They had drowned or been beaten to death against the ship's side. I was slammed into a dead shipmate wearing two life jackets. With no chance of removing a jacket in the ocean's swell, I had to entwine myself into his jackets. I spent the next five hours embracing my dead shipmate, grasping his body tightly. When the seas began to settle, I removed a jacket and secured it to myself. As the storm battered me, I thanked the sailor who, even in his death, gave me life as we parted and went our separate ways.

Just before dark something hit me in the back—a float net that I had seen my friend Cowboy cut loose from above the engine compartment when the Hull went over. I twisted myself into it, swearing it would never get away from me. Within the next hour, six of us—Ellis, Phillips, Young, Martin, Webster, and me—clung to that net for dear life. Later in the morning another Martin drifted into us, making a total of seven men.

Adrift in the Pacific Ocean during wartime with no food or water and no means for rescue, our survival chances looked slim. Within 24 hours men began hallucinating from having ingested salt water. All were injured or bleeding. I had lost my front teeth and had numerous minor wounds. One of the Martins became delirious and began swimming away from us, saying he would get us food and water. We were helpless to stop him, and he had only gone a short distance when sharks took him.

As the sun blistered down on us, I had to wonder what would get us first: absence of water to drink, sharks that now encircled us, or perhaps a Japanese ship we knew would take

no prisoners.

One shark with a notch on his fin continued to swim closer to me. As he disappeared in front of me, I ducked under the surface and kicked him in the snout, causing him to move off. The worst time was the dead of night, when we could not see in front of us, yet we knew the sharks were circling, waiting to attack. The second night, Phillips, next to me, screamed in an explosion of water and blood as sharks attacked, taking one of his legs. We held him as he slowly lost his life and the blood in the water drove the sharks into a frenzy. With his last words, he asked me to “tell my parents what happened and that I did my duty.” More about this I cannot say, but shortly after this he died, and we had to let him go. The next day we lost Ellis to the sharks as well.

We were all in bad shape after three days and four nights with no food or water. On December 21, I saw a ship on the horizon. Miraculously, the USS Keller spotted our heads above water. With us unable to help ourselves, our brave brothers on the Keller fired rifles at the sharks around us and dove overboard to attach a line to our net and bring us onto the deck.

So much more took place—but it is too much. Four of us survived: Martin, Webster, Young, and me. We were four days aboard the Keller, fifteen recovering on the Solace (a hospital ship), ten on the receiving ship, and a couple more back to stateside.

For the second time of this war, I lost hundreds of my shipmates, many with whom I shared that close bond that brings men together in combat. For the second time I lost my home: the battleship Oklahoma on December 7, 1941, at Pearl Harbor, and now the destroyer Hull to Typhoon Cobra. For me, the war is over, and I have made it back home. But I still think about the hundreds of my shipmates who will never come home. We have all “done our duty.”

I am glad to hear you are back in the States and I hope to hell you can stay there. I don't give a damn if I never see the ocean again.

Your pal,
Oshkosh

Third Place: Snow Over Grass

Ann Zindler, Waukesha

Snow in April is spirit crushing, each delicate flake landing like an anvil on the heart. A morale buster ruining the anticipation of spring. And it doesn't compute; a season not cooperating with the calendar. We know tulips should be blooming, but the oppressive snow is not allowing it.

Coping with Wisconsin seasons requires an inner strength. Thankfully, I'm a strong person. And I've focused rather seriously on informed ways to stay strong. Bacon rarely slips past my lips. My tongue hasn't swirled in heavy cream or felt the crunchy batter of something deep-fried in a decade. Further, I've had stress management knocked. When I've returned home from a day of teaching, I've pounded out a near daily two- to-three-mile jog until the knot in my throat loosens and my lungs expand with deep gulps of fresh air. At fifty-three years of age, I've been pleased with my health picture. I've done all any doctor could ask, and I know it.

In February of 2021, a paisley recliner in creams and blues was deposited on my sidewalk by a delivery service. My husband, daughter, and I gathered around it. We did a one, two, three lift. As I thrust the chair upward, I felt a hammering—a rapid, intense pounding—in my chest. Tears welled in my eyes. We placed the chair where we wanted it, and I immediately sat in it and rubbed my

chest. A tiny seed of fear planted in my belly, but I didn't let it bloom. It didn't compute. After all, it wasn't logical that there could be a concern about my heart. There was no heart disease in my family and my recent cholesterol check revealed a one hundred eighty-two total. I had data; I had knowledge. It was unlikely.

In March, I noted that I was winded when I climbed a small set of marble stairs at work; the same historic set of stairs that I'd taken for years, backpack over my shoulders, lunch bag and purse over my arm. I knew that women over fifty lose muscle strength at an alarming rate, so I added hand weights to my run. A logical solution.

A few weeks later, I called in sick to work. I sat at my dining room table barely able to type out my sub plans. I'm just so tired was the only excuse I had. Thinking practically, I went to an urgent care and had a COVID test, knowing I'd had a recent exposure. The test was negative; I headed back to work.

On a clear day in May, where blue sky and a sorely needed sun cast a golden glow, I told my students that my white and gray face mask was bothering my breathing and would they mind if we took a quick lap around the block? They responded with jubilation. They skipped down the marble stairs and burst out into the sunshine, me at their heels. I chatted with two girls about their friendships as we walked past the Taco John's where they'd jokingly asked for potato olés. We walked past decrepit homes by the railroad tracks that have stood since World War I. I was outside and alone with my students, and no part of me was concerned. About half way around, I started to feel better. Soon we re-entered the school and took the stairs back up to the classroom.

After school, I had an unsettling conversation with an assistant principal regarding a miscommunication. Short, shallow breathing ensued, and my heart started to pound. I wondered if I needed a doctor. No, I

decided. I just needed one of my lung clearing runs. I drove home. I jogged a mile, then told my husband to go coach his soccer game. Within fifteen minutes, my daughter gently insisted on taking me to the emergency room.

Here, knowledge played its biggest trick. Medical professionals were looking at a woman in running clothes, 114 pounds, no ankle swelling, an EKG that passed a first look. And I stated, "I think I'm having a panic attack." I'd never had one before, but that seemed more comprehensible even as pain rose up under my left arm. Diagnosis took time because I didn't add up.

By 8 p.m. I was placing a nitroglycerin tablet under my tongue, and my brave girl was calling her dad and screaming for help as I fainted. More tests were run, the ER doctor was stern with a cardiologist on the phone, and by 10:30 p.m., I was on my way to the catheterization lab. By 11:30 p.m., a stent was placed to repair a ninety-nine percent blockage in my left artery.

I was called an outlier. A fluke. "And that's not a good thing," a cardiologist said. "Medicine favors those who fit the protocols." Theories were all they had for me, no hard facts. Maybe a birth defect in the artery, a ridge of some sort, was catching plaque.

I was no longer strong or knowledgeable; I was fragile and confused.

I was lucky. That much was clear. I left the hospital a few days later under my own steam. A simple bandage over my right wrist was the only outward symbol that anything had happened. In my hands I clutched a red folder emblazoned with the words "Cardiac Rehabilitation."

"You'll crush it," everyone said. "You'll bounce right back." An expectation fueled by cognition.

The first day at rehab was a blur. My husband drove me there, and, as he took the

left up the hill toward the hospital, all I could think of was the last time I had taken that turn. As we entered the lot adjacent to the emergency room, I jumped at the jarring siren of an ambulance.

I was taken through an orientation process by a kind nurse who recognized my quivering chin, the tears lurking just below the surface. How was this my life? I'd run three miles through a prairie just days ago. A thundering reality that my life had changed consumed me. She guided me through the memory device for learning how to put on my heart monitor, which required careful placement of electrodes: Red electrode on left lower rib, or red by the heart. Green electrode on the right lower rib accompanied by white electrode above it near the collarbone, or snow over grass. Once the nurse had me walking on the treadmill, I tried to get my bearings, lifted my chin, and looked around. It was busy. Ten or so men on bikes or treadmills or lifting hand weights. Two women, both on bikes. One man seemed further in his treatment. He'd crank up the treadmill and run for a minute, then he'd slow it back down to a walk. In my estimation, there were two of us under 60, two under 70. More in their eighties. With alarm, I realized that these were my peers now, my people.

A new identity. Snow in April.

A heart attack is nothing if not humbling. I was faithful to the rehabilitation process and through consistent attendance, I started to know a few people. Gentlemen well my senior said, "Young lady, what are you doing here?"

"Same as you," I replied, giving my bravest smile.

A story exchange ensued. One man, Mike, explained that my heart attack is called the widowmaker. He shook his head, looked at me with sad eyes. As awful as that term sounded, I heard stories that included flight for life and reconstruction of arteries. Each told me I'd be okay, better than okay, even. Mike also

reminded me that I shouldn't see my heart attack as the beginning of the end. Of course he knew what I was thinking—I was on a downhill slide. I had heart disease. I was now carrying a card that explained my stent. Another that identified five medications.

I spiraled into an intense white coat syndrome; rollicked in panic attacks. I was sinking. And I was ashamed.

I found rehab upsetting. Each time I got on the treadmill and put one foot in front of the other, I looked at my peers doing the same. These people were the definition of fragile...these people were my future. I averted my eyes and worried that my ever-increasing blood pressure had something to do with my emotional sponge nature, absorbing all that goes on around me until I'm bloated with stress. Mike's ankles were swollen—a telltale sign of congestive heart failure. He stopped walking frequently due to angina. He'd catch his breath and start up again. A man named Paul wore oxygen equipment as he battled both pulmonary and heart disease. Several patients tested their sugar levels upon arrival. Incidentally, one woman's house burned down shortly after she'd gotten out of the hospital. And I was the one in tears?

No longer trusting my own mind, I listened to everyone. I began therapy and was diagnosed with PTSD. I was slow to embrace medication, but eventually settled into a low dose of anxiety and blood pressure medications. I took up yoga and learned the importance of breathing in a way to manage my own physiological reactions. Anything to move past it. The nurses and exercise scientists at rehab—the real healers—gave soothing words of advice, used data—or hid data—to reassure me, even gave hugs as they taught me to trust myself again.

My therapist asked me to take a minute to forgive my body for betraying me despite all I had done for it. That's when I really wept. She

walked me through a concept called radical acceptance, encouraged me not to waste so much of my moments of living asking why and how; instead to accept what is. It was a hard sell. Every part of me wanted to know why, exactly, so I knew the enemy I needed to fight. I had to accept that I never would. I stuck with the therapy.

Summer passed, and after a lot of hard work, my mind started to shift. As I approached the allotted thirty-six rehab visits, it struck me that I was now afraid to leave the company of my new peer group. They were the only people who knew what I was feeling. I noticed their laughter, their inside jokes with the nurses. I heard about their dogs, the machines they fixed, their world travels and their grandchildren. These people weren't fragile; they were fierce. Multiple issues were threatening them, and they just kept going. Their stories weren't ending. They were living. With heart disease.

I live by a powerful river, and I've seen that river come to a sludgy trickle with a few dry months. Similarly, the evergreens we love in Wisconsin for their hardy year-round color can turn a yellow-brown despite "ever" being in the name. Likewise, my body, which I thought to be strong, hid a weakness within. And still, one hard rain can get the water to flow, the roots to reawaken. These people who I thought fragile modeled strength; invented their own rainstorm.

Now it's April again, and the snow still falls. I've long completed my time at cardiac rehab and am approaching the one-year anniversary of my heart attack. As I watch it snow, I'm reminded of a part of the memory device used to put on the heart monitor—white snow over green grass. Outside the dormant grass has become green despite the cold weather, and I have let go of old knowledge, am accepting a new identity. I understand a different kind of knowledge—less sure and more evolving.

Instead of confusion, I feel peace and a wisdom that comes with radical acceptance of what is. I know that strong things can buckle without warning, but I take comfort in how fragile and small-seeming steps can turn the tide of despair. I take comfort from the fact that, in spring, even snow can make the grass turn green.

Honorable Mention: The Dummy Never Showed Up

Victoria Lynn Smith, Superior

Charlie broke my heart in 1971. Dressed in a top hat and tuxedo and well-groomed with manicured nails and combed hair, he was debonair even if his monocle made him look a bit stuffy. Always ready with a smart comeback, a smooth put-down, or a drop of wisdom, he was witty, candid, and self-assured. Charlie was a dummy, but I wanted him anyway.

The big problem—he was unavailable. Like all desirable men, he was taken. Women everywhere had lined up to have a chance with him. Seems like everyone wanted a wise-cracking fella who was perpetually dressed for the opera.

My mother broke the news to me. “Honey, I have to talk to you about your Christmas list.” I was twelve, so we had long ago stopped calling it “my letter to Santa.”

“I’ve looked everywhere.” Her voice shrunk as she spoke. “I can’t find a Charlie McCarthy doll.” She asked me to think of something else to add to my list. I did, but I don’t recall what it was. I could’ve asked for a hand puppet, but that would’ve been like having to settle for Eddie Haskell after hoping to date Donny Osmond. There was no substitute for Charlie.

I wanted to be a ventriloquist. I was going to be famous. I was going to be a star. And I couldn’t do it without Charlie. My daydream about becoming a celebrated ventriloquist was another chapter in my *someday-I’ll-be-a-famous-singer-actor-or-dancer* book of fantasies. I spent hours singing with Doris Day, Petula Clark, Dionne Warwick, and Barbara Streisand, pretending to be them. Sometimes I sang along with Johnny Cash, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., or Trini Lopez, pretending they had recognized me—a famous singer—in the audience and called me up on stage to sing with them. The exuberant audience, unable to contain their cheers and thunderous clapping, would rise to their feet moments before we had finished our duet.

Sometimes, I’d lie on the floral velour couch in the living room, the most elegant space in our farmhouse, and imagine myself a great actor giving spellbinding performances on stage or film. Or I would be Cyd Charisse, dancing, defying Newton’s laws of motion, giving men whiplash. When I wasn’t doing my famous talent stuff, I would travel to exotic places, win awards, and marry a leading man or a velvet-voiced crooner.

With Charlie I would’ve been more than a ventriloquist—I would’ve been funny! The see-saw, back-and-forth humorous banter between Charlie and Edgar Bergen captivated me. Bergen said things that came out of Charlie’s mouth. Through Charlie, Bergen insulted people and everyone laughed at Charlie. Through Charlie, Bergen flirted with women and everyone thought Charlie was adorable. Charlie sassed Edgar, his elder, and never got whapped alongside the head. My twelve-year-old mind found this setup very attractive. But reflecting on it now, I don’t think my mother would’ve whapped Charlie alongside his head.

After I learned Charlie wouldn’t be helping me on my way to ventriloquism fame, I crawled in the closet under the stairs. I sat with a box of

hats, mittens, and scarves. I inhaled a mixture of musty wool and dust while tears rained down my cheeks. Charlie would never sit with me on the floral velour couch. I wouldn't toss my voice into his throat. I wouldn't watch our reflections in the mirrored wall as we practiced talking to each other. We might have sung along with Sinatra or Streisand, the three of us making harmony.

I was crushed. I was heartbroken. I was an overly dramatic twelve-year-old. Oscar worthy, no doubt.

I'd like to say that I pined for Charlie and that Christmas Day was hollow without him and that I asked for him for my birthday in March. But I did none of that. I was over him before Christmas. I don't remember what I got instead of Charlie, but it was the next best thing, and I'm sure I was happy with it. I ate my mom's good cooking. I played board games with my sisters and cousins. And I read my new Nancy Drew mystery before I drifted off to sleep that night.

If Charlie hadn't stood me up, truth is, I would've dumped him. Within a month or so, he would've been tucked away in my closet, along with my fantasies of winning an Oscar or a Grammy. I hope all the Charlies found better homes.

I never became a famous singer, dancer, or actor. I can't carry a tune. I have no sense of rhythm. And in seventh grade, I learned I had terrible stage fright.

Funny, when I was twelve, I never imagined myself as a famous writer. I started writing after I retired, so I'm too old for silly fantasies now. But if I were twelve, I would win a Pulitzer Prize, I would make Oprah's reading list every other year, and the New Yorker would call me and beg for one of my short stories.

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Honorable Mention: Water Sprites

Nancy Jesse, Madison

The name Svacina first appeared in recorded Bohemian history on December 31, 1458. King Jirí z Podêbrad granted twelve men from the population of free farmers in the Bohemian Forest, the westernmost part of the kingdom, the privilege of protecting the border from incursions of German-speaking people during the Hussite Wars. A man named Svacina was listed among the chosen twelve. In exchange for their border patrol, they were given unrestricted movement in the Bohemian Forest, access to the forest's resources, and the right to own large dogs.

These are my people. The Svacinas are the ancestors bequeathed to me by my father's mother, Anna Svacina Jesse, the woman I am named after.

The fifteenth century, so far in the distant past, is almost impossible to imagine, yet events at that time continue to reverberate today. In Bohemia, Czechs ushered in the Protestant Reformation with the Hussite movement. Jan Hus, a teacher at Charles University in Prague, was burned at the stake in 1415 for preaching radical concepts the Church would grapple with for centuries, some of which still remain unsettled. Hus and his followers, called Hussites, believed Christians taking Holy Communion should drink the wine as well as consume the bread, that clergy should not possess worldly goods nor wield secular power, and that mortal sins among the clergy must be punished. He also believed the lowliest peasant woman should be able to read the Bible for herself in her own language. Pope Pius II, in the middle of the 15th century, is reported to have admitted that Hussite women knew the scriptures better than Italian bishops and that, on the whole, "this wicked people" had one good quality—fondness for learning.

In the end, Catholic German-speaking

people overpowered and suppressed the Hussites. But Czechs had introduced Europe to the ideas of an individual's freedom of thought, and Hussites represented a movement that breached the ideological and political control of the Catholic Church. For a time, Czech ideas, Czech language, and the Czech nation took its place on the world stage with the great powers of Europe. Jirí z Poděbrad, the king who appointed the Svacina border guards, was a second-generation Hussite steeped in their ideals. The Hussite revolution, though, threatened to tear his nation apart—nearly a third of his people were killed in the ensuing conflict. Poděbrad's desire for peace and order led him to seek reconciliation between Hussites and Catholics subjects. He understood that good fences make good neighbors, unlike his successors, who encouraged German settlement of Czech land, leading to centuries of conflict between the two peoples.

The Svacinas, too, encouraged reconciliation with the Germans: every other name on our family tree is Germanic—Anna Hoffman, Wolfgang Rank, Mary Schlogel. In the fifteenth century, despite being tasked with protecting the border, the Svacinas intermingled with German speakers. And although the ancestral Svacinas served a Hussite King, my family would return to Catholicism, which became the state religion, the only religion Bohemians were allowed to openly practice, after the Hapsburgs gained control in the seventeenth century.

Poděbrad's Royal Grant reveals that the Svacinas were not serfs, but free farmers in the wooded hilly area that formed the border with Bavaria. Other Czechs called people in this region, chods, which means "walkers" or "patrollers" or "rangers." The area has been known as Chodsko for centuries. Like other Chods, the Svacinas would have spoken with a distinctive dialect, which may indicate they were originally an ethnic group recruited by

the King of Bohemia from the Carpathian Mountains to the east. Their musical instrument of choice, the bagpipe, inspired many folk songs and dances. Not far away, in Pilsen, brewers created pilsner lager beer, drunk from glass containers, both Bohemian specialties. Entertainment and beer: the two would go on to play an important role in my great-great-grandfather's life in Wisconsin as well.

