

The Portal

A Collection of Short Stories and Poems
by members of the Writer's Group

In Celebration of the Summer Learning Program South Regional / BC Poetry Contest Winners

First Place

Dear School

By Cheryl Sheinman

Dear School,
Your rude thunder awakened me again:
To the noise of a registrar that refused my application
Demanding proof of my background, my name, my status.
To a syllabus full of rules, homework, points, grades, extra
credits and demerits
All the pressures that I wanted to leave behind, things that
capture and possess
Making me stiff, like I'm in amber, armor, a straight jacket
And I can't twist or turn, create or differentiate.

Dear School,
I carried a piano on my back all my young years
It hung off my shoulders like a backpack
Full of my piano teacher's voice:
Practice, Practice, Practice
Use the metronome, Steady your scales
Tick tock tick tock tick tock; fuck off
The piano exams and festival competition always prowling
Waiting to scare me with their arrival: 'Recital Required'
The Western and Toronto.... Boards,
Schools of music. Imposing, impressive,
Like 88 sleek black and whites melded back into elephants

tusks.

Textbooks, notebooks, classical piano books, theory and
harmony books-
All on my back, in my pack, I carried you everywhere
So I could always study, rehearse, homework
And my mother could brag to her friends about how much I
love you
And how well I do with you.
She doesn't know this, so don't tell her, I really hate you.

You follow me around and get into my drawers
Like an annoying little sister looking for my favorite sweater
Like a cloying fruit that I can't peel off my skin.
Under your ivy covered arches, You march me down your
cold

Marble hallways of perfectionism, halls that lead to more halls
(more hells).

There is no respite, no breath, you push on and on and on
and on.

The teacher, my teachers
Wear robes of those that came before
The classical piano judge, the mother that couldn't see me
The proctor interminably announcing, a recording in my head
that rewinds and repeats:
Times up Close your blue books Pencils down.
Times up Close your blue books Pencils down.

Dear School,
I was heavy, a skinny little girl
Weighed down with your performance
Expectations I had to fulfill in order to be seen
Or I'd be cast aside, unworthy, dirty
Mud between my toes and ears
Playing, but not white keys this time and
Not for you.

Had I no one to play for
A fatal inertia would ensue:
I'm buried in my bed dirty
Dishes sit in sink, laundry languishes in loads still
I want to throw you off, shut you up:
Time's up, time's up, time's up
Your time's up
Turn your pressure off, melt your markers down, shred my
home work
Rip the pack off my back, burn the piano bench full
Of classical pieces I have yet to practice, to practice, to
practice

P.S. But I can't let you go, I can't live without you
You are my only and constant companion
I go to sleep with you, I dream of you, I wake in your Rigid
Embrace. You are my Scaffold, my Schedule, my Structure,
my Mentor.

While my deepest longing is that you will see me
For the half lazy, ordinary person that I am
Not a grade, not a composer, not a polished puppet
Not even a student.

Second Place

The River

By Carol Ann Howell

Just before the sun
crawls
behind the mountain
to sleep
it lights and warms my arm
The arm that writes to
the rhythm of the voices
singing from the stream
a choir of waters whose
breath bubbles
over stones and boulders
lyric tinkling grace notes
in harmony with
rich whole notes
played in deeper water
a river choir singing
with its own symphony
neither being itself
without the other

To the eye it is only
water, rocks and space
to the ear it is
music
music this land
has always known
long before there were
human ears to hear

It
doesn't play
doesn't
sing

to be heard
it has to --
water must move
must travel
removes dirt
exposes rocks
water must move
sings

sculpts the land
breathes into the air
its moisture

Being itself
river gives, creates
humans poor ungiving
always taking
humans benefit
enjoy
are enraptured ...
we few not too insensitive
drawn to these
river places
as if we
had been drops of water
a puddle
or a creek
as if our bodies had
flown between these rocks
long long ago, before
we were divided
into species
before some were
determined to be
more important
others less sacred
before some were
said to have
intelligence
others instinct
when we were
all one
and one all
and there were
no divisions
before the world was
so sad
so sophisticated
when it was
new and naïve
and perhaps
when it was
truly

WISE

Third Place

The Raft

By Donna Ragland-Greene

Survivors cling to splintered remains
scattered by fate and the sea
broken men and mangled pieces
joined by