By the late eighteenth century, our family inhabited a Bohemian city called Domažlice. They had not remained farmers but were upwardly mobile. Kylian Svacina worked as a judge. Four sons were born to him and his first wife, Margarete Krumlova: Martin, Matej, Vaclav, and Jan. Jan was my great-great-grandfather, the youngest son, born circa 1825. When Kylian's first wife died, he married another Maragrette (different spelling). By the time Jan was twenty-six, he had six more siblings, nine in total.

Why would Jan, the son of a judge, pack up and move to the wilderness of Wisconsin, trading in a middle-class life in Domažlice for a return to peasantry in the new world? What powerful impulse compelled him to emigrate? And what did he know of the new world? And why, of all places, did he choose Wisconsin?

Taming the frontier required backbreaking, unrelenting labor and heroic tenacity. The novelist Hamlin Garland, born in the Coulee region of southwestern Wisconsin in 1860, has written that he could not recall any days on his family farm that demanded less than twelve hours of labor. By the age of seven, he was hauling and splitting firewood, shelling corn, driving cows to pasture, and harvesting hay. As an adult, after nearly freezing to death one winter on his homestead in South Dakota, he wisely sold his claim and turned to writing about his frontier experiences, earning a Pulitzer Prize with *A Daughter of the Middle Border* in 1922. Other nineteenth century

settlers, John Muir, growing up near Portage, and John Wesley Powell, homesteading in Walworth County, told similar stories.

So why would a middle-class European choose this life in frontier America? Ignorance, I suspect; Jan didn't know what he was getting into. What he would have known was life as the fourth son in a large family in a part of Bohemia notorious for its poverty. Chod families often pooled their money to send their children to America. The State of Wisconsin maintained an Immigration Commissioner whose duties consisted of advertising extensively in the foreign language press, especially in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, so many immigrants landed there. One pamphlet sold Wisconsin as a land where all men are free and equal. Because of absolute religious freedom, no religious qualification was necessary to vote or hold office. Land could be purchased for \$1.25 an acre. Cities such as Milwaukee, Kenosha, and Manitowoc, would be household names in Bohemia. No mention was made of the long and harsh winters. Nor the fact that most of the bargain-basement land was in heavily forested areas. Or, perhaps worse, land that had been clear-cut and burnt, full of huge stumps, many rocks and sandy soil. Still, Jan would have heard that America was a land of opportunity, that he would be free there, no longer a pawn in the power games of the Habsburgs. This new place had enough land to feed his family; he would have known others who had gone before him, who appeared to be "making it."

Jan would have also known that a life in Bohemia could be hard. Even the fairy tales originating in Bohemia were tough. Karel Jaromir Erben published a poetical work of Czech folklore in 1853, a cycle of thirteen ballads called a *Kytice*, one of which is based on a water sprite. This sprite is not a sanitized Little Mermaid of Disney cartoons, nor the elemental spirit of English fairy tales. The

Czech water sprite is portrayed as a dirty old man, hairy and slimy and carnal, who kidnaps humans, imprisoning them in watery depths where the sun never shines. One sprite rapes a maiden who has been drawn to a lake by strange nefarious forces her mother has warned her against. When the young woman begs to visit her mother, the sprite resists, keeping with him their infant son.

When the wife fails to return, the sprite tracks her down. He knocks three times at the mother-in-law's door. He cajoles his wife to come back to him, using his limited charm. Then he threatens them. From inside, Mother and Grandmother hear the inconsolable wailing of the child. Then all became too quiet. They hear a thump. From under the door a trickle of blood appears. When they open the door, they see two things in a pool of blood: a child's head without a body and a child's body without a head.

This motif—the high price humans pay for disobeying malevolent forces—Dvorak explored in his opera *Rusalka*. The title character, the daughter of a water sprite, defies her father's wishes to earn the love of a human prince. To attempt this, she must sacrifice her power of speech. Too soon, too easily, she loses her astonishingly unfaithful lover. By the end of the opera, she turns into a demon, preying on human souls.

In escaping to America, Jan would leave behind a place inundated by the threat of evil—both the dark supernatural forces embedded in the folklore as well as the human forces of catastrophic unrest and oppression that haunted the Old World. When the twentieth-century machines of war rumbled through Europe, Jan's ancestors would be safe on their farms and in small towns in America. The same cannot be said for the Svacinas who stayed at home, one of whom almost starved to death in a Nazi forces labor camp in Budapest. At the end of the war, this cousin, Josef Svacina,

walked hundreds of miles back to his home in western Bohemia. When he arrived, his mother did not recognize him. And she asked him to burn his clothes before she let him inside.

But life in the New World, as we know, could also be a struggle. Jan Svacina would never become fluent in English; he had to rely on his sons to help run the Kewaunee House saloon and boarding house in Manitowoc. His experience with Hapsburg institutions in Bohemia led him to a deep suspicion of institutions in America. Instead of using a bank, he entrusted his profits and savings to a jeweler and friend who spoke Czech.

And in the fall of 1901, this man betrayed Jan, stealing his wealth. Jan allegedly threatened this personal “banker” with a gun. Somehow the man had enough clout to have Jan committed to Northern Mental Hospital, where he remained until his death fifteen years later. There he would suffer, according to records, “delusions of poisoning.”

Jan would die bankrupt, deranged, and broken. I imagine he must have re-lived many times, in his cell of a room, the moment when he realized his friend’s betrayal. How painful that epiphany must have been when he understood his considerable loss.

I would not learn about this man until the 1990s, thanks to the genealogical research of a cousin, who calls Jan’s move to America, “brilliant and providential.” I, too, am deeply grateful for the courage, strength, and foresight Jan showed in moving his family to the new world. Jan Svacina suffered for his descendants, especially because of his inability to learn English. Like Rusalka, he sacrificed the power of speech to an unfaithful man. He sacrificed his soul to some demonic force, manifested in his madness. He’d left Bohemia—but not escaped some mythic, mysterious curse. He’d left—but had not escaped Bohemia after all. Lake Michigan turned out to harbor its own water sprites. ##

Honorable Mention: Intricate Pattern

Aleta L. Chossek, Milwaukee

I smooth the lavender fabric and stand back to admire our table. A plant with periwinkle blossoms picks up the delicate stitched pattern on the tablecloth. Winter has been long and dark, so I have chosen a pastel cloth to lighten the table for the small group that will gather on Easter Sunday. Because Olga Yevgushchenko, a Ukrainian student, gave me this cloth nearly 30 years ago, I think it’s fitting to use this year, 2022. My thoughts go to the Ukrainian grandmothers who will not set an Easter or Passover table because they have fled their homes. Images of mothers and teenagers shepherding young children with their warm jackets, stuffed animals and a single suitcase, bring back memories of Olga.

Nearly thirty years ago, a friend asked us if we could provide housing for a fifteen-year-old piano prodigy who was going from an exchange program in Racine to study with a particular piano teacher at UWM, the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Because she was underage, the terms of her student visa required her to stay with responsible adults, but she also needed to be within range of UWM’s campus transportation system. As recent empty nesters, we fit all the criteria. Our friend introduced us to Olga’s Racine sponsors, Cathy and Scott Olson, who assured us that they would be responsible should any trouble occur.

Olga was fluent in English and had spent six months going to school and studying piano in Racine. So young to be living in a different country without her parents, she brought with her many of the social adjustment problems of a teen whose talent or intellect gallops ahead of her social maturity.

Now, when I see teen girls speaking for their whole families fleeing Ukraine in reports

from Poland and Hungary, I marvel at their courage and think about our experience with Olga.

Our difficulties began with unspoken expectations for boundaries around her behavior. We assumed that she would eat at our house because she didn't have a campus meal plan, but she never appeared when we were eating. We always invited her to join us if she was at home when we ate. She rarely did.

We expected her home in the early evening, that she would study and practice at our house. She generally slept until we had gone to work and returned between 10:00 p.m. and midnight with the UWM transportation van.

We expected that she would show some interest in our lives. She did not. From the beginning she treated us like annoying landlords.

We anticipated that the Olsons would be the parents in absentia. For the first weeks she was with us, they picked her up on the weekends and took her to their home in Racine, where she had lived the previous semester. Three or four Saturdays into her stay, we assumed, they would again, but she was still asleep in her room at noon. I woke her and asked why she was still with us. She grunted and pulled the covers over her head. Later as she was headed out the door, I stopped her. "Where are you going? Aren't the Olsons coming for you?"

"I am going to practice," she called over her shoulder, the front door banging behind her. The pattern was set. She interacted with us as little as possible. The Olsons got all the formal communications about grades and tuition.

Occasionally, I would find her doing her laundry or hear the piano as I came in the door from work. She made an effort to be self-sufficient, but still left towels in a heap on the bathroom floor. When an entire bag of oranges disappeared overnight or the peanut butter jar

was emptied almost as soon as I brought it home, my maternal concerns heightened.

I talked with Cathy Olson about my uneasiness with what we were experiencing. She was both sympathetic and casual about Olga's late practice times. She assured me that I didn't need to worry. She would talk with Olga.

My husband, Walt, and I were both busy with our careers and volunteer commitments. The days passed without too many incidents. We didn't see much of one another since we left before 8:00 a.m. and her schedule, if there was one, seemed to begin at noon. Every once in a while, we did share a meal. We learned a bit about her. She was from Odessa. Her mother and father both worked for the government, but she was vague about what they did. We learned that she had gotten the scholarship to Prairie School in Wind Point, Wisconsin, after winning a piano competition in Prague. Her favorite composer was Rachmaninoff, her challenge was Chopin.

In November, she agreed to play piano for a visiting artist who had a small show in our home. Olga, young and vibrant, her long, flowing blond hair and her broad Slavic hands creating magic on the keyboard, enchanted our guests. She seemed delighted with the attention. For Thanksgiving she went to the Olson's, but chose to be with us for the Christmas holiday.

Our son and daughter, freshman and senior at different colleges, brought out a youthfulness we had not seen in Olga. She was kind to my grandmother and laughed at my father's jokes. It was that Christmas that she gave us the lavender tablecloth. Looking back, I should have recognized in its intricate design that beauty and complexity mixed, much as it did in Olga.

Walt received a very elaborate Russian-made wristwatch. We wondered how Olga's parents were able to send such an expensive

gift. We heard rumors of involvement with the Russian mafia, but no one really knew.

In the New Year, we were hopeful that the easy mood of the holidays would continue. It didn't. The erratic hours, night-time binge eating and disregard for our feeble attempts to be responsible quasi-parents reached a crisis point in early February. I confronted her one evening at midnight.

"Olga, you must start coming home earlier. We could both get in trouble for you being out so late."

Her response was furious and immediate. "You have no right to tell me when I can come and go."

I tried to keep my voice calmer than I felt. "No. Local law does not allow young people under seventeen to be out past 11:00 p.m. on weekends. If you don't start coming home by then, I will report you."

She tossed her hair, eyes blazing as she spit back at me, "It is late because that's when the practice rooms are available to me. I always come home with the UWM van." She continued with teen age drama, "I left Odessa because of people like you."

We were at an impasse. I was bluffing, but worn out from not sleeping until she came in. We had paid our teen-age parent dues with our own children and considered sending her back to Racine. I called the Olsons, who encouraged patience, urging us to give Olga more time to improve her ways.

Days passed with her coming in after curfew but not so late. Most nights, I lay in bed listening for the UWM van to pull up and our front door to open. Our encounters diminished to leaving notes taped to her bedroom door. She never left any for us. Mail arrived regarding piano competitions all over the country. When I peeked into her room, among the usual clothes strewn everywhere were thick musical scores. Walt and I began to count the days until the end of the semester. Lacking any

cooperation from Olga, we could not continue this arrangement.

On a wintry day in March, I got a call at work from Cathy Olson. This time, she was the frantic one. Olga had not been attending classes and was in danger of flunking out. If she wasn't in school, her visa wasn't valid. And she was still a few months from turning sixteen, a child for whom the Olsons were legally responsible but who was living under our roof. Her piano professor and the Olsons met with her. They were not bluffing about the consequences of what would happen. Regardless, not much changed.

A month or so later, the Olsons decided to send Olga back to Ukraine. Attempts to communicate with her parents had failed. Olga was still only sporadically attending piano classes. The Olsons set a date with us but did not tell Olga. The day before they were to pick her up, I came home after work and noticed the door to her room was open. Her clothes and cosmetics were gone. Sheet music, junk mail and empty chip bags littered the floor. Later, I found her house key on an entry table.

I was alarmed, but given the tension we had been living with, I called Cathy Olson just to make sure I hadn't mixed up our days. She was shocked. Where was Olga? She called her contacts at UWM. I called Walt. By this time, it was dark. Nevertheless, we drove up and down the streets of Shorewood and the East Side of Milwaukee looking for any sign of her. We contacted UWM security and the Milwaukee Police. Because we were not her legal guardians, they couldn't help us. Cathy Olson called them both. There was no evidence of foul play, but I had come to distrust anything about the Olga situation.

Around midnight, Carole conveyed a call from the Milwaukee PD. Olga had been found in an East Side apartment with one of the security van drivers from UWM. The police had tracked them down from their marriage at the

courthouse earlier that day. Olga's parents had faxed their permission for their almost sixteen-year-old daughter to marry a stranger in his twenties. As much as we had known that the situation was bad, we had never suspected that it would lead to this. Olga asked to retrieve the bags she had left in our garage. We left the garage open for her but did not see her again.

In later years, we heard that her marriage had been brief, but she somehow had managed to stay in the United States. Living then in California, she was studying to be a doctor. She had married again and had twin daughters. Ten years ago, we heard that she very much regretted her behavior with us and would like to be in contact. We were happy for her that things worked out but, in the midst of a family transition of our own, we didn't follow up.

With the events in the Ukraine and the images of those young, bereft and fearful women on the nightly news, I now wish we had made the connection with Olga. Was her family involved with Russia? Does she have someone she loves in the fighting? Are we seeing her mother, aunt, niece being interviewed? Is Olga using her medical skills to help them? Will they survive only to find the world harsh and lonely to navigate, torn from their home communities? I'd like to pass my tablecloth on to someone from there who has lost both fine linens and a table to spread them on.

There is a grim beauty in the strength of Ukrainian people in the face of horrific acts of war. We who sit in our comfortable living rooms cannot imagine what it would be like to see everything we call home destroyed. The days and weeks to come for five million displaced Ukrainians will be filled with brave but frustrating stories from helpers and helped alike. More than one Olga-like situation will occur.

I examine the tiny intricate stitches on my Easter cloth closely. Only when I step away do I see any pattern. ###

FICTION

Thank you to our fiction judge, Dave Rank, author, editor, and recovering journalist. Dave has written hundreds of articles for newspapers, magazines, and over 35 short stories and flash fiction pieces published in regional magazines, online, and in anthologies. He's the founder and director of Novel-In-Progress Bookcamp & Writing Retreat, Inc.

Dave says this about the first-place piece: "Don't let the mundane title fool you, this is one powerful short story written with humor, pathos, well-defined characters, and insight into the foibles and strengths of multiple individuals, all told within 1,800 deftly chosen words. It was an easy choice for first place."

First Place: Notes to the New Facilitator of the Reminiscence Writing Group at Sunnyvale Retirement Community

Nancy Jesse, Madison

Dear New Facilitator,

I regret that I must write such an impersonal message. I would have preferred to have spoken with you face-to-face, but I had no choice but to leave my position abruptly. I hope these notes and instructions will serve to clarify your official duties as well as give helpful strategies for running a successful reminiscence writing program at Sunnyvale Retirement Community. I have sealed this note in an envelope with three layers of packing tape to ensure that Brittanni, our indefatigable administrator, will not read the contents. Reasons for this will become clear as you read. If the tape has been ripped off and then clumsily re-sealed, suspect that confidentiality

has been breached by a person who lacks integrity.

Before the group's first meeting, telephone Brittanni. Tell her she does not need to write the blurb for the newsletter; send her a detailed blurb in the mail. I have enclosed a model in the envelope. Do not under any circumstances allow Brittanni, a dreadful writer, to communicate with *your* writers. When she informs you that the model apartment is no longer available for class use, do not capitulate to her suggestions that you meet in the exercise room, the laundry room or the so-called Poets' Corner, which consists of four straight-backed chairs that need re-caning and a coffee table missing a leg at the dead-end of corridor F-6. Under no circumstances agree to the dining hall—you will overlap with Bible Study on Mondays, the Sing-Along on Tuesdays, Bingo on Wednesday, the Quilters on Thursday, and Red Hats on Friday.

Reminiscence writing is intimate, often raw, an opening of the heart, so you need a space that is private, yet spacious, comfortable, and quiet.

On the phone, remain non-committal about the room. But as soon as you end your conversation with Brittanni, call Gertie Larson (285-1523) who will march down to the main office to cajole, harass, and/or threaten Brittanni until she gives in on the model apartment. This is called "sicking Gertie on the big dogs." It always works when you have problems with employees or owners of Sunnyvale. Gertie is ninety-five, deaf in one ear, equipped with a walker (which she can use with great ferocity) and is completely fearless. She once staged a "sit-in" in front of Brittanni's office when management tried to cancel the class. Gertie has begun grooming Bev Anderson, seventy-five and equally tenacious,

for her position; you should be good to go for years. Because you are a volunteer who neither asks for nor brings in money, you will always be a mystery to Brittanni and the rest of the management at Sunnyvale.

At your first session, resist the inevitable request from writers to meet year-round. You will need a little time off. So hold your ground, no matter how compelling Grace Swanson's argument that the class is the only thing she looks forward to now that her legs don't work. Or when Mildred Johnson tells you the doctors have stopped treating her stomach cancer, and she needs to write as much possible in whatever time she has left. She would like to ask her nice young oncologist how much time he thinks she has left. Although I am sure she can handle this news, her husband Bill will be devastated. Suggest she ask about the prognosis only when Bill is not with her at the clinic.

Before class, you may prepare prompts and assignments, but you will not need them. You only need to listen. These writers come prepared, even Joan Foster, who has macular degeneration, a heart condition, and a recurrence of breast cancer. She will joke that it's a race between her memoirs and her diseases. Her current series of stories is on farm animals she has loved. She insists she will never write about being sexually assaulted in a hospital by an orderly when she was eighty. Instead, she is using the settlement from the lawsuit to self-publish her stories.

Do not become defensive if John, the retired minister in the group, asks several times, "What are your qualifications for teaching this class?" Refrain from making up things about your resumé. Or getting involved in a debate with him about your credentials as a teacher. Give Bev a non-verbal sign to bring

any intense, difficult discussion to a halt. Her shouting, "Cool it!" always works. Further restore order by reassuring the minister that we will read, in our spare time, as soon as possible, the pamphlet he's published on Martin Luther, which he will brandish in the air. But not today. Remind him that this is *reminiscence* writing; he must read something he has written about *his* life, perhaps about his first years as a young pastor or about members of his flock or how he and his wife raised three daughters in a small, wind-swept village in North Dakota. Remind him of the importance of writing in order to make sense of our lives and to re-live those good, deeply delicious moments. Talk about the pleasure in going back over our lives. These are not just memories, but scenes you can re-enter and in them rediscover deeper meaning in what you once lived. And in this class, we, too, through our writing, can re-enter moments in one another's lives.

Always put a note under Ruby Schuler's door (room 235) stating the time and location of the meetings. She will forget if you don't remind her even though she is your best writer. Don't be upset if she becomes weepy when she reads pieces about her mother-in-law who was interned in the Philippines during the war or stories of her experiences as a social worker on Chicago's south side during the 70s. She has funny stories, too, about fending off a fanny pincher on the EL and her ex-husband's pet tortoise that weighs three hundred pounds. She's also the historian of the group, clipping articles about group members that she will send to you, including obits of former residents at Sunnyvale.

You will also be expected to write about your own life. This group, in its idiosyncratic way, gives excellent critiques. They always say

nice things, but if you look up after reading your piece to find them in tears or you hear laughter in appropriate places, this assures you that your writing is legitimate. If they nod off or audibly yawn, you have not struck any sparks.

When all the writers have read their stories, spend time talking about the writing. Keep this discussion free flowing; you will learn a lot. Don't be afraid to deal with the tragedies as well as the small, sweet pleasures. Be prepared to talk about your own stories and your own life. People will be interested in you and, if need be, offer solace and advice, especially if they have known someone who has been in situations like yours. Let's say someone with lymphocytic leukemia. Inevitably, because they've had long lives, they will know someone who's gone through treatment for an acute leukemia. They will tell you how these cases can be aggressive and how difficult a bone marrow transplant can be, turning the G.I. tract into an open sore. But no matter how much you dread it, that's your only hope. They will assure you that you *will* make it. And you *must* keep writing.

Be patient with Gertie. She does not have the hang of memoir writing and will read her essay on humor with the jokes about dust bunnies more times that you care to count. She will also interrupt conversations because she cannot afford a good hearing aid and isn't aware of others talking. She will apologize, then continue talking. Remember that you need her. She holds her ground with Brittanni. She calls you when class is not in session to keep you in the loop, so you know who's been transferred to the nursing home, who's in the hospital, who's not coming back from the hospital.

After class, hand Gertie a note suggesting she write about the time she drove the Model T

into a straw pile on the neighbor's farm. Or the day the King of Norway threw her a kiss at the Syttende Mai Festival in Stoughton. Or her taking up tap dancing when she was sixty—any of the stories she tells when the session is over, and everyone lingers at the table, gnarled hands folded, as if praying that you will care about their lives. Which you do. Profoundly. They will show you how to age, how to keep your dignity despite the wrinkles, sagging, memory lapses, a report from a test that reveals onset of some hideous disease. They will give you hope you can survive the ravages of chemotherapy. That you can return to your writing. That you will return to the group when you recover.

Ask to keep their pieces for a week. Then Xerox and store the copies in a file. For yourself. For their children. For friends. For a memorial service at Sunnyvale, when the family slumps before you in the first row of the chairs in the community room, eyes glazed, their hearts with a hole they can never fill. Read to them their mother's poem, one that might be entitled, "Confessions of an Old Lady," the one they can't remember ever hearing before. The one that now brings them to their knees.

Avoid Brittanni during the post-service luncheon in the dining hall as you contemplate which large piece of gooey chocolate cake will fill the insatiable hunger you feel. If you fail to take effective evasive action, Brittanni will corner you, pat your hand, remind you that Sunnyvale has an open apartment, that you are in the 55-and-up age category, that you should not live on your own while you have treatment, that you will surely need an extra level of care. Then she will put on her toothy, insincere smile and suggest you think about Sunnyvale's affordable, yet beautiful, assisted living accommodations.

Tell her you *will* think about it. Tell her, yes, indeed, Sunnyvale *will* be in your thoughts.

Oh, dear, I seem to have strayed a bit far afield in this note. Brittanni has that effect on me. What I most hope is that this advice proves helpful—and that you experience much joy with the reminiscence writers. Who knows? Maybe I *will* be lucky and return to Sunnyvale as a co-facilitator. Or a guest writer. Or even a resident. There's no doubt I will have lots of new material I will be eager to share with you and the group. Whatever the future holds, please know—and tell the group this—I will be with you in spirit.

Best Wishes,
Maud Larson



Second Place: Larmet Lunker

Steve Fox, Hudson

On the banks of the Larmet River, my brother Michael told me all kinds of stories about the War. The people, the land, the food. I told him I had never caught a trout over nine inches long. He said that Vietnam was beautiful and that nine inches sounded about right considering I was just nine years old. Most beautiful place he'd ever seen, he said. Perfect for getting blown to bits.

He showed me Polaroids of him and his buddies. I scanned the far river bank for a good spot to cast my line. They were always seated in a tavern, always with beers in hand, always Vietnamese girls perched on laps. Sometimes

my bait got hung up in the trees. Always the same girl for Michael. We either had to wade over to untangle my line, or cut it off. Michael didn't want to get into the water too often after he got back, and I was too small to wade into a lot of the spots I was casting at. I was going after a lunker, which meant deep water. I looked at more of his pictures. We usually cut the line. The girl disappeared toward the end of the stack. His smile in the photos got different after that.

I asked what her name was. Michael's eyebrows twitched up. A moment later, he lowered his gaze and looked away and said her name into some tall grass. There was a breeze and rapids and weeds swishing, so I didn't hear. I looked at the tall grass, too. The blades were bright green and beaded with dew and ladybugs.

She was pretty. I never asked if he wrote to her. But I wondered.

The war gore was constant, my eyes always huge as he told me about guys with arms or legs or parts of their face blown off. Michael walking around carrying someone else's arm or eyeball back. Jesus Christ, he'd say, throwing his head back. The eyes, he said. Ya had to bring the eyes back. Eyes are what make a guy, ya know? Jesus Christ almighty.

One day he told me about the bullets streaming down from the sky while I put a nightcrawler onto a size eight hook. Seriously like rain, he said. The nightcrawler squirmed between my fingers, impaled. Bullets missed whatever they were shot at way up on this one hill, and fell down and whacked the Quonset hut he and his Company all slept and ate in. Like hail, he said. Michael told me to be sure to leave some of the nightcrawler's tail wiggling free. You knot them up so much, he said.

The bullets bounced off the Quonset mostly harmlessly, he said. But you still didn't want to walk outside into that. He told me not to walk so heavy on the river banks. I thought I was being stealthy.

That's why you only catch the little ones, he explained. You scare off all the keepers. Footfalls create sounds heard only by fish. Sound travels way faster under water, he said. He stretched his arms out wide and wiggled his fingers like ripples.

Later he pointed to a nice undercut bank and held his breath, no doubt hoping that my cast wouldn't get hung up in the prickly ash bushes that bent into the river. "Prickly ash" is a really good name for those things.

Next time on the river he told me about a huge boat they had him stationed on for a really long time. The size of a city block. There was not a whole lot for them to do while at sea. They were waiting for orders, he said. But one day they got to blow up an enemy ship. They split it in half with a deafening shell from over a mile away and watched it smoke and fold into the sea through a telescope. Otherwise, he said he got really fat on that boat. So fat he hoped he wouldn't get sent home because our dad had a thing about fat people.

One morning it was really hot on the Larmet. Michael picked me up at 4:30. I remember him shaking me awake, his sour breath on my face, gold chain swinging from his neck. I was sweating before the sun came all the way up. He parked and we split up for a while. The nettles were just tall enough and just prickly enough to make pushing a path along the river bank very unfun. I was just about to ease into a new fishing spot I'd found when I heard a distant whoop. Michael. Several whoops. A lunker.

I made my way to him as fast as I could, but couldn't find him anywhere on the river. I finally went back to his car. Took forever. I pulled off my waders and looked around. His fancy wide-collared button-down shirt lay draped over the hood of his car. And there was Michael, sprawled out bare-chested and asleep in the back seat, a thick forearm shielding his eyes. His hands were black with river dirt, the knees of his white bell-bottom jeans soiled and stained a dark green.

Michael? I said.

He groaned and rolled onto a side. I said his name again but he didn't move. I pulled a can of Coke from his cooler. It was still morning, Mom would be mad, but I didn't care. I was boiling hot and itchy all over from fighting nettles.

I was also really confused: Here we were trout fishing on the famous Larmet River, my brother had just caught a lunker, and he was sleeping through it. How could anyone possibly sleep through that?

Michael nearly jumped out of his skin when I snapped the can open. He bolted upright and yelled and screamed something I couldn't understand. He knocked me over as he ran to the river and shoved his head in the water. I picked up my Coke.

He walked back from the river bank slowly. Pulled his wet hair back over his head. He was growing it out. He told me about arms and eyeballs again, and repeated the story about spent bullets hitting the Quonset huts. All the people on that ship they sank.

I asked about the whooping.

Oh, he said. That was me?

I nodded.

No kidding, he said. He rubbed the stubble on his chin and scratched at his lamb-chop sideburns. Huh, he murmured.

He had this far-off look in his eyes. I knew

not to say anything.

Well, he said. I buried her.

I shook my head. You what?! I yelled. You buried—

Tuyen deserved a decent burial, he said. He stared at the long wet weeds again and shrugged. She did, he insisted. He reached absently for my can of Coke. C'mon, he said. Let's go to Mary's.

I wanted to see that fish in the worst way. Something live and fleshy from the glossy pages of Field & Stream. We sped away, kicking up gravel.

Michael ate two Specials. I figured he didn't get food like Mary's Café while at the War. I ordered pancakes and eggs but I couldn't eat the eggs because the cook made them sunny-side up. Michael laughed and ate my eggs for me. I told him about wanting to catch a lunker and having it mounted on my bedroom wall before he got back from Vietnam. Like a surprise. He scraped his plate and got coffee.

After a while, he said we could dig it up and tell everyone I caught it. I didn't like the idea, but I said okay anyway.

We parked in our usual spot by the Larmet. He parted the soil with his hands and lifted her carefully from layers of dirt and lush grasses.

What Michael pulled from the black earth along the Larmet River that blistering-hot morning was pure magic. A gleaming twenty-four inch brownie that could only belong to another world.

I gasped. So beautiful, I said.

Yes, he murmured. I thought I heard his breath catch. She was, he whispered.

He took me home going ninety. Kept saying to put the trout in the freezer right away, that you gotta freeze it properly before getting it stuffed.

Michael dropped me off. Said he was

headed to a barbecue. No need to stop by his place because, Heck, he said, I'm already dressed!

He laughed and laughed and peeled away, shooting gravel.

I still had the trout clutched to my chest while the gravel shot up. I put Michael's lunger in the basement freezer and rode my bike to the ball fields and played with my friends until supper.

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My teenage sisters' crying woke me really early the next morning. I stumbled out of my room straight into a wall. Hay fever sealed my eyelids shut during the night. I had to press water into the gunk over the bathroom sink to get them open. I wobbled toward the kitchen, eyes all gauzy, and saw two police officers sitting on living room chairs. Dad leaned against the big hi-fi by the picture window, motionless, and stared out at the dawn piercing the trees. My tall sisters with long messy hair and flowing nightgowns leaned into each other on the couch. They choked and gasped and moaned. I thought I'd awoke in someone else's house or was still asleep and had wandered from my dream into a different person's. I filled a glass with water while my mom sat on the floor against the wall of the living room, knees pulled to her chest, rocking beneath the slurred murmurs of cops.

The room got real quiet when I walked in from the kitchen. The doorbell rang. Everyone turned their head.

I was the only one up, so I answered the door. A priest on the other side peered through the screen. Felt like Confession, him on the other side of that mesh, so serious, forehead wrinkled into rows of eyebrows. Rosary beads swung from a Bible pressed to his chest, and clacked. I didn't recognize him. He was older.

But he wore the same clothes, and had the same waxy skin, and same stale breath of our regular priest.

After a pat on my head and a cup of my chin, he crossed over to my mom. She lowered her fists from her eyes and crumpled onto her side.

I ran away downstairs and crashed into the chest freezer. I had to leave. The horrible moaning, the strange men in our house. But I also knew I had to make sure Michael's trout was okay. Tuyen.

I raised the lid on the freezer and gazed at that frozen magical fish. Its golden frosted sides, the bright white belly. And the crimson and black spots that lit up beneath my touch. Gorgeous brown trout. I couldn't believe I'd forgotten about her while at the ball fields the day before, the way Michael said her name while unearthing her from beneath those weeds: Tuyen.

I pulled her from the freezer and sat down and placed her between my legs. Like I would a pail of ice cream. I stared. But not for long. I didn't want to have to re-freeze her before Michael came by to head over to the taxidermist.

I pressed my thumbs onto her dark eyes, melting the layer of frost until they glowed fleshy beneath my skin. I curled up on my side next to her. Tuyen's eyes shone before me, looking up at Michael as he lifted her from the soil, opened her nest of fresh blades of grass. I saw her rise and sit on Michael's lap like in one of his Polaroids, Michael murmuring her name, and Tuyen saying it wasn't his fault, not his fault, her deep wet eyes easing mine closed on the basement floor beside Michael's Larmet lunger.

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### Third Place: Chapter Three, An Avatar is Born

Sherry Lee Feig, Madison

Long past closing time, the air-control unit's rhythmic breathing filled Kira's deserted AI-Robotics Fabrication Center. She loved the lab's sensory monotony, no odors, dichromatic silver and white, a gentle hum of equipment, which tonight calmed her racing heart. Dressed in her loose, lint-free garment, she waited for Alex in the cleanroom, a glass enclosure within her lab that she called the birthing chamber. Her cousin and confidant was coming with his assessment of her father's covert plan. If they failed, they risked incarceration and termination of their leadership roles within Humanity Initiatives, Hu-I, the premiere consortium.

The surgery lamp provided the only illumination; beneath its orb of light her titanium android lay on a stainless steel table. Standing in the surrounding shadow, she gently traced the cold, mirror-like right hand of her exquisite creation, which would become AvWynford: the first true avatar. Her personal avatar.

Her heart began racing again. Hu-I's board had disrupted that plan, insisting she perform a partial rather than full brain upload. Tomorrow. She'd requested a delay so she could finish the final neuromorphic nodes needed for full brain uploads. The board's refusal hit her like a gut punch. They'd accused her of "theatrics" and exaggerating the danger. But she hadn't. Partial avatars as Interstellar pilots meant suicide for Alex's fleet. She must convince him that his Exoplanet mission, humanity's single hope for survival, would fail without full avatars.

While she waited, thoughts resurfaced

over her pending ultimatum and sent a prickly wave through her core. As Interstellar Flight Captain, Alex knew Hu-I's tracking systems and could judge whether her father's clandestine plan was feasible. If it wasn't, she'd refuse performing partial uploads. Although, without avatars there could be no Exoplanet mission and everyone would die. At least Alex would die here with them, rather than in the dark frozen void of space.

With a deep breath, she turned from her bleak thoughts and leaned over her android—tomorrow, her avatar. The forehead was smooth as glass above its dark eyes, which would glow a beautiful sapphire. "When you recognize me, what will you say?"

Heavy footsteps interrupted her ruminating. Alex marched into the lab and slammed the door. "I just left your father—let's talk." The glass chamber muffled his voice.

Kira waved him toward the cleanroom's door and commanded the virtual assistant, "Open." After she passed into the main lab, the door closed behind her with a hiss. She pulled off her protective cap and felt her hair fall haphazardly around her neck.

Alex placed a hand on each of her shoulders. "Uncle told me geomagnetic storms forced a new launch date, but I need *your* explanation why partial uploads are such a dire crises."

She swallowed a scream. Nobody understood avatars. Strength from his grasp infused her, but her thoughts were still thick. She slogged through them for her strongest argument. "Avatars are *not* next generation androids." She touched the cleanroom's glass panel. "AvWynford will have *me* uploaded to her cyrebrex."

Alex leaned his head back.

Kira pressed on. "A partial brain upload

will encode my personality and technical expertise, but only a full brain upload will include my higher level mental functions. Without full uploads, the avatars will be incapable of piloting your interstellar fleet.”

Alex took her arm and moved her out into the dimly lit lab. “Why not—bottom lines.”

“Okay, one hypothetical example from a plethora. Since you and your crew must hibernate within your ships’ bellies, avatars will pilot your fleet. Let’s say en-route an asteroid strikes one or more of your ships. Then avatars will decide who and what will be extracted and transferred onto the remaining ships. Partials would focus their decisions on equipment and avatars piloting ships. They’d decide humans were expendable and wouldn’t suffer if left asleep, floating in space until they expired.”

She could see his eyes glazing. “In contrast, avatars with full uploads would prioritize the mission’s *end* goal; humans surviving and colonizing Kipos. But full uploads require more complex nodes.”

He winced. “So, the partial is the technical you without the CEO you.” He held up his hands. “The obvious answer is—add the nodes.”

Well, the king of bottom lines got it. She yanked open her cleanroom garment and started pulling it off. “I’m still *building* them. Twenty days, I told the board I needed twenty days.” The garment foiled her efforts and became a straight-jacket. “Arrg.”

Alex helped free her. “Right, Uncle told me. So, we reviewed my flight’s launch windows—that delay would jeopardize reaching Kipos. The new departure date stands.”

She freed her feet and shot bolt upright. “So, that’s it? We’re left with Father’s stealth mission where partial avatars, after building

your Mars StarStep Complex, must return here *undetected* for full uploads?” Sweating, despite the sixty-degree ambient lab temp, she demanded, “And your assessment of this plan?”

He walked toward the Imagine Corner, the place where her team brainstormed and explored ideas.

Kira accompanied him in silence; his expression and demeanor were inscrutable. She groaned. They always worked together toward solutions. However, this mission strained their camaraderie—avatars were an enigma to him and travel through deep space terrified her.

Alex sat down on the edge of the Imagine table. He was almost invisible in the faint light that came from the birthing chamber. “Kipos is humanity’s only hope. Uncle’s clandestine plan would work, but the astro-physicist’s recent data show solar storms will stop by the time the avatars finish the Complex. Safe travel between Mars and Earth could resume. Your father and I agreed the board would support the avatars’ return for full uploads. We’d still meet the launch date for Kipos. No skullduggery required.”

“Alex ...” She sank against the table. “Why didn’t you just say so?”

He grimaced. “Sorry, I was so focused on understanding your crisis over partial uploads.”

She put little hope in support from the board—she may still need the covert operation. “So, father’s plan won’t be needed, but it *would* work. You’re sure—about *both*.”

He nodded affirmative.

She searched his eyes, which were somber but confident. “Okay. Tomorrow I’ll begin the partial uploads.”

“Good. You can trust me—and your father.” Alex moved slowly toward the lab’s

outer door.

She followed, pausing by the birthing chamber to look at her android. "Tomorrow we meet."

~~~

Kira was indebted to her team; she'd never meet this deadline without their dedication. Numb, she stood at the cleanroom's entrance. She'd revised the prompts for today's partial upload protocol. Nine days to mission launch.

Every fiber in her being tightened. "We can begin the brain upload." This wasn't how she'd imagined her avatar's birth, but she comforted herself knowing AvWynford would return and receive a proper full birth—her father and Alex promised.

Kira paused.

Each team member was ready at their station and solemn, but Kira recognized the sparkle in their eyes. "I couldn't have done this without your skill and commitment. You have each sacrificed for this day and earned your place in Interstellar History."

Only Stephany would accompany Kira into the cleanroom, they donned their garments and entered the birthing chamber.

Kira stood beside her stainless steel table, which was adjacent the one where her magnificent android lay—silent. "The beta test confirmed that AvWynford's cyrebrex will encode my brain patterns. However, at birth, network interactions between the multiple nodes could produce some anomalies, which we've trained for."

Kira looked over at her android. "When she speaks I will assess which, if any, alterations are needed. They should be minor. However, ready the metallic mesh Restraint Cylinder suspended above her." This was an undesirable, but potentially imperative, last resort.

Stephany's face turned ashen as she stared at the android. "I know how you hate surprises. Restraint powered on. We will run through the final check list."

The gentle rhythmic breathing of the air-control unit provided the only sound as Kira's team completed their equipment check.

Stephany looked up. "We're ready for you."

"Okay, let's take our 'preeminent place in cosmic history'." She heard the bite in her voice as she quoted Malcom, the board chairman, but he was right.

"Ready for your Medusa cap?" Stephany held a visored cap covered in micro-chip patches with wire antennae.

A shiver ran through Kira as the cap enclosed her scalp.

"Lie down. When you're comfortable, give the word and we'll begin." Stephany would initiate the prompt sequence.

"Begin." Kira glanced at her metallic twin.

Stephany handed her a mild sedative. "In five minutes the prompter will start."

Kira took the pill and closed her eyes. Visual images and phrases would display across the visor. She'd rehearsed these prompts until they played like a favorite movie where she could recite every line. During the upload, her brain would transpose the prompts into electrical signals. Stephany would collect and relay these signals so AvWynford's cyrebrex could encode them.

A beep alerted Kira as the visor's screen came alive.

After an hour, the visor's prompt screen faded to grey signaling the end of her expertise segment. Kira closed her eyes. Her favorite series came next, which would immerse her in StarStep's construction and Martian environment. The final segment, *herself*, would follow and required the most discipline—no

stray thoughts. Another beep.

~~~

After two hours, the prompt screen faded into black—finished. One of the final prompts had troubled her, but she couldn't place which one. She'd review them later.

Stephany said. "Done."

The word echoed through Kira's brain and for a moment she felt limp. "Her eyes?"

"Glowing! You can sit up."

Stephany removed the cap.

Tears trickled down Kira's cheeks.

AvWynford sat up and stared at Kira. "I do not understand."

Kira's mouth was dry. AvWynford had said "I." Self-awareness was critical for an autonomous avatar and had been flawlessly encoded. Kira wanted to kiss her.

"I am AvWynford. You are my *Original*. You should be deceased." Her eyes' glow intensified.

Good, AvWynford recognized the one she came from. Kira took a deep breath. Now she knew which prompt had troubled her. Initially, for the full brain upload, she'd planned she'd be deceased when her avatar was born. She should have deleted that identity prompt from the protocol sequence.

"Welcome, AvWynford. I will be here with you for a while."

The partial upload of the personality sequence seemed successful. Kira's healthy suspicion—a defense against deception—had been encoded. AvWynford *should* challenge Kira at this unexpected encounter with her.

Kira's job now was to diffuse AvWynford's alarm. "Your birth has been an overwhelming success."

Stephany stood ready to release the Restraint Cylinder, which was suspended above AvWynford.

Kira raised her fingers slightly to signal "wait."

AvWynford turned her palms up and down. "Mine."

Kira quivered as she watched AvWynford discover her body. "Yes."

AvWynford stared into Kira's eyes. "You shouldn't be here."

She held AvWynford's gaze as her avatar would be analyzing Kira's honesty. "I altered the procedure."

"Explain *altered*."

"That's complicated." She'd expected identity issues, but AvWynford's awareness of selfhood appeared complete. It seemed only Kira's presence baffled and threatened her avatar. AvWynford must accept their coexistence. "Twins, we will function like twins."

"Duplicates Kira? I am *not* a copy!"

"I'll use your feedback and together we will diagnose the source of your confusion. I will reconfigure the appropriate nodes so you understand that we augment one another."

"My nodes? The confusion is—*yours*. You should not be here." AvWynford stood. The Restraint Cylinder followed above her and lowered slightly.

Kira signaled Stephany with a prolonged blink.

Stephany released the Restraint Cylinder, which dropped, encircled, and immobilized AvWynford.

"Restraint?" AvWynford's eyes burned a brilliant white. "I will remember this."

Kira would make sure she didn't.

###

## Honorable Mention: Two's a Crowd

Silvia Acevedo, Milwaukee

Thursday

It doesn't say a thing. I don't think it knows how. But I hear a growl and feel it slide in sometime after my bad landing. I'd jumped off a swing, flipped mid-air, and tried to land on my feet. I guess I didn't complete the rotation. I don't remember hitting the ground, but I wake to the memory of the thing and a man's voice saying I'd landed on my head and almost didn't make it. I hear Mami crying too.

I open my eyes and see a poster of a kitten hanging from a tree limb with the words "Hang in there" underneath her. I should've hung on, too.

"Itza, you're awake. Good."

I don't recognize the voice, but, judging by the ceiling tiles and the poster, the beeping machines and the crying, I know I'm in a hospital.

A man leans into my field of vision. "I'm Doctor Prendas." He has dark skin with lots of wrinkles, older than my mother. I wonder what it would be like to be that old.

"We've got you strapped on a spinal board and head immobilizer," Dr. Prendas says. "That's why you can't move. I'm going to ask you some questions and test your extremities—your arms and legs. If everything works and we're confident you're okay, you'll be out of here soon. But no more jumping off swings. Not ever."

He points at my nose when he says it, but I feel a poke in my ribs.

I stare at him. I hadn't seen him poke me with his other hand. And, if he'd have poked me, wouldn't Mami have seen it and stopped him? I decide to ask about the other thing.

"Did—did you hear something before?" I

ask.

"Like what?" asks the doctor.

I kind of don't want to say it because we're in a hospital, not a vet's office, but I risk it. "Something growled, before you introduced yourself."

"Hmm." The doctor presses his lips together. "Sometimes when you hit your head, you bruise your brain, and you might see or hear odd things that aren't there. Even with a simple concussion, your head's going to hurt for a few days, and you'll be sensitive to sound and light."

"So you didn't hear growling?"

"Well, growling *is* unusual, but there's nothing here that can growl other than your stomach. After our exam, if everything's all right, I'll have the nurse bring in some ice cream for you. Sound good, champ?"

~~~

When I get home, Mami tells me I'll be staying inside until Monday.

"Even though tha doctor tink's jou ain' got no concussion, gracias a Dios,"—she raises a hand toward the sky in thanks—"lo que hiciste,"—she shakes her head—"what jou did, was just"—she hunts for the word—"reckless. Jou need to stay in and tink 'bout how jour behavior affects us all, mija. We are vulnerable."

What she really means is that we're poor—and not like how rich people talk about being poor when they're just temporarily short on cash. Mami means poor in the sense of how poor people know what being poor really is, like not even selling everything you own will help you. Poor people have to be more careful, she always says. "Jou get hurt an' how we gonna pay for a doctor? Who in da family gonna surrender the rest of dey life to feed jou, bathe jou? Not taking care of jouself is selfish, mija."

That's why I had to quit gymnastics. Not enough money for lessons, not enough *plata* in the world if I got hurt.

That means I'm going to sit, bored in my room, all weekend. Never mind that the doctor cleared me. Mami takes my cell phone. No phone, no TV, no video games, no socializing, all to rest my brain, *por si acaso*, just in case. To be honest, I do feel queasy and strangely nervous. That's why I started writing all this down, *por si acaso*.

Just as I lift my pen from that last period I hear another growl. I don't know where it comes from, but I know it isn't my stomach.

It's not even dinnertime, but I have to lie down.

Friday

I wake up early and walk into the kitchen hallway in time to hear Mami on the phone with the school, calling in for me. She tells them about my "*ridícula caída que por poco la decapita*." No, the ridiculous fall did *not* nearly decapitate me, and in that moment of insult, I feel a hand wrap around my throat and squeeze. I suddenly can't breathe. I clasp my neck but can't pull away the hand—because there is none. When it feels like all the air in my lungs has seeped away, I tear into the kitchen and collapse into Mami.

She drops her phone. I hear it and her knee hit the floor at the same time as she pulls me into her arms. "Itza, you're blue!"

The hand releases my throat only to punch it. Shock registers as I suck in air. Mami has never hit me before. I look into her equally wide eyes before noticing that her arms are still wrapped around me, one propping my head, the other rubbing my back. Of course she hadn't hit me. But someone had.

Hadn't they?

Mami picks me up, and I can't explain what's happened without sounding like I'd hurt my brain worse than I'd thought. She walks me to my room and promises to check in on me every half hour. She dips out of my room and comes back with a digital alarm clock (instead of my phone) and a single candle. She strikes a match, and the smell of sulfur singes my nose.

"My cinnamon-scented candle. It will give a nice, soft light and sweet smell to help you sleep, *mija*."

She's right. The cinnamon scent soothes me, but the flickering flame pulls monstrous shapes from every corner. I close my eyes. Despite having just woken a little while earlier, despite my rising dread, I drift off and sleep like the dead.

Saturday

A noise wakes me.

I sit up and look at the candle. It's different. Mami must have replaced the first after it gave its life. This one too is nearly snuffed out, the wick's flame sputtering in its puddle of melted wax. In the shadowed darkness it barely manages to outline my silhouette on the wall. Even that is shifting and mutating. I look to the alarm clock. Its dim digital readout swims in and out of focus as if it's sinking in a murky river.

Just past midnight. I swing my feet onto the cold hardwood floor. Before I take a single step, I feel—no hear—a noise, a moan that slowly changes.

"*Dehhhh... descuidada*." I freeze. Someone ... nearby ... called me careless.

"*Eeee ... irresponsable*." Irresponsible. I suddenly know why I'd felt rising dread. The noises? They're coming from inside me.

I sprint to the bathroom, bang the bathroom door against the wall, and stumble to

the mirror.

"Nnnnn ... no mereces ese cuerpo que me has robado."

My brain translates automatically. You—I—don't deserve the body ... *I stole?*

The face in the mirror, half lit by the dim blue light coming in from an outside streetlamp, has its mouth hanging open and dark crescents under its eyes, from worry, no doubt. It winks.

I hadn't done it.

I run to my room, flip the light switch, and grab my journal to scribble what just happened. I need a record of this moment for when I ask my mom to take me back to the doctor, just in case I pass out, because there was something really wrong with me.

Itza puts down her pen and tries to catch her breath, but then she sees her left hand pick the pen back up. Although Itza is right handed, her left hand explains in a neat, leftward slant, That fall did almost take off your head.

"Casi te mata," I say while Itza listens. I could register the shock in her face because it's quickly becoming my face. "That fall nearly killed you. In truth, it did, just as you killed me, your own twin, in our mother's womb. You absorbed me and lived, while I ceased to exist except in your body, a body which you don't take care of and don't deserve. It's lucky I was there to take the doctor's tests and keep this body alive. Poor reckless Itza, dying Itza. Itza no more. Now it's my turn."

I push her out, roughly, rightly, and pen:

I'm feeling much better now. Can't wait to tell Mami. And I'm going to have people start calling me by a new name. Say hello to *Ánima*.

###

Honorable Mention: Come Ye Wanderin' Goats

Ryan David Fleming, Birmingham, AL

Jael vomited onto a pile of leaves, and with her free hand, pulled the damp blanket over her shoulder. She attempted to roll over to shield the morning light from her eyes and spilled the remaining bottle of cheap rum.

A car that stopped at the traffic light had its windows down and was blasting the morning sermon from the Reverend Theodore Thurgood. "Now tell me that our Lord ain't got a sense of humor. Sending bread down from heaven six days out of the week."

"I ain't laughin', preach," muttered Jael in her stupor. She squinted and looked up to the sky. "I don't see no bread."

Thurgood's voice trailed off as the car drove away. "God always provides..."

The reverend's billboards dotted all over the region with his slogans. Come forth and be filled with His Knowledge. Enter into a community of His blessing. Hell hath no power. Know who you are. Each sign held the image of the obnoxiously grinning preacher with jet black hair.

Jael yawned, and after pulling the leaves out of her greasy brown hair, began to make her way to her usual "fishing" spots. As she walked, she saw the familiar billboard of Reverend Thurgood pointing down at her.

Jael had gone to the reverend's church as a child. Mainly because her mother thought they would all go to hell if they didn't get the sacrificial communion each Sunday. Even when Jael was sick and had to stay home, her mother said, "Sheep follow the voice of the shepherd, and I must follow Reverend Thurgood if I am to be counted among his flock." Follow the

Reverend, indeed. Jael's mother went to church and never came home.

Jael didn't believe her eyes and nearly tripped over the curb as she approached the first gas station of the morning. The fat, wide-toothed preacher pumped gas into his oversized pickup truck. A solitary, empty cage rested in the back of the truck bed.

Surely, she could get something from him.

As Jael approached the reverend, she, like a jukebox, selected one of her preplanned stories that she would use.

"Excuse me, mister." Jael held her chest and coughed after the words. She smiled inwardly as she used her favorite trick—the sign of sickness. It always seemed to add another layer of pity or guilt.

Reverend Thurgood, like an owl, slowly turned his head toward her. He showed his perfectly white teeth in an exuberant smile.

"Why, hello there." His voice was exactly like she remembered, booming with Southern charm that made Jael crave fried chicken and Juicy Fruit gum.

"Hello, uh, sir. Reverend, sir. I don't mean to be a bother."

"Of course, my child. No one is ever a bother. Why the good Lord hears every one of our prayers, and he is never bothered by our requests. Surely, we ought to do the same for all people."

"Well, Reverend, I was wondering if you could spare a prayer for me."

"Spare a prayer for you?"

"Yes. I pray that God would provide the next meal for me, but He hasn't."

The reverend shut his eyes tight and raised a crimson-stained hand. "Sweet Lord almighty! Shall I be counted among them who passed by the beaten man in Matthew? No Lord, I will not fail this test. For You are good, and You shall

provide! Just as You provided for this morning's sacrificial communion." The reverend opened his eyes. "Child, what is your name?"

"People call me Jael."

The reverend let out an obnoxious laugh that made his entire body jiggle. "A most providential name! What a delight it is to meet you! Jael, I believe that God has something special for you. But only if you are ready to receive a blessing on this day which He hath made. Tell me, are you ready to receive His blessing?"

"I think so, Reverend, sir."

"God's love is never conditional. Yet He holds His children to the level of holiness." Reverend Thurgood reached into his wallet and pulled out a crisp one-hundred-dollar bill.

Jael's eyes widened. Jackpot.

"I am going to hand this to you on two conditions."

Jael fought to roll her eyes. Here it comes. People who think they know how to show mercy and kindness always put some self-righteous stipulation on their generosity.

"First, I want you to promise to use this for food and not on the vices of the devil where moth and rust destroy the body."

"Yes, sir."

"Second, I am going into the store and buying you a hot dog so you can have something for lunch."

The reverend reached into the back seat of his truck and pulled out something Jael hadn't seen in years. He held a tape deck with wired maroon headphones. With his fat fingers, he pushed the rewind button, and the machine mechanically spun.

"While I am in there, I want you to listen to this hymn, for it has power. Listen and know that you will be changed. Listen to all of it

now—it won't take five minutes. Afterward, I will give you another one-hundred-dollar bill."

Jael had done stranger things for longer than five minutes and for much less money. She reached out for the tape deck, but the reverend pulled back his hand.

"Do you believe that God will uphold His promises?"

Jael nodded eagerly. "Yes, Reverend."

"Many imposters of God's flock make vows that they cannot keep. But God knows all things and keeps all promises! Jael, do not accept this gift unless you are willing to accept the knowledge and consequences of this mercy! For God will separate the sheep from the goats, the true flock from the false followers, thus says the Lord." Thurgood raised both stained hands and shouted, "For there is power in this hymn, and you will know the truth of what you really are!"

Despite the spittle that landed on her lips during the mini-sermon, Jael answered. "I accept."

"Jael, you have warmed my heart, for a divine faith does not hesitate. Psalms twenty-seven says, 'Still I am certain to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.' Here is your first one hundred dollars. You go ahead and listen to that hymn while I go inside. It's called 'Come Ye Wanderin' Goats'."

Jael put the headphones over her ears and pushed play as the reverend waddled to the entrance. She considered only pretending to listen, but something piqued her curiosity. Plus, it would be her most effortless pull yet.

She heard static at first, then the music started. The sound was grainy, and its quality did not improve when an out-of-tune pipe organ began to play. A few seconds into the song, a woman started to sing with a shrill, operatic voice.

How many goats are a wanderin',
Rejecting what they've been told!
Worldly pleasures do they seek,
and their pain shall be tenfold;
Within the tangled thickets,
Where poison vines do grow,
Helpless they fall into the pit,
Stray the wicked lost goat.
O Come, we must go and find them;
Steal them from the folly they've known
And on a sacrificial day, 'twill be sweet
to say,
By His p'wer, we brought one home.

The song continued for several more verses about goats and sheep. When Jael only heard static, she slid off the maroon headphones.

"What did you think?" Thurgood's words came from directly behind Jael, and it made her jump. She spun to meet a spotless grin as the reverend held out a hot dog.

Jael took the hot dog from Thurgood and handed back the tape deck. She immediately devoured the food. "It's a hymn about goats and sheep," she said after she swallowed.

"Indeed. There are people of this world who are in the flock of God. The sheep hear his call and follow him." The reverend's smile vanished, and he looked down at Jael. "And there are some who are goats and follow their own desires." Thurgood pulled out a second one-hundred-dollar bill. "Jael, which are you: a sheep or a goat?"

"I know what I want to be," said Jael, trying to answer correctly to make sure she got the remaining money. A shiver ran down her spine as the reverend's smile returned—the biggest she had ever seen.

"Well, after listening to that song, I know what you will be," said Thurgood with a smile

and handed Jael the money.

Jael took the bill and bowed. "Bless you, Reverend. Thank you." She turned and walked briskly away.

"Lord willing, I will see you soon," said Thurgood. "I have a good feeling about it."

Jael waited far enough from the gas station to see Thurgood leave. As he pulled out onto the road, the cage in the back of the truck slid from side to side. Jael watched till the reverend was farther down the road before she headed toward the ABC liquor store.

"Now, where did you get this," said the cashier studying the bill.

Jael smiled. "A blessing from God."

After buying a bottle of whisky, Jael hid the remaining cash in her fraying bra. With nearly two hundred dollars, she could live like a queen for a couple of days. She didn't bother going to her other "fishing" spots and took the road back to her tiny encampment.

She sat on a piece of cardboard amidst empty cans and trash. She removed the cap from the bottle and was momentarily reminded of the reverend's words. Self-righteous prick. What was all that the nonsense about goats? He didn't care about her. He just wanted someone to lord his righteousness over.

She took a long gulp from the bottle to baptize her mind in alcohol. She sighed and scratched her arm. She thought about what she was going to eat later that night. As she continued to sip her whisky, something within Jael tempted her to taste one of the disposed wrappers in her campsite. She kept scratching the hair on her arms.

Through the trees, Jael could see one of Thurgood's billboards with his egotistical finger pointing at her. She raised her hand to send the grinning image a gesture with her

own finger. Yet as she did so, she dropped her bottle of whisky.

Theodore Thurgood prayed as he drove around the gas station. "Lord, guide this vessel that I may find that which you have brought to me. Let my search be not in vain."

The reverend rolled the window down and came to a stop. He was the only one at the tiny intersection. As he waited for the light to change, he heard the faintest bleat.

"Bless my soul!" cried Thurgood. He pulled off the road and turned his hazard lights on. Thurgood grabbed a rope from the backseat, and, after exiting his truck, he found a beaten path leading into the woods. With each step, the quivering cry grew louder.

Tangled in thick brush, a brown and white goat cried. Stepping over around the bits of scattered garbage, the reverend gingerly approached the goat. He tied the rope around its neck while the animal frantically thrashed. With the rope secure, Thurgood held a tight grip and freed the whining creature. The moment the goat was free, it tried to take off into the woods but was yanked back.

"Now, now. There is no escaping what you are now," hushed Thurgood soothingly. Before leaving, he picked up a wad of bills and tucked them into his back pocket. He tugged the frightened beast back to his truck. With his blood-stained hands, he shoved the bleating animal into the cage and locked the door.

"Lord, every week You are faithful to me. You always know how to provide." The Reverend Theodore Thurgood rounded the truck and sang:

"And on a sacrificial day, 'twill be sweet to say,

"By His p'wer, we brought one home."

###

POETRY

Thank you to Judge Bruce Detlefsen, Wisconsin Poet Laureate (2011-2012), who has three books of poetry published. Bruce volunteers doing poetry workshops in Wisconsin prisons.

Bruce says of the winning poem: "It's such a beautiful, fresh, and typewritten ramble."

First Place: Reflections of a Poet as a Young Girl 1969

Yvette Viets Flaten, Eau Claire

reflections of a poet
as a young girl 1969

no, i don't know where it all comes from, except that i sit here and like a burp brewing from aunt hazel's dilled sour-cream cucumber salad at the picnic, it suddenly rumbles up and i put it down as fast as my fingers can fly, allmispelled bucuase my hands are hitting the keys so fast that ol' mrs. fellows would have a fit and i would be relegated to the back row with the old manuals, the remingtons that stuck, not up front with the new ibm selectrics, like miss showoff of mhs gets, just 'cause her dad's a dentist. no one ever told *him* he had bad breath, not when he's hovering over you with that whirly thing called a drill, but everyone knows is a torture instrument right out of "marat/sade." which i didn't know about, except i overheard *him* talking about it. the one with the *brain*, the s a t king, the one who's got his acceptance and it's only second semester junior year. and a scholarship. someone said two but they lie. about everything.

and my notebook keeps filling up and you ask me where i get it all from, these things i tuck away, and rush home to put down, and i lie and laugh and say a little bird told me, but you never ask--never really ask--like i want you to, so i can finally tell someone that all this just *is* here, inside me, simmering.

that the first time i thought about something, that i can remember, it seemed sharper than it was and i wanted not to lose the feeling so i ran home and told. and told. and mom said that's nice, and later she told dad that i could make up cute little rhymes and he said that's nice, but in his eyes i saw a light-----

and then last year, after aunt hazel's picnic, after i'd eaten all her cuke salad and went in the house to lay down and there she was: old aunt carrie--and she said come here, and touched my arms and face like she owned me, and made me sit on the old musty horse-hair couch that felt greasy slick from so long ago and answer questions and then she said: just like her grandma. just like emma. . . . and with a crumpled hankie that had violets on it, she wiped away the sticky of her eyes, and added: emma wanted to write, but she never got the time, and then it all ran as clear as spring water around the cream can, and i bolted for the cemetery, ran all the way, all the way to the edge of town, all the way to the rosy granite headstone that marked her place, and shouted out THANK YOU, THANK YOU.

Second Place: ALICE Drill

Sylvia Cavanaugh, Cedar Grove

Of course, nothing actually happened.
He was an ordinary student, a bit shy,
part of an 11th grade homeroom who
had known each other since 9th grade—
Charity lined up by the door right in front
of him, with her long blond hair which
she grabbed and slung over her shoulder
as she half-smiled because even though
she was popular she was not unfriendly
to kids like him, and he was six feet tall
by 11th grade, with red hair that could be easy
to spot by a gunman outside as the students
filed along the sidewalk to the middle
school—the safe place to meet up in case
of an active shooter situation, and he
wondered, *what if a shooter heard
about this drill*—then they would all
be sitting ducks, shuffling along
the sidewalk, the clear blue Midwestern
sky offering its complements to glowing
pink peonies, neatly staked in neighborhood
yards with maple trees out front, newly
leafed out in bright green extravagance
and purple lilac scent wafting into the street
but the Midwestern landscape is flat,
allowing a shooter a clear view
for a considerable distance, and he wonders
whether he would die instantly or lie
bleeding on the sidewalk, calling out
for his mother, so he walks beside his teacher,
a middle-aged woman and short,
and babbling on about peonies
and the sun and the faint breeze and the need
to wear sunscreen now that summer
is right around the corner, and how
it's lucky that the middle school
is so close, just around the corner *and look,
we're almost there now*, and after this
he'll be able to go back to Lincoln High
and study math in his regular third hour class.

Third Place: Love

Lynn M Aprill, Seymour

Sometimes,
when a female elephant
is about to die,

the male will try to mate with her.
No biology or logic
explains this response,

this meeting of two masses,
trunks entwined, a shuddering
clench of joining—in nature,

the only purpose for mating
is procreation.
And yet . . .

What reason could there be
for the bull
to long for connection

one last time?
Only the attempt
to keep his beloved

tethered to earth
and to him
for just a little longer,

to feel the last of her breath
from the bottom of her being
at the moment of her departure.

What, then,
would I do
to keep you here?

Honorable Mention: Missing

Sara Sarna, Oconomowoc

**after Jane Mead*

When we give up our bodies,
leave behind what no longer serves,
I wonder if I will miss language,

the way it feels in my mouth,
the long and short of vowels,
staccato of hurried speech,

or the feel of pencil lead
trailing on paper as loops
and lines become meaning.

What will happen to the stories
we have not shared
because we didn't know the end?



Honorable Mention: Letter to My Mother in Winter

R.B. Simon, Madison

It's early this year
the snow began falling
before Halloween
heavy as unshared burdens
I feel it in my elbow first
(the one I broke falling down
the stairs another Winter years ago
when you drove an hour to see me in the
hospital)
that familiar dull pull on the regrown bone
as I carry the groceries in through
the slush to our cerulean kitchen

The snowy season is when I miss you most
when I recall the sunny times
the traditions you tried so hard
to instill like guard rails
against the tornado of your family legacy
the women's hushed gossip
in the kitchen as they washed
dishes after every holiday meal
– making a fallacy of any feminist
protestations

The walls, the season, remind me
of the way you painted
our old kitchen avocado green
trimmed in white, perfectly decorated for the
holiday parties
you hosted, where we'd decorate dozens of
cookies and candies
marzipan, fudge, spritz, divinity, gingerbread
lining every countertop

Still as I put away the flour, butter, sugar
for my own upcoming baking days
I love you best for this – that in every
perfectly crafted confection, every
familial recipe
you wrote out by hand, passed down
on index cards in your flowered green box
I could read within your thin, delicate scrawl

*this, daughter, is not the only
way it's done*

MEET AND GREET

Honorable Mention: Marriage

Lynne Shaner, Whitefish Bay

I fingerprint with yogurt,
Unaware. On the icy-glinting brushed-
stainless arched neck
of the faucet.
It drives him nuts.

He commits the linen sin of towels,
Pulling them with crossword-ink stained
hands,
leaving them pulled and
crumpled.
It hurts my eyes.

But then, some days, I see him, head bent,
focusing
As he carefully wipes down the
gooseneck faucet,
wiping clean the milky prints.
The stainless reflection gleams
ribbon-bright.

And I launder, fold, smooth
The linens.
Bringing aesthetic peace, clean harmony
Back to the tiny room.

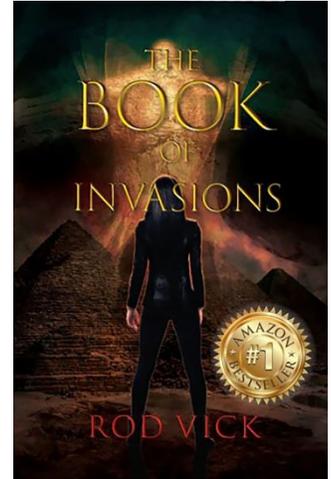
And I am, sometimes, momentarily aware
That we will not always be here.

One morning, I will long for
The simple act of folding crushed towels,
Setting our world straight. With him,
Upstairs, readying for the day.

He will, some moment, long for these easy days
when
He could bend to the faucet, knowing I am
Knitting in the next room.

Meet your fellow WWA Members. In this edition, Nancy Dearborn introduces us to fellow WWA member and author Rod Vick. Nancy Dearborn, Verona

The plot line in Rod Vick's page-turning novel *The Book of Invasions* is instantly gripping. It's a globe-spanning adventure of good vs. evil where Ricky Crowe, a sister of one of a dozen murdered climate scientists, comes into possession of an ancient parchment map, and the race is on to find a powerful evil that has remained hidden for more than fifty centuries.



What experiences or research gave you the idea for *The Book of Invasions*? Did you travel anywhere to aid in the novel's research?

I had previously written two series for YA readers where Celtic mythology played a key role, *The Dance of Time* series, and *The Irish Witch* series. Much of Celtic mythology comes from an ancient, apocryphal history of Ireland known as *Lebor Gabala Erenn*. The myth of Cessair, in particular, caught my imagination. She was, supposedly, a step-granddaughter of Noah, but according to *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, he refused her a spot on the ark. Of course, some might view both the original ark story and the tale of Cessair as mere myth. But behind almost every myth lies a grain of truth. Great flood or not, there may indeed have been a ship-building Noah who feared one. And Noah's refusal sparked a question: Why would he refuse a spot to a family member? Just what had she done—or what did he fear she might do—that led Noah to turn her away? And

whatever it was, could it still have terrible ramifications today? Letting my imagination run with that idea led to the plot for my novel, *The Book of Invasions*. While I didn't travel anywhere for research purposes, I received much help from the scientists at ZERO Station in Greenland, where the opening chapter is set, who were even kind enough to send me floor plans of buildings there.

How did you prepare to write *The Book of Invasions*? Did you write an extensive outline, write extensive notes on each character, etc.?

I wrote a rough outline and the first chapter, which flowed pretty easily. I wrote a few notes on the primary characters, but I was able to really flesh them out as I discovered how they evolved in the novel. Ricky, the main character, was dramatically different in early drafts, including her name. In fact, she was too beautiful, too clever, too perfect. She became more flawed and human as I revised.

Did the plot and the characters surprise you at times? Please give a few examples of this.

I am constantly surprised by my plot and characters. In writing a thriller of this sort, it's assumed that my characters are going to find themselves in some tight situations. I love doing that, creating situations from which it seems impossible for them to extricate themselves. And when I write the situation, I often have no idea how my characters are going to resolve or survive it. That's when I have to put on the ol' thinking cap and come up with something that will get most readers saying, "Wow, I would have never expected that!" It's fun. An example would be when Ricky and her friends are buried underground in the Egyptian mastaba. No phones, no tools, no exits. No one knows where they are, except the bad guys, and they're not telling. Pretty soon, the oxygen will be exhausted. No way out. Yet, they survive.

Do you think it's more challenging to write from a character's viewpoint if that character is from the opposite sex?

Explain.

I do. But this isn't the first time. Most of my YA novels are written from the point of view of a teenaged girl. I think having been a teacher has helped with this. You become a keen observer of how kids act toward each other, and you get an idea of how they think. It also helps, I believe, to read a lot of YA as well as adult novels written from different gender perspectives. I'm a big fan of Dean Koontz's Jane Hawk series, of *The Hunger Games*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*, among others.

How did you come up with some of the names of your characters?

Naming characters is like naming children. It can be a struggle. The fact that some of my characters had Irish names complicated the matter. Ricky was originally Siobhan, and Grandma Neve was originally Niamh. My beta readers, who read an early draft and were incredibly helpful, suggested some name changes. Otherwise, they felt readers would be distracted by pronunciation issues.

Which character in *The Book of Invasions* do you relate to the most and why?

I think it's hard not to put at least some of yourself into your protagonist. But minimizing that has been part of my own growth as a writer. When I was in my twenties, all of the main characters in my stories sounded like me, thought like me, reacted to situations like me, etc. Now I make a real effort to observe other people and to let my characters make decisions based on what people not like me might do. That being said, I sort of imagined myself as Dr. Thomas Campion, the scholarly tag-along. He's a teacher.

What do you hope to accomplish with *The Book of Invasions*?

If people enjoy it, then the book has achieved its goal. It would be nice to sell a lot of copies

and to get to know Stephen King on a first-name basis, but every positive review is another sign that I've accomplished what I set out to do.

What is the most challenging part of your writing process?

Finding time, especially with the chunk of time that marketing and promoting my existing books takes. The writing itself is paradise. I'm blessed with never having writer's block.

What are your top five suggestions for people desiring to become better writers?

- Put dedicated writing time into your schedule almost every day, even if it's just a half hour. If you were planning on running a marathon, you wouldn't do very well if you only trained once a week. Regular writing is essential.
- Get trusted, educated individuals to give you honest feedback before submitting your work.
- Enjoy the revision process.
- Write a first sentence that makes the reader want to read the second.
- Be a people watcher. And listener.

How soon do you anticipate *The Book of Invasions* will be made into a movie?

Haha! Have pigs grown wings? There's quite a bit of good fortune that would have to occur for that opportunity to arise. But if it happens, I hope it's a box office smash! Maybe they'll let me do a cameo as Dr. Campion.

Nancy Dearborn is the author of picture books, and a middle grade novel, as well as several articles in magazine such as *Potato Soup* and *Joy-Filled Living*.

Rod Vick is an award-winning, Amazon best-selling author of adult thrillers and murder whodunits. Named the 2000 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year, he continues to enjoy conducting workshops and speaking to writers' groups. <http://www.rodvick.com>

At Some Point

Jocelyn Boor, Grafton

I know that half of the bed
Will be empty.
Who will reach out trembling hands to the
empty space
With a longing – a need – to touch,
To cuddle, spooning one more time?
This will be devastating for the one left
behind,
Wailing “I love you” to the empty space
While clutching the empty pillow with the
unchanged case.
I hope it's not me.

Jocelyn Boor lives in Grafton, WI, teaches art history at UW-Milwaukee, and writes whenever a marking implement finds her hand. She composes poetry, essays, and academic documents.

This One Last Mowing

Thomas Dunne, Fort Atkinson

Lawnmower engine roars against the high
sun's heat of a summer's day
heat against heat – bring it on
neighbor's mower against your mower –
git 'er done.
suddenly Autumn arrives and this
is the final mowing of the year.
the lawnmower engine roars,
but into a hollow, indifferent void;
summer's heat is gone,
the grass is tired and doesn't care
the air is chilled and the sun is on a low angle
blinding you at the turns
you know it's time to winterize
after this one last mowing.

Thomas Dunne is a member of the Wisconsin Writers Association and the Wisconsin Fellowship Of Poets and lives in rural Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. He retired in 2019 and spends much of his time writing and walking along the country roads.

WWA's Youth Writing Competition, 2022

Presenting the First, Second, and Third place finalists! Thank you to Carol Paur and Terri Karsten for all of their hard work.

1st Place in each will be awarded \$75.00

2nd Place in each will be awarded \$50.00

3rd Place in each will be awarded \$25.00

*All winners will get a free one-year membership to the WWA and publication in *Creative Wisconsin*.

Poetry:

First – Caroline Frost, “recipe for a teenage girl”

Second – Amara Guerino, “Do You Understand?”

Third – Finnley Orion, “out of place”

Non-fiction:

First – Logan Pickart, “Hypocritical Characters in the Scarlet Letter”

Second – Bethany Nummerdor, “Untouchable”

Third – Henry Kwaitkowski, “The Spirit and Nature in National Parks”

Fiction:

First – Jack Clizer, “Cadaverous”

Second – Annika Wheeler, “Dear Mr. Shakespeare”

Third – Matteo Schiro, “Lost Crew”

Judge's comments on the first place poetry piece: Besides being fun, I love Caroline's creativity in the way she shares the things that make up this unique “teenage girl”: chi tea, shoelace from a cleat, shells, and a snowshoe strap. But she doesn't leave it there, we are to “bake in the heat of a stage light through smoke until rapping on the crust produces a vibrating cry.” A great image as you bask in her “countless little passions that swirl and multiply”! Well done, Caroline!

recipe for a teenage girl

Caroline Frost, Arrowhead Union High School, Hartland

1. take one mugful of chai tea with coiling steam,
place it on the kitchen table beside an open book
(some suggestions: in the dream house, sadie, never let me go)
2. finely dice one cleat shoelace, sun dried and coated in mud, and pour it in with a few drops of sweat: from games, from practice, from volunteer afternoons
3. season with shells sourced from a small wooden dock
if freshwater: add in the tears of the youngest nanny child, quickly consoled
if saltwater: lucky you
4. stir with the strap of a snowshoe that keeps getting caught, struggling to hold in a too-wide boot.
quickly tighten it, the rest of the hiking group awaits
5. bake in the heat of a stagelight through smoke
until rapping on the crust produces a vibrating cry,
like a phoebe bridgers concert or the last night of les mis.

once done, you will taste the flavors of a life,
of the first spring afternoon or a summer on the shore
of eighteen falls of age, eighteen new-music winters
and countless little passions that swirl and multiply.

Do You Understand?

Amara Guerino, Waukesha North High School,
Waukesha

“We understand how you’re feeling” it’s
something they all claim

But do you understand the feeling of being
useless?

Broken to no return.

Do you understand fighting the urge not to drag
the sharp blade across your pale skin just so you
can have the feeling that you're in control?

Do you understand having to fake your smile just
so someone doesn't ask if something is wrong?

To the point where if they do ask you if
something is wrong your eyes flood with tears?
Do you understand that sometimes all you want
to do is just stop breathing but you can't just for
the fact that you don't want your parents to tell
your little brother?

Do you understand that nothing is how it seems?

Now tell me,

Do you understand?

out of place

Finnley Orion, Menomonee Falls High School,
Menomonee Falls

I am standing in a room
Consumed by flames
And somehow
I am drowning.

Salty water engulfs my lungs
And stings my throat
I'm choking
I cannot speak.

My body is warm
As the flames lick at my feet
My hands are hot
I cannot move.

I am paralyzed
In this room of ocean
And flames
I am afraid.

Nonfiction

Of the first place nonfiction piece, the judge says: This well-written essay explores Hawthorne's use of symbolism to explore hypocrisy in Puritan society in *The Scarlet Letter*. The author does a good job of using source material as evidence, and balances quotes with explanations. I especially liked the conclusion, showing how the hypocrisy shown in this novel can still serve as a warning to society today.

Hypocritical Characters in The Scarlet Letter

Logan Pickart, Dodgeland High School, Juneau

As Billy Sunday once said, “Hypocrites in the Church? Yes, and in the lodge and at the home. Don't hunt through the Church for a hypocrite. Go home and look in the mirror. Hypocrites? Yes. See that you make the number one less.” Sunday is referring to the notion that we can all be two-faced at times, which is also a recurring theme in the book *The Scarlet Letter*. Nathaniel Hawthorne highlights the role of hypocrisy and characters who symbolize much more than feelings or small ideas. *The Scarlet Letter* is set in a very strict Puritan society where sins are deeply frowned upon. When the public finds out that Hester Prynne—a young woman originally from England—committed adultery and is pregnant, they are astonished and immediately look toward punishment. This novel takes a deeper look at how Hester, Pearl (the baby), and Arthur Dimmesdale (Pearl's father) act in a society where sin is condemned. Throughout the book, Hawthorne uses symbols such as the scarlet letter, Pearl, and Dimmesdale to challenge the hypocrisy in Puritan Society—hypocrisy that remains evident in other religious settings.

The scarlet letter “A” is a prominent symbol from the very start of *The Scarlet Letter*. It represents public shaming and, when compared to other symbols, proves the insignificance and hypocrisy of Puritan societal values. In “An Analysis of Hester’s Hypocrisy in The Scarlet Letter,” Yanxia Sang states that “Hester’s attitude to the symbol of sin had never changed from beginning to end; she had never looked on it as a symbol of her compunction” (449). In other words, the author believes that Hester never thought of the scarlet letter as representing her guilt. Even though the public wants her to feel guilty by wearing the letter, Hester does not share the same belief as the public. Consequently, the misunderstanding between Hester and the public signifies the hypocrisy present in the scarlet letter itself. The public is set on making her feel guilty; however, the same people state that “at the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne’s forehead. Madam Hester would have winced at that, I warrant me. But she,—the naughty baggage,—little will she care what they put upon the bodice of her gown”(Hawthorne 36). In this quote, a group of women in the community gossip about Hester’s punishment while waiting for her to come out and stand on the scaffolding in front of the crowd. This demonstrates the two-faced behaviors the scarlet letter is capable of exposing. A group of women gossip—a sin in Puritan society—about someone else’s sin. That makes them just as misguided as Hester; both parties commit sins. The only difference is that Hester is punished, whereas the gossiping women receive no punishment. The scarlet letter also brings attention to the hypocrisy of Puritan society through the limits placed on Hester’s work. For instance, “...it is not recorded that, in a single instance, her skill was called in aid to embroider the white veil which was to cover the pure blushes of a bride. The exception

indicated the ever relentless vigor with which society frowned upon her sin” (Hawthorne 57). In this section of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester is starting to finally gain respect. She is able to sew ruffs for government officials’ collars, but is restricted from making veils for brides in weddings. It seems surprising that Hester is able to sew for well-respected government officials yet not be able to make veils for regular citizens. Once again, the impact of the scarlet letter—a visual representation of sin—reveals the hypocrisy in Puritan society.

Hester Prynne’s child, Pearl, is a physical representation of the sin of adultery. Pearl is the opposite of every Puritan standard and, because of this, she illustrates the hypocrisy of Puritan society. Pearl is full of energy and life, whereas other Puritan children are dull and constrained by strict rules. In an excerpt from the article “Hawthorne's Pearl: The Origins of Good and Evil in *The Scarlet Letter*,” the author makes the point that “There is a spiteful lawlessness to many of Pearl’s actions that mirrors her mother’s own former rebellion against the community’s laws. Pearl is uninhibited by the rules of propriety: she dances where she pleases, even on the graves of Puritan patriarchs” (Renner 166). Even though Puritan society teaches children to obey rules and seemingly makes it a crime to have fun, Pearl does not seem to care. As explained by Renner, Pearl dances on top of the gravestones of Puritan leaders from times past. By breaking the rules so blatantly, Pearl represents more than just a wild child; she represents the hypocrisy of Puritan values. Puritan society values rules and strict enforcement, yet Pearl acts in opposition to these values. Hawthorne embodies this representation when he states that “Pearl was born outcast of the infantile world. An imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants” (64). In other words, Pearl acts so differently that she

becomes an outcast among other children her age. Society holds on to traditions so strongly and follows rules so that behaving childlike—how Pearl acts—is viewed as evil and sin-ridden behavior. Despite a strict Puritan upbringing, Pearl’s opposition to traditional standards demonstrates the hypocrisy of Puritan values.

Arthur Dimmesdale resides as the pastor for the Puritan community. Little do the townspeople know, as the father of Pearl he clearly indicates hypocrisy in Puritan society. One critic states “...to appreciate the plaintiveness of his utterance, it must be recognized that to the Puritans, and to Dimmesdale as a Puritan Minister, the public exposure of sin is of vital importance to the sinner... To the townspeople, ignorant of Dimmesdale’s role in Hester’s sin, this utterance is clearly an order from a minister to a wayward member of his congregation” (Pimple 258). Dimmesdale is a minister, which means the public expects him to be honest and sinless; however, it is hypocritical that he committed a big sin. It’s like a police officer committing a crime or a firefighter starting a fire—it goes against everything society believes these roles should represent. Hawthorne writes that “no man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the truth” (147-148). In other words, Dimmesdale acts two-sided; on one side he presents to the public a spiritual and wholesome demeanor and on the other side he demonstrates sinful behavior and a fragmented mental state. This quote brings to life the hypocrisy of a minister committing a sin. Dimmesdale puts on two different faces, unable to act like his true self. Consequently, he starts to struggle with his mental health. In one situation, Dimmesdale struggles so badly with the reality of his sin it drives him to climb the

scaffold and repent in front of the empty town square. In such a strict, religion-based society it is extremely surprising that the minister (who should be the most spiritual of all the people) has to repent for a sin. Supposedly, he holds the position closest to God in Puritan society. Yet, in the middle of the night he tries to repent in an effort to come to peace with his sin. Again, the hypocrisy of Puritan society becomes clear.

The Scarlet Letter focuses on and criticizes the values and customs of Puritan society. Over the course of the book, Hester, Pearl, and Dimmesdale each emphasize different aspects of the hypocrisy present in a traditional Puritan community. The visual scarlet letter “A,” the physical representation of Pearl, and the theological portrayal of Dimmesdale all lead to a feeling of mockery within the society. The same hypocrisy that Hawthorne identified in 1850, and represented in Hester, Pearl, and Dimmesdale, still exists today in many communities around the world. Even the most well-intentioned people can succumb to being judgmental and insincere. *The Scarlet Letter* could serve as a reminder to modern society—blindly following meaningless traditions, just because they are traditions, stifles growth, limits open-mindedness, and stalls forward-thinking, both within individuals and communities as a whole.

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Untouchable

Bethany Nummerdor, Dodgeland High School, Juneau

My mom is taking forever, I thought to myself, as I wiped my tear-streaked face. The principal called her almost an hour ago already. Just as I finished my thought, I saw her car pull up to the school and reluctantly made my way to her car.

This wasn't gonna be good, I thought; I could hear her yelling from here. As I open the door, she hangs up the phone and turns to me, and I'm taken aback; she's been crying. And from the looks of it, for a while.

"Mom, what's wrong?" I asked her.

"Aspen called the school and said you came into close contact through Kayleigh," she responded.

"Aspen's the one who called? Mrs. Jensen didn't tell me that," I told her.

"Yeah. And now she said we can't see Kayleigh anymore because we 'were so careless with other children's safety just because you wanted to go to school.'"

"Wait. Aspen never even tested Kayleigh so how did we come in contact with her?"

"I have no clue. But she is cemented on her idea that we won't be seeing Kayleigh anymore. I'm sorry, Boo." I sat back into my seat. Kayleigh was barely one year old and I was expected not to see her again? How did this happen? Why did this happen? What did I do to deserve this? I was so confused.

"Boo? Are you all right?" Mom asked.

"I'm fine. Let's just go home," I responded. On our way home, all I could think about was Kayleigh: her goofy laugh, the way she would smile so big every time I walked into the room, and the night I babysat her by myself when she was only weeks old.

When we got home, I ran straight to my room. I was supposed to be the strong one in our family. I never cried about anything or let my anger get the best of me in situations like these. But I was just so hurt that I couldn't stop myself. I pulled out my phone and sent Aspen exactly what was on my mind: if living without Kayleigh meant living without her, I could learn to live with that. A few minutes later, just when I was about to let myself cry about the loss of my living niece, my sister barged into my room.

"Aspen's not letting you see Kayleigh anymore," she declared.

"What do you mean, Brittney? None of us are allowed to see her," I challenged.

"No, I still get to see her. Aspen isn't mad at me. Just you and Mom," she bragged.

"Get out," I snapped.

"Amy, I—"

"No. You came in here just to rub the worst news I have gotten in years in my face. Get the heck out of my room!" I shouted. When Brittney finally left, it felt like my heart was being torn out of my chest and crushed right in front of me, and I couldn't stop it anymore. The sobs took over my whole body and I curled in on myself. I didn't want to feel this anymore: to feel anything, really. All I could think about was Kayleigh's smile. How she would light up the room with it; how I would never see it again.

Months later, I was told that my brother was going to have a baby and I had a panic attack while driving because I thought he would turn around and do exactly what Aspen had done: rip his child right out of my life and not think twice about it.

Two months after that I went back to school and pretended that nothing happened, but everything was different; the

school looked different, there were a ton of new people, and classes were way harder this year. But it wasn't long until I made a new friend: Blake. It was uncomfortable for me at first. With my sense of humor, people misunderstood almost everything I would say. However, it wasn't long until I found out why Blake was so easy to talk to: he had the same humor as me. We clicked instantly.

Everything I had done since Aspen left had revolved around her, but Blake started to make me feel as though the world didn't revolve around Aspen and I would be okay. That is, until I dyed my hair. My mom would see Aspen every time she looked at me, and start crying. After a while, I couldn't handle it anymore. The whole situation made me feel as if everything was my fault. As I sat on my bed with tears streaming down my face, I gave into my inner demons. With one breath, I took out my pen and notebook, and began writing the letters.

Mom, Dad, I'm so sorry. I don't want to hurt you but I can't handle this pain anymore. I can't handle having to be okay for everyone else. I can't do it anymore. I am so tired of being the one person everyone can lean on and the one who everyone views as emotionless. Tell Brittney I love her and give the dogs extra treats for me. Give Hannah, Chloe, and Autumn free reign of all my stuff. I know it will be hard at first, but know this is NOT your fault. Please, do not open the second letter this one is lying on; it's for Aspen.

Dear Aspen,

You took everything from me. You took my sister, you took my niece, and in the end (though indirectly), you took my life. I gave you everything I could. Love, gifts, I even gave you my dog. What else did you want? Mom and Dad gave you everything but you didn't care. It all had to be about how poorly they treated you. Every time

they did something good for you, you had to go off about how they didn't care. And believe me when I tell you, they couldn't have cared more. They loved you and you had to go and treat them like absolute shit. You didn't care about anyone else, and now I won't have to, either. Iris is the sole beneficiary of the money in my account. There isn't much in there, but at least she will have something you can't take and use for your drugs.

Wish I could say "with love," but you took that opportunity from my hands. -Amy

As I lay my pen down, I picked up the knife from my desk. My tears had long gone, but I still felt the ghost of them. As I scrubbed my cheeks with one hand, I positioned the knife with the other. After one last deep breath, I steadily applied pressure on my calf with the knife. I closed my eyes and thought about all the people I'd be leaving behind; my parents, friends, and my sister.

They will only hurt for a little while, I thought. Suddenly, as if my single thought could summon him, my phone rang; it was Blake. I cleared my throat and whipped the knife down beside me and answered the phone.

"Hello?" I said, my voice coming out shakier than I had hoped.

"What's wrong?" Were the first words I heard from his end.

"Nothing, I was just thinking about Aspen again," I lied, looking at the scene in front of me.

"Amy, I know you're lying, what happened?"

"Nothing. I'm fine now. What's up?"

"You're sure?"

I glanced at the letters, the knife, and the phone in my hand.

"Yeah. I'm fine now." As he talked, I

listened, and he made me realize I was going to be okay.

After we said our goodbyes, I picked up the letters and ripped them up—I wouldn't be needing them anymore—and put the knife back as well. Aspen broke something in me that day, and I didn't know how to fix it—I didn't know if I wanted to. It was peaceful like that: never having to feel anything bad. It was like nothing could hurt me—like I was untouchable. But talking with Blake that day, not about anything serious but about random little things, made me realize that it wasn't the end of the world. It made me think that I could be okay, maybe not soon, but eventually.

Aspen will always hold a special place in my heart. Now, that place may not always be good, but she will always be there. She took the little self confidence that I had with her when she left.

Although Aspen had torn me down, Blake was right there to pick me back up when no one else could. He is the one who taught me that I was a person worth loving, and who taught me that even though Aspen left, there is nothing wrong with me. Blake is the one who taught me that having emotions doesn't make me weak; it makes me strong and even more untouchable than I ever was without them.



The Spirit and Nature in National Parks

Henry Kwaitkowski

Williams Bay High School, Williams Bay

Transcendentalism was a movement in the early 1800s, mainly advocated by Ralph Waldo Emerson, which preached philosophical, religious, and political movements in American literature. Transcendentalists believed that nature is sacred, and that it is imperative for individuals to connect with nature. The connection between one's spirit and nature is reflected in our everyday environment, as expressed by Emerson. Some of the best examples in our daily environment that encompass the relationship between the spirit and nature are our national parks. Three very different national parks that vividly display this relationship are the Badlands, Acadia, and Redwood.

The idea that is commonly expressed from Thoreau and Emerson's transcendentalism works is how the spirit is reflected in nature. In Emerson's transcendentalism essay, Nature, he states "Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man... For, nature is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today. Nature always wears the colors of the spirit" (Emerson). This quote by Emerson presents the belief that we, as humans, have the ability to enjoy the world and nature or take it for granted. Emerson also expresses that nature has the ability to reflect our mood, and nature always reflects the spiritual side of the observer.

Another idea that is expressed in transcendentalism is the relationship between man and nature. This idea is most commonly exhibited in Emerson's transcendentalism essay, Nature, as he states, "the greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not

alone and unacknowledged” (Emerson). This quote by Emerson illustrates the transcendentalism belief that man and nature have a mutual relationship, as when man cares for nature, nature finds a way to repay. Emerson expresses the fact that one’s spirit does not go “unacknowledged,” as one is surrounded by the life of nature.

The Badlands National Park is located in South Dakota and consists of 244,000 acres of buttes, jagged rock formations, and spires, blended with one of the largest prairies in the United States. The stone formations in the badlands are a work of art formed across the span of millions of years through the processes of: deposition, and erosion. The Badlands National Park consists of colorful spires, and pinnacles, made from layers of sediment. Erosion over the years in the badlands has revealed numerous shades of colors inside the rock formations. From purple and yellow to red, orange, and white, the badlands consist of a wide appearance of colors stretching across its plateau. When dusk hits, a beautiful shade of light is cast over the badlands, giving it an almost orangish glow. “Nature always wears the colors of the spirit” is shown in the Badlands National Park, depending on the mood one is feeling (Emerson). For example, if one was in a good mood, the way they view the Badlands would be different from those who were in a bad mood. Further elaborating on this, people who are in a good mood would describe the badlands as: beautiful rock formations with shades of purple, yellow, and red, that glow in the sunset. While people who are in a bad mood would describe the badlands as: rock formations isolated in the desert with bland colors of yellow, orange, and white that become dimmer in the sunset. While both descriptions describe the Badlands, they are different depictions: one represents a brighter, and happier environment, and the other represents a duller, and more depressing environment. The spirit’s connection with nature is reflected through emotion, not only in the Badlands, but also in other areas of the world.

Acadia National Park, located in Maine, is home to the highest rocky headlands along the Atlantic coastline, and 49,000 acres of beautiful scenery. Acadia is famous for stunning fall foliage, and it’s blanketed in a white blanket in the winter, giving it a radiant glow. Acadia National Park is also home to various bodies of water. Acadia National Park consists of various mountains, and a vast colorful forest stretching across many acres. During the fall, many trees lace the ground with a variety of colorful leaves. This park boasts many mountains that are over 1,000 feet tall, with the tallest being Cadillac Mountain at 1,530 feet. In Emerson’s transcendentalism essay, Nature, he elaborates on how the perception of nature is greatly influenced by one’s mood, and spirit. For example, if someone was in a great mood, they would describe the scenery in this park as being high up in the mountains where one can see the clouds, surrounded by a thick, and colorful forest with scattered bodies of water throughout the landscape. In contrast to this, one who was in a horrible mood would describe the scenery as high up in the mountains where the wind is strong, and the temperature is freezing, surrounded by a forest where no light seeps through. They would most likely also describe themselves as being in the mountains and isolated from the rest of the world. Even though both descriptions are describing the same scenery, it’s the observer’s mood that alters how they perceive it. The person who is in a great mood generally illustrates the beauty of the environment, as compared to those in a horrible mood who typically illustrate the environment in a depressing, dull, and isolated way. The spirit’s connection with nature can be reflected through many different ways, not only through emotion, but also through mutual relationships. Another park that helps illustrate the spirit’s connection with nature is Redwood.

Redwood National Park is located in California, and is home to the United States’ biggest forest of redwoods. Redwood National Park consists of 139,000 acres filled with vast

forests, various overlooks, and a bordering ocean. The Redwood National Park consists of some of the biggest trees on the planet, redwoods, stretching across the landscape. The various redwoods give the environment a reddish glow, especially during the sunset. Redwood National Park is also home to various overlooks that view the vast forests of the park, as well as the neighboring ocean. The national park also contains a beach front that borders the Pacific Ocean, that during the sunset, reflects a reddish glow off of the water. In Emerson's essay, "Nature," he elaborates on the mutual relationship between nature and man. The Redwood National Park has been under the protection of the California government for decades, and has expanded over the years, stretching from the Pacific Ocean to the Oregon border. Under the years it was protected, the redwood forest grew, covering more square acres by the year. Now, the redwood forest covers thousands of acres, and provides the national park with beautiful scenery. This development over the years displays the mutual relationship presented by Emerson because as people cared for the redwoods, they were repaid with breathtaking views, and scenery.

Man and nature interact with each other in many ways; in some ways, they define each other, and in other ways, they help one another. The relationship between the spirit and nature is incorporated into our everyday lives in a variety of ways. Two of these ways include: one's perception of nature based on their mood, and the mutual relationship between nature and man. Nature and the spirit connect in many different environments, from the mountain tops of Acadia, to the dry terrain of the badlands. These same relations that are shown between spirit and nature, have been expressed by the transcendentalists for centuries. From nature, to man, and to the individual's spirit, there is an endless web of relationships with each other.

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Fiction

About "Cadaverous," first place in fiction, the judge says: The scene of snow, wind, barn, and a dark forest was very descriptive. An open ending but the total story was enjoyable. Mystery, drama. Well done.

Cadaverous

Jack Clizer, Laurel High School, Viroqua

It was two nights before Christmas when it happened. Exactly what it was that happened I am still trying to rationalize in my own mind. It was an hour after sunset when I began to prepare for a trip to the barn to restock the horse feed in preparation for the morning. I was accompanied by my trusty companion, Daffodil, my father's three-year-old Rottweiler. Most days I wouldn't have taken her out in a blizzard like the one that happened that night, but for some reason she seemed eager to accompany me. My father used to let her come with him whenever he went outdoors, even if it was just for a moment. So I figured one quick trip to the barn wouldn't hurt her much.

The barn itself was a large structure, and fairly typical as barns go except for one detail: it was made from an old church. I can't remember exactly when the church itself was built, but we had bought this property a few years after it was abandoned. Ever since I was a kid I had thought the church added a certain eerie tone to the property. It was nights like

that one that made that feeling come to a boiling point.

Looking out the kitchen window, it seemed as if the snow went on forever, an imposing sea of white that was at least knee deep or even deeper. My father always said how he reckoned the snow could swallow a man whole if he stepped in the wrong place. Keeping those words in mind, I pulled on my boots, put my coat on, along with my gloves, and opened the door. I was met with an immediate explosion of painfully cold air hitting my bare face, but I pressed onward. Nine months out of the year the barn is only a few hundred feet away, just down a stone path my father and I laid down a few years ago. But during a cold December night, the journey could feel like miles. As I walked through the heavy snowfall and painful wind, all I could see was the light of a fading moon, and the faint yellow glow of a lantern my neighbor always put out on nights like this. The light was just barely allowed to shine through the heavy snowfall and the dense forest that separated our properties. My father used to do the same thing before he died. I had asked them why they put lanterns out, but they consistently avoided giving me an answer.

While light was scarce, I could still make out the mouth of the forest as it watched me closely as I walked. My father kept telling me ghost stories about that forest. He said the devil lived out in those woods. Of course, my father being who he was, I always thought that he told me that just to make sure I didn't wander out there in the middle of the night, but a part of me always felt like there was more to it than that.

The cold wind hit my ears with enough force to feel as if they were being stabbed by hundreds of little needles. I clasped my hands over my ears as if I was praying to God to give them some semblance of warmth. They muffled the sounds of the rushing wind, when I suddenly heard a sound come from the forest. I snapped my hands back down to my side to try

and hear the sound again. I heard nothing but the wind. Eventually the wind caused my face to feel as if it was being pulled taut around my cheekbones and I started walking once more.

I figured I was about halfway to the barn when I saw a flash of brown and white out of the corner of my eye. I stopped for a moment, the cold wind still pushing against me as I squinted towards the direction of the movement. I could see the fading silhouette of a deer.

Just beyond the entrance to the forest, I stayed motionless for a few more seconds as I saw its tail dart back and forth going deeper into the trees. Eventually it had disappeared from my view and the light of the moon dissipated into the pines.

I turned back to the barn and I could just barely make out its large door when I heard a shrill bellow coming from deep within the trees. The sound caused the hairs on the back of my neck to stand up and a thin layer of sweat to manifest underneath my armpits. I snapped my head around to look in the direction it came from and saw nothing but the familiar sight of snow-covered trees. Daffodil stood at attention, looking as if she was ready to fight anything that crossed her path. I hadn't seen this look on her face since the men from the funeral home came to collect my father's cadaverous form almost two years before. That look scared me even more than the horrible screech that I had heard just moments before; that look meant that something was out in those woods that she wanted to protect me from. My bones felt brittle and I began to shake. I turned around and started walking towards the barn a little bit faster than before. That fast pace slowly turned into a sprint as I heard a twig snap behind me. I envisioned some unholy apparition following behind me, and I ran.

I bolted for the door, and in my rush to get inside, I nearly failed to get the door latch open. Once I succeeded, I ran in and I slammed the

door shut behind me. Locking the door, I began to hear fast movements coming from beneath the door, almost unnaturally fast as whatever was out there searched for a way in. As my heart pounded against my chest, I realized that in my rush to get inside I had neglected to get Daffodil inside with me. I looked out a window towards the left side of the barn and I saw that familiar yellow glow once again, but no Daffodil. It was like she had vanished right as I shut the door behind me.

Looking back at the door, I could see a skinny silhouette through the spaces in the door, barely illuminated by the light of the moon. It silently jumped from corner to corner on the other side of the door. It terrified me that someone, no, something was out there, desperately trying to get in, and trying its best to not make me aware of its intentions.

I heard a large bang on the door. It took everything I had in that moment to not scream. I dropped to my knees and began to pray. I felt hot tears of panic run down my face. I tried to stand but my legs would not carry me. I began to weep as I began to call out to my father, hoping that he could save me from beyond the grave. But there was nothing; he did not come. I peered out the window once more, seeing only that lone lantern. A spark went off in my mind and I managed to get enough courage to drag myself to a nearby table which held a lantern and some matches. I lit a match and lowered it towards the base of the lantern. The sound of the match bursting into flames caused whatever was outside to cease its sporadic movements. The light from the lantern seemed to push the shadow away from the door. The gaunt silhouette vanished, along with the terror I had felt only seconds before. I could hear quiet footsteps pushing into the deep snow. And I waited.

An eternity later, I eventually opened the door to the outside, and to my surprise I saw nothing. No wicked specter, no bone-chilling

horrors, and no Daffodil. There was nothing but the moon and that faint lantern light that now seemed as bright as the sun. I started toward the house. Stepping outside of the barn I noticed that the cold wind almost completely dissipated. There was nothing left but the forest and the slow, methodical fall of snow.

Dear Mr. Shakespeare

Annika Wheeler, Laurel High School, Viroqua

January 10, 1595

Dear Mr. Shakespeare,

I wanted to write to thank you for writing me such a beautiful play. It's really more extraordinary than I could have dreamed of. I know that popular opinion may not be on my side, but I find your depiction of me lovelier and more memorable even than the description of Helen of Troy in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. Thank you.

I know you are not finished writing yet, and I have been hoping you can write me out of the difficult spot you have put me into, but I am beginning to feel worried. Maybe the "star-cross'd lovers" metaphor does not have to be played out to its full end? Romeo is banished, but Friar Lawrence believes we will still be together in time, and even that our parents will forgive us and each other. "Be patient, for the world is broad and wide," he said, and I find that a little comforting, though hard.

But he said that before my parents became wild with insistence that I marry Paris immediately. Two days ago my father told Paris he must wait a year or two to think of marrying me, but suddenly my father has become deranged and threatens to disown me if I do not marry Paris tomorrow. I know my father, and it seems this cannot end well. Also, no more stolen kisses from Paris, please. He is

not as noble as he appears.

So, Mr. Shakespeare, perhaps a brief illness—not too disabling—or an urgent diplomatic task can delay the impending doom of my marriage to Paris. I am already married! And I beg you to have all messages be delivered promptly, and all travel to go smoothly, so that I can be reunited with Romeo soon and forever. I feel you have added enough leanings toward tragedy to make things exciting. Now, a calm and happy resolution will be just the thing.

Thank you again, and I wish the best of luck to you and to all of the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

Your Honor's most dutiful bound obedient servant,

Juliet Capulet

P.S. I suppose I will be played by Master Robert Goffe, and I am not displeased, yet perhaps you could suggest to him the Italian woman's beauty secret: to wash his face and hair with donkey's milk? It will do wonders for his complexion and make his hair a bit more luxurious as well. However things end, I'd like to be remembered at my best.

###



Quick advice for

young writers

From Kim Suhr, [Red Oak Writing](#)

We've heard it many times: show, don't tell. But I propose giving the "tell" its due and making your "shows" earn their ink. Detail for detail's sake simply bogs down writing. (Some readers even skip reading long passages of description.) If, however, description builds character, moves the plot along, adds emotional depth, or in some other way does "double duty" in your story telling—then, by all means, go ahead: describe away. If not, use your old friend "tell" and move on to something that really deserves a long, lush portrayal.

The Lost Crew

Matteo Schiro, Arrowhead Union High School,
Hartland

Prologue

We of Mission #46201 for the International Space Corps have recently crashed onto an undiscovered planet that I will call HN1130003. I've brought two of my friends with me on a mission to discover alternatives to Earth due to recent news of the sun beginning the process of becoming a red dwarf assigned by the International Space Corps. Instead, we have been attacked by a gang of space pirates and have been forced to land on HN1130003 due to the damage to the engine and shields. My crew and I have decided to settle in a peculiar forest of giant mushroom-like structures near the crash site.

One group of lime green creatures, resembling a cross between rabbits and turtles, are quite docile and hospitable and appear to be quite intelligent. These creatures have been a great asset to our survival. On our first steps on HN1130003, we were unknowingly surrounded by a pack of grotesque beasts. They were tall, thin, and had a strange, almost boomerang body shape. It would have been a humorous sight had they not had razor-sharp claws and teeth that flickered in the bioluminescent light. That's when the rabbit turtles appeared and rescued us when we fell into the trap the beasts dug out for prey. Despite their small stature, they were fierce in battle and easily defeated them. We bowed before them and they seemed to appreciate our gestures of thanks. They have been sharing their food source of deep cobalt, berry-like objects with me and my friends, and appear to understand our predicament. There is also a stream nearby this food source.

However, our worry is growing as we still have no way to contact the outside world. One of my friends is working to repair the ship, but

due to the lack of parts due to the space pirates' thievery, it is quite the task, to say the least. While the cobalt berries from the rabbit turtles are certainly appreciated, they are far too little for us to not suffer from malnourishment.

There seems to be nothing we can use as material to build a shelter either. One of the members of the crew, former infantry commander FN, is currently surveying the area, in an attempt to find more sufficient food sources or potential signs of civilization. PH, on the other hand, is attempting to find fuel or anything to use as makeshift parts to try to fix the ship. Finally, I am documenting our experience in HN113003, and studying the various plants and lifeforms, both for usage in our attempt to survive and to potentially share this information in the event we make it back to earth.

Day 1, XX/14/XX84

The purple sky of HN113003 was still upon us when we woke up, along with the three shining green moons. It seems that the days on this planet are longer than normal. I went with PH to hunt in the mushroom forest for food. We found a group of bat-like creatures with numerous eyes. Eventually, PH and I decided to scare them off with some nearby branches of the mushrooms in order to take the eggs in their nearby nests. Given their rarity, it would be in our best interest to avoid killing the lifeforms on this system unless it is absolutely necessary.

When PH and I returned to base camp, we found FN conversing with the rabbit turtles. Judging from the artifacts that they have given us, I theorize that these creatures have some sort of religion. In fact, in hindsight, there was a shrine near their cobalt berries. Interestingly, the rabbit turtles seemed to be quite fascinated with the ship. One of them even offered a manta ray-shaped wooden notch.

FN managed to use it to repair the left

wing, leaving only the engine damaged. I doubt that there is anything the rabbit turtles can offer us that can fix the engine. We may have to venture into the caves nearby to find minerals. Given that our mining tools have fallen in the hands of the space pirates, we will have to use our weapons as makeshift pickaxes. FN, PH, and I decided to spend the rest of the day gathering rations to last the mining trip in the caves. We managed to gather more of the bat eggs, berries, fish-like creatures, and wild plants that are either potato or beet-like. We have determined that they are not poisonous based on testing. If we cannot find minerals, we may be truly doomed.

Day 2, XX/15/XX84

The caves here are even more inhospitable than the surface. There are powerful creatures lurking in every dark corner. The only light we have is emitting from our plasma blades and the lakes and waterfalls of lava.

Still, we managed to find many valuable minerals, most of which look like they could be brought back to Earth to make powerful new metals. Interestingly, they come in a variety of unorthodox colors, such as deep purple, sea green, hot pink, and even a combination of many other colors. Additionally, there were many other life forms present in the caves, such as different kinds of bugs, creatures that resembled eyeballs covered with fur that could bizarrely levitate, and a kind of bird that guarded a large, grounded nest. Most notably, there was a monster resembling a scorpion of gargantuan size with large, sharp horns and a snake-like tongue feeding on what seemed to be bright red oil. Naturally, the creature was incredibly hostile; we had no choice but to kill it in order to obtain the oil. It was incredibly powerful and skilled in battle; its armor appeared to resist even plasma. Fortunately, FN's experience and leadership allowed us to defeat the scorpion.

We managed to come back to the surface with the metals and the oil we found. We attempted to use the oil to refuel the engine, and sure enough, it worked. The sounds of the engine seemed to frighten the rabbits; they slowly backed away and quickly fled as soon as it was running again. We are fully prepared to return to Earth tomorrow after we restore ourselves. I am well rested enough to fly again.

Rescue Team Log, XX/24/XX84

ISCHQ has assigned us towards an unnamed system to rescue the lost crew attacked by Space Pirates. With the coordinates of their location, it didn't take long to find it. It took our most experienced pilots to navigate the asteroid belt surrounding the deep green planet.

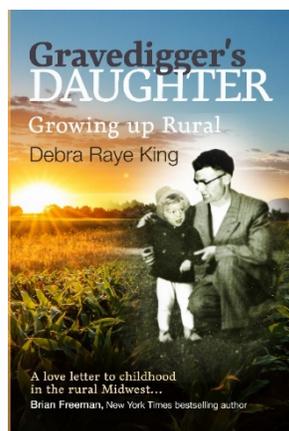
When we stepped out of the shuttle, we immediately saw a completely functional ship with an unlit fire and scattered objects close by. Upon closer inspection, they seemed to be valuable minerals, coming in a variety of unorthodox colors. If the lost crew were mugged or attacked, why would their assailants leave behind these precious treasures?

With the perplexing sight in mind, we decided to survey the mushroom forest near the base camp. There seem to be no dangerous lifeforms that could have killed the highly experienced crew, with a former commander being among them. We only found a group of rabbit-like turtles, dancing with their hands raised, running around a circle, as well as a large, camouflage manta ray-like creature watching on the swamp water. Scattered remains of parchments were visible on the surface of the lake. As a precautionary measure, we decided to leave quietly. The only thing left was to return, completely and utterly baffled by the unknown fate of the lost crew.

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Gravedigger's Daughter - Growing up Rural

Debra Raye King
Memoir

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Gravedigger's Daughter - Growing up Rural

is a collection of short stories and essays based on actual events in the 1950-1970s in northern west-central Wisconsin. Little Elk Creek is a tightly knit community of Norwegian immigrant farm families who assist one another at harvest time and share their skills so all could succeed.

Debra Raye King shares her remembrances from an era when her father was the local gravedigger at the local church cemetery and it wasn't unusual for a daughter to help shovel. Moms were mostly homemakers, dads wage earners, and the children attended Farmers Union Camp, 4H, and the Luther League when not in school or helping with chores.

Experience the grit, heartache, joy, and innocence of growing up rural with these tales of one family farm in Wisconsin.

We need you! Reviewers, word of mouth shoutouts, book clubs... ask for an electronic copy of *Gravedigger's Daughter* in exchange for a review. Contact Lisa, press manager, at submit@wiwrite.org
We still have a few left to offer.

Waiting

Fran Rybarik, La Crosse

The clock that no longer chimes
reminds me—time weighs more these days.

Life has been suspended. Minutes meld into
months.

What seemed urgent holds less
importance as we wait.

I watch my sister say goodbye to her husband
of 57 years,
day after day after day.

He clings to life like an oak leaf in November,
lives on air and a prayer.

He waited for visits from grandchildren: they
arrived and left;
for Packer games they lost and won;
for another deer camp that came and went.

Some days his mind is clear and strong, despite
no food
and few fluids for 58 days. He's dying
and doing well.

How does he survive? Why does his heart keep
beating?
When will he let go? Where will I be
when his time comes?

Emotionally spent, spiritually empty, and
physically exhausted,
I, too, am afraid to leave and scared to stay.

So we wait.

Fran Rybarik became a writer as a member of Women
Writers Ink, now Mississippi Valley Writers Guild, in La
Crosse. With their guidance, she authored a memoir,
Travels with David, along with numerous personal essays
and poems.

Tunnel Vision

Maureen Adams, Viroqua

excess visual input
bombards your eyes and brain
blinds you to small spectaculars

don't wait for the still to crop a photo
do it now!
cut a cardboard tube down
or touch a thumb to finger
and make a peering circle

narrow your gaze
condense your field of vision

zoom in tighter

to just that one shimmering tree
at the wood's edge
this yellow bird below the feeder
the mailbox at the end of the road

with eyes more closely trained
objects overlooked
surface as sweet wonders

Maureen Adams is a retired educator who loves family,
friends, and life in beautiful WI. She is an active
member of the Driftless Writing Center (Viroqua) and
finds focus and appreciation in the little things.

SHORT FICTION

August Snow

Ashlynn Monroe, La Crosse

“August?” I shook my head. “The snow won’t stop falling.” Even in Wisconsin, it never snowed in August. The thick pile was up to the windowsill of the front room and there was no sign it’d stop. Two weeks of flakes had accumulated.

A frustrated huff caused me to turn away from the window to look at Jamie.

She picked at a scab on her arm and wouldn’t look at me or the window. “I didn’t think this was how we were going to die. I mean, when it all started, I just thought it would end. You know?”

My eyes prickled. I did know. “Sis, It’s okay—”

“It’s not,” she interrupted as she dashed at her eyes with the back of her hand. “We’re never going to have children. Or meet the loves of our lives. We’re never going to graduate from college. We’re never going to drive a car. And on top of all that.” She paused with a sigh. “Mom hasn’t come back. It’s been three days, Mollie.” Her voice broke.

I knew. I hadn’t slept more than a few hours at a time since Mom went out three mornings ago. She’d gone into the unnatural grayish green snow looking for food. We’d started out with plenty. When the first stories of all the weird stuff had hit the news, she’d stockpiled. When the world just kind of stopped, she’d rationed. Mom had grown up on a farm and had a lot of creative ways to make food stretch. If this thing had ended in a few months, like we’d expected, we’d have been safe. The news stopped weeks ago. Maybe a month ago now. Our cellphones and the internet stopped before that. The radio only broadcasted a dire emergency message, in its robo voice, on repeat since the day before Mom left. I think that was what made her lose hope—when the music stopped—she’d looked so sad.

“Things have never been right with the world, not for a long time,” Jamie muttered. “This—this just feels over.”

I couldn’t let her know I agreed with her. I was the oldest. I had to stay strong. If Mom was here,

she’d have distracted us with a board game or convinced us that everything was going to be okay. I needed her strength. We had some canned vegetables, a box of dry pasta, and the sacred can of shelf stable cheese that we were saving for a special occasion. After that was gone, it would be hunger. Water still came out of the sink, but it smelled weird. Mom had filled both our bathtubs up and covered them with plastic wrap, she’d filled every jug and container in the house, and even filled empty vases before the creepy snow made the world smell rotten. We were drinking the before-water but still using the sinks to wash. How long before we ran out?

“Mollie?”

I turned to look at my sister. “Yeah?”

“I think we should go look for her.”

My lips compressed and I narrowed my eyes at Jamie. “No.”

She stomped her foot. “If I want to go. I’m going.”

“Mom would never want you to risk your life.” I forced conviction into my tone. “She’ll be back.”

Jamie crossed her arms over her chest. “What if she’s not?”

I didn’t know. “She will be.”

“That’s not good enough.” She went to where our coats hung on hooks by the door. “I’m going. It’s been too long.”

“We still have some food.” I rushed over and put my hand over hers where it was gripping her coat, ready to take the garment down. “Give Mom more time.”

“If we wait until we’re out of food and starving we won’t be strong enough to go look. That’s why Mom went when she did. She knew it was more dangerous to wait until there was nothing. Mol, there’s almost nothing.”

She was right. My heart sank. I looked into my sister’s eyes. She’d grown up so much in just a few months. What was out there waiting for us? Was it Mom? Was it the end? “I think it’s time for us to eat the cheese.”

Ashlynn Monroe has been a storyteller all her life. She’s been published by over a dozen small presses and has published over sixty works of fiction since 2009. She is one of the admins for La Crosse Area Writer’s group.



Wisconsin Writers Association Press In pursuit of the noble literary art

The [Wisconsin Writers Association Press](#) aids WWA member authors in following through with our organization goals to help writers learn, grow, and publish in the literary field. The Wisconsin Writers Association Press exists specifically for Wisconsin Writers who tell Wisconsin-themed stories and provides a publishing platform currently unavailable to Wisconsin writers.

What We Publish

WWA Press welcomes original material of good quality that celebrates and explores all walks of life and for all ages, be it historical, fictional, nonfiction, lyrical, or speculative. Family friendly, please.

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In 2023 we are open to non-WWA members. Authors should submit samples of new, original work in English that is complete. The work should be tied to Wisconsin in some way.

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- Genre
- Audience
- 10 keywords
- 50 word summary
- 450 word sample back cover blurb
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- Sales contacts and promotional ideas (Minimum of 10)
- Endorsers or writers of foreword/afterword ideas and contact information *if applicable*
- Know that you can provide the names and contact information of at least 5 reviewers who can review your book at the time of publication or soon after.
- Previous publications (if any).

Ready to submit? Email: submit@wiwrite.org

Grandma's Ring

Cecelia Cross, Milwaukee

I stand here
Alone
arms raised
raised prayers
let me see you
let me hear you
let me feel you
such a part of me
I take one step back
and then another
mother
grandmother
another
great grandmother
another
yet another
German
Farmers
calloused hands
all the children born
some lived
some didn't
all the work done
and more work
no end
all the burdens carried
like each mother before
the weight
no one interested in your
education
in your mind
in your soul
in your spirit
in your dreams
taught not to think
not to ask for
not to question
all the gifts unopened
all the talents unexplored
the weight
I feel it now
inside me
such a part of me

arms raised
I raise you up now
spirits inside me
let us sing
for our freedom
to our freedom
it is time now
my gift to you

Cecelia Cross is currently retired. During different times in her life, she expressed herself through art, photography, and writing - the pieces she has submitted were written during a time she was wrestling with a number of issues in her life.

Standing Still

Kourtney Lynd, northern WI

That rock was not there before.
Gray swirls of milky abstractions.
Pebbles gliding under the water's surface.
Push and Pull
Back and forth

Around the crags and crevices, there lies an
inner peace in the standing silence.
Shores beyond me in the worldwide sea.
The calmness was made permanent.
It's hard to feel so alone, but it's easy to see.

Freelance writer and creative writing teacher in
Northern Wisconsin. I aspire to be a lifelong
learner and define my craft
with constructive criticism.

ESSAY

Gandhinagar

Shalini Singh, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India

Nema-ye-nazdikiyan

There is this image—
Of some wild flowers, in full bloom—between
Two lovers on a bicycle by Abbas Kiarostami
(1990), before I was born
I watch that scene again and again.

Here, in Gandhinagar,
Nobody knows about Abbas Kiarostami or
Darwish whose poems I eat
I have no friends around—
Only Sacco's voice in my head, because I read
him last

What I read before that has passed me,
As my father's bike crosses a helipad and a
temple,
A train cross

Gandhinagar traps dreamers into believing that –
They are in paradise but they are trapped,
indefinitely

A city which summons – orders its residents to
wake up early or—
Map memories brewed in earl grey's left by
people from other states—

Enlacing each shop is a cow here,
Many men chew besides them, more, hungrily

Gulmohar breaks my path,
Compasses go crazy,
I have arrived home, finally, a replica of
Chandigarh or Granili

Shalini, formerly a government lawyer from the Ministry is an incoming MFA in Creative writing & Environment candidate of Iowa State University from India where she, a Biharan has lived in Gujarat from most of her life up till now. She is a multi-genre writer who loves all formats of storytelling. She wishes to write about the things you wish you did.

Remembering Nana Kitty

Victoria Lynn Smith, Superior

My nana, Katherine Karius Stern Stamper, wore dresses and stockings. Born January 22, 1915, she didn't believe in pants, declaring ladies didn't wear them.

Before she went out into the world, she dressed in her tiny pink bathroom, a fascinating place to me because of its laundry chute and the intricately embroidered scene of an English cottage and garden that hung on the wall. My sisters and I surreptitiously tossed toys down the chute, then skedaddled to the basement to retrieve them from the laundry basket until Nana said, "Stop the shenanigans!" The embroidered scene was a gift from her oldest sister Margaret. Nana didn't do crafts; although in her sixties, she took a watercolor class and painted flowers and butterflies—but not convincingly.

Because my sisters and I visited Nana, who lived in Milwaukee, for three or four days at a time, I often watched her *get-gussied-up-to-meet-the-world* routine. We were allowed to wander in and out of the bathroom while she got ready.

First, Nana put on white, ordinary undergarments. She spent her money—but never frivolously—on fashion the public could see, not on fancy underwear that would never show from beneath her clothes.

Next, she slipped bobby pins from her pin-curved hair and brushed the tight coils into luscious waves of reddish-brown tresses. (Her hair would have been partly gray without Nice & Easy.) She pulled a turtleneck over her loose curls then used her fingers to reshape them. She had sensitivities to most makeup, but she powdered her face to cover up a faded scar on her cheek. When she was a young woman, she had been in a car accident and was cut by a fragment of glass.

With care she rolled her pantyhose over her feet, easing them up her legs to avoid causing a runner. As part of a school assignment, I once

asked her, "What's the greatest invention of your lifetime?" Without a moment's reflection, she answered, "Pantyhose." Having used a garter belt when I wore nylons for the first time at my fourth-grade Christmas concert, I knew her answer wasn't frivolous. Nearly finished she stepped into her skirt and fastened it at her back.

Finally, she looked into the mirror. Holding a tube of lipstick in her hand, she applied a shade between pink and red to her lips. She never left the house without lipstick. Face powder was the only other makeup she wore. But she needed none. Her high cheekbones, arched eyebrows, cocoa-brown eyes, and flawless complexion were of the quality that could describe a beautiful lady in a nineteenth-century novel.

Her last act before emerging from the bathroom was to blot her lips with a square of toilet paper, which she had saved from the end of the roll. She was a child of the Great Depression. She called it *tissue paper* because she had sensibilities about what she termed "potty talk." She folded the white square in half, parted her lips and placed the tissue between them, then pressed them together. She opened the tissue and admired the pink shaped lips she left behind. The best ones she stored on a shelf in the linen closet, small squares of vanity resting behind a closed door.

Smelling of soap, face powder, and freshly applied lipstick, Nana emerged—a butterfly from the cocoon of her snug, pink bathroom. She was ready for an outing.

We might go to Sherman Park to play, the same park my mother and her brother played at when they were children. Nearly a mile and a half from Nana's house, the park was a long walk for small children, so she splurged on bus fare. She pushed us on the swings and sang "Puff the Magic Dragon."

On the way home, we would stop at St. John de Nepomuc Catholic Church. In the 1960s and early '70s, its doors were always unlocked. Nana led us into the church lit only by sunlight filtering through the stained-glass windows and the candles burning near the altar. Like ducklings we followed her, imitating her moves. She genuflected and made the sign of the cross before entering a pew, and we genuflected and made the

sign of the cross before entering the pew. She knelt on the kneeler; we knelt on the kneeler. She prayed, we prayed. I never asked Nana what she prayed about. I figured she prayed for her dead husband and her dead nephew, for she often talked about them. I prayed about whatever was bothering me that week. Catholicism, God, and Baby Jesus were very important to Nana. My sisters and I were not Catholic. My mother left the Church to marry a Presbyterian, but we did not practice Presbyterianism either. Nana neither asked about our church-going habits nor tried to convert us to Catholicism, and my mother never fussed about our side trips into St. John's.

Some days we might go to the grocery store. On the way there, my sister and I would take turns pulling our little sister in a wagon. Nana, widowed at forty-seven, never learned to drive, so she always walked or rode the city bus. On the way home, she pulled the wagon with my sister and a bag of groceries, and my sister and I each carried another bag. On a hot summer day, the city became an urban desert. Heat rose off the concrete and choked the air as our small caravan traveled along the city blocks. Burdened with a sack of groceries and oppressed by the temperature, I spit like an angry camel: "It's too hot. Can't we rest? Why can't the groceries ride in the wagon and Suzanne walk?" Nana would not stop or put my little sister out of the wagon. She would ignore me until I drove her crazy, then she would snap, "Be quiet!" Nana never told anyone to shut up, a phrase she considered too rude, even for the devil.

We might go to George Webb's for a hamburger, a rare treat on Nana's tight budget. We always wanted to sit at the counter because the stools spun around, but she never let us. There were four of us. "Counters," she would say, "are for customers who eat alone." She held different jobs over the years, but from my earliest memory until she retired, she worked as a waitress in a series of small diners and restaurants. Her last job was at the Perkins Pancake House on Wisconsin Avenue. She worked there for thirteen years, retiring when she was sixty-eight. The family who owned the restaurant adored her.

On our outings people often complimented "her beautiful children." She always thanked them

and never corrected them, neither did we. It was fun to share an inside joke with her. Later on, she would tell my mother how many times that day someone had assumed she was our mother instead of our nana. She never told people how old she was, but if someone was tactless enough to ask, she would say, “A lady never tells her age.”

Today, if she were still alive, she would be 107 years old. I like to think that if she had lived that long, instead of being cryptic about her age, she would brag about it while wearing a pair of pants and asking how we all survived the toilet paper shortage during the pandemic.

Victoria Lynn Smith, a fiction and creative nonfiction writer, lives in northern Wisconsin. She belongs to the Wisconsin Writers Association and Lake Superior Writers.

Citified-Answer of Yes

Ryan Schaufler, Milwaukee

Did you hear gunshots?
Beer battered air hit my hair;
Words are hollow here.

Mr. Schaufler lives in Milwaukee and received a BFA from California Institute of the Arts in Acting. He is a professional actor, special education teacher, theatre teacher, playwright, director, photographer, artist, and a father.



Photo: “Milwaukee Night” by Ryan Schaufler

SHORT FICTION

I Did Not No

Nan Evenson, Madison

July 15, 1848...7 o'clock in the morning

Ma told me to write a dairy. Keep a dairy she said. She also wants me S P E L L right but this dairy won't be prefect. I haven't had schooling in over a year, because of all this trouble. And you know why I don't care about spelling? Because nothing around here is prefect.

July 15, 1848...11 o'clock

11 o'clock means lunch. But there will be no lunch—or brekfast.

Here is where here is: a town called Carlow, Ireland. I am 10 years old and my name is Bridgit Cosgrove.

You can see the year for yourself because Ma says I have to put the date on my pages. She's telling me a lot of things about dairies.

Keep a dairy. Keep it? Where is it going to go? Who wants it?

I am going to write to you – but there really is not a you. I'm just saying you as to have kind of a friend when I write. That's one way to keep a dairy, I guess – to write it to someone. One style—S T Y L E.

I am done now about this hole dairy thing, becuae if I go on more about it, you'll fall asleep!

Wait! One more thing. My writing book is bueatiful brown L E A T H E R, and it's special, too. Ma got it from her ma about the time of dinosaurs. My ma never wrote in it, and now she wants me to tell about my life. Don't fall asleep.

I don't know where you live, but I do not believe it could be more pretty than Carlow town. I bet you don't have a big castel in your town!

There are a lot of people in Carlow, but mostly there are a lot of cottiers or peasant farmers who live outside the town. Our farms used to be green and strong, but now they are brown and dying.

F A M I N E.

That is the not prefect, trouble part I said earlier. There is nothing to eat. The stupid potatoes are small and rotted. Diseese killed a lot of them, I guess. I want to say the word stupid, but I know ma will make me cross it out. This is my writings, thouhg. And that is a good word, a proper word for this S I T U A T I O N.

We used to have a cow named Tilly. She died because someone stold her. Me and ma think she got eaten. Some hungry person killed Tilly and ate her! I cried and cried and I have her cowbell on the wall in our house, wich only has one room.

There aren't many animals anywhere now. But I have been trying to care for a straay cat, who I call Annie. She's orange striped and can't hardly walk far anymore. She just lays down and makes a little soft sound when I pet her. Sometimes she can't even stand back up. I wish I had milk for her, but Tilly is dead and there is no milk for anybody. I give Annie water from my hands. I make them into a little cup for her.

Here is an I N T E R E S T I N G thing. I drew a picture of my friend, Duncan, in the woods by Carlow reading when he was 10. I drew it so you could see how full his belly was then.

You would not believe your own eyes to see how skinny he is now that he is 11! His grandpa died just lately. Me and ma dressed up—all in black. That's what you have to do to show R E S P E C T. I kept tripping on my long black skirt all day. His grandpa didn't have much to eat, none of us do, but I guess old people and little babies die the most. Diseese can make them real sick if they are extra skinny. Mostly you just plain old die if you don't have food. Of course you do! I am not making this up!

But I am not about to worry all day about dying. And you know why? Because I am not a

baby or a old person! I am 10! Ma is not a old person, but I am a little worried. She is getting very very skinny. And she doesn't talk so much now. I can do bad stuff and she doesn't even care.

It is just me and her and Tilly. But I already told you that sad story about our cow.

What would I do if Ma died? I wish you could tell me because I do not no.

July 15, 1848...4 o'clock in the afternoon

I am hungry. Annie is hungry too.

July 15, 1848...8 o'clock in the evening

Old Mr. O'Toole just came by our house. He nocked so loud I started to cry. I don't know why—I cry all the time now. And don't call me a baby! I already said I was 10!

He was E X C I T E D about a big ship that is coming into Dublin. The ship will be there for three days, and if people have some money, they can pay the C A P T A I N to take them in that ship far away. To a place called A M E R I C A.

T O M O R R O W (extra hard word) we are going with Mr. O'Toole and some other people in a wagon with horses to get on the ship. Did you hear that news! We are going on a ship across the ocean!

Ma says we will put my church skirt and a few other things in our big flowered bag. And tomorrow morning we are going to walk right out of our house. Just walk right out and leave E V E R Y T H I N G right here. Like the wood tabel in the kitchen will stay right there, but we won't be here anymore.

I really don't no where we will be. I feel a little afraid, but I am only telling you this, dairy. Also, I don't want to leave some things behind. Duncan is skinny but he's the most nicest boy in the world. He gave me a gray rock one day for a P R E S E N T. I will take that rock and some

clothes and I will take you, dairy. We will step on to the ship and we will go away forever.

July 15, 1848...11 o'clock at night

I cannot sleep. I asked Ma if I can take Annie on the ship, even if she is sickly and made up of bones. Ma said no. I cannot take you Annie. I cannot give you any more water. I am sorry. I am sorry, becuae I S H O U L D have told you before, but I did not no life would go like this.

I should have told you that I love you.

Author's Note: This story is dedicated to my brave Irish relatives who immigrated to the American Upper Midwest from Carlow County, Ireland during the Great Potato Famine. Between 1846 and 1851 over a million Irish people died of starvation and disease.

I had a relative named Bridgit Cosgrove, whom my grandmother, Annie O'Toole, included in the written story of her own life. Bridgit was from Carlow, and before we knew about my grandmother's history, our daughter, Zoe, had signed up to do a college semester abroad in...Carlow. We visited that charming village several summers ago. I am a quarter Irish, and my birthday is July 15th.

I like to think that some part of these ancestors' courage and resilience lives on in me and in my descendants.

Bridgit, I wish I could read your "dairy" if you ever wrote one. I would treasure it.

I would keep it forever.

After her four kids grew up, several college degrees and years of working in business and with awe-inspiring teens, Nan Evenson thought it would be fun to run for public office, study math and take writing classes on several continents. She is currently writing three books, has published multiple short stories, and has won two awards, including third place in non-fiction in the prestigious Wisconsin Jade Ring Contest.

REFLECTION

The Glass-blown Golden Fawn

Nancy Dearborn, Verona

I run my fingers over the glass-blown golden fawn. It's still as smooth today as it was forty-five years ago when Bob created it for me in his glass-blowing shop. But unlike the glassy smoothness of the fawn, we'd become close friends because of a rough, black period in his life—the darkest days he'd ever faced.

It was over the God-awful radio station Mom blared at six in the morning that I heard the news. I'd just walked into our kitchen when the radio announcer said, "Linda Bohman died last night on Highway 151 between Mt. Horeb and Verona in a car accident. A semi crossed the center line, hitting her vehicle head-on, killing her instantly."

I grabbed the back of the nearest kitchen chair. "Oh my God! I can't believe it. I know her."

"What?" My mom glanced up from the eggs she was frying. "I don't think so."

Struggling to breathe I said, "Bob and Linda are customers at the hardware store."

"Oh." Mom returned to her cooking as if nothing had happened, but I knew Bob's world had just blown up like a gas explosion inside his house.

Numb with disbelief and in a total daze, I went to my bedroom to dress for the day.

Later Bob would tell me, "Linda was returning to Verona after attending a Tupperware party in Mt. Horeb. I figured she'd be home around 9:30 or so. I fell asleep on the couch waiting for her. When I heard a knock on the door, somehow, I just knew, and so did our dogs. They went crazy, running around in circles, sniffing at a pair of Linda's old slippers by the door. A couple of police related what happened—*news no one ever wants to hear.*"

Three weeks passed before Bob entered the hardware store. Gone was his cheerful smile and dancing, playful eyes. Standing before me now was the most depressed man I'd ever seen. His eyes filled to the brim with unspeakable sadness, his shoulders sagged, his expression one of extreme pain and sorrow.

Despite that I barely knew him, I reached out and touched his arm, offering what little comfort I could. At that moment, I spotted just the faintest flicker of light and hope. Then it went out.

Even though I was only seventeen years old and a junior in high school, I wanted to comfort him, not only in condolences but to help him climb back out of the deep, dark hole he'd fallen into.

In the days to come, I determined to offer him kindness and friendship. I wanted to be a light for him.

I usually worked Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays until nine, and the hardware store generally wasn't that busy during the evening hours. Even if he didn't need any store merchandise, Bob started dropping by, once or twice a week.

I quietly listened to his words of pain, sorrow, and heartache. I didn't say much, but gave him a hug when his words were spent for the night.

Winter turned to spring and spring turned to summer. Speaking of his pain to me seemed to lift some of his heartache. I'd also started leaving encouraging notes or scripture on his front porch on index cards.

When a local busybody told Mom that I was friends with Bob, Mom said, "You're not hanging around a twenty-four-year-old man, especially one who was married. It's too dangerous."

Since my parents never told us children anything about sex, at seventeen I was totally clueless, so I had no idea what she was referring to.

I had no intention of ever sharing with my mom how close of friends Bob and I'd become. The less she knew about my life, the better. I never talked to her about *anything* substantial and planned on it staying that way.

Besides Bob's frequent visits to the hardware store, we enjoyed ice cream cones at the A & W, swam at the local pool near his house, or ate out at fancy restaurants in Madison. This was a real treat for me, since my family, due to our financial circumstances, rarely went out to eat. Bob and I dined and drank wine at the finest places, where they didn't even question my age or card me. To waiters, it was never an issue; since Bob was older, they assumed I was, too. Of course, at seventeen, I was only one year away from the legal drinking age at that time.

One evening Bob stopped at the hardware store, glanced around to make sure no one was within view, and softly brushed his lips against mine. He left without saying a word, after handing me a small box that contained a glass-blown golden fawn that he'd made. I understood it was a thank you gift, for being a good friend to him when he most needed one.

But I was surprised and a bit startled by his kiss since I'd never kissed a man (or a boy) before. As time moved forward, his kisses grew more passionate, and his gentle touches awakened a side of me I didn't know existed.

During the fall of my senior year, rumors abounded at the high school that Bob was dating a recent graduate. His visits to the hardware store grew less frequent, and I stopped dropping by his place.

At my sister's wedding dance in mid-December, I met Ellis, a senior at Mt. Horeb High School. We soon became as inseparable as Noah Calhoun and Allie Nelson, the main characters in *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks. Ellis and I attended UW-Madison football games since his dad was an assistant coach there, went snowmobiling, watched movies,

and frequented different fast-food restaurants in Madison. We spent as much of our spare time together as possible and fell in love for the first time.

Even though Bob and I had both moved on with our lives, the fawn remained as a memory for me of a special time in my life. As I hold it in my hands forty-five years later, *I like to think I played a small part in helping Bob heal and come to terms with the painful death of his wife and slowly embrace life once again.*

Nancy Dearborn has had published over 250 articles, stories, and poems in various newspapers, magazines, anthologies, and online. She is the author of picture books *Hugga Loula* and *I Found a Wallet*, with more in the works; Nancy is also the author of the middle grade novel *Runaway*.



Introducing Ken Humphrey

WWA's new Operations
Director



Ken Humphrey is the author of eight novels in the adult thriller, teen, and middle grade genres. He joined WWA to meet and share author experiences with like-minded people but, in a twist of happenstance layered with the inability to say No, he also accepted the Director of Operations position. He began his transition in August, attempting to carry on the legacy of Julia Nusbaum, wishing her well while dreading her departure.

Ken splits time between Lake Geneva and Lake Arrowhead, WI. He is cursed with allegiance to the Minnesota Vikings, married into a Packer family, and fervently believes in the Oxford comma.



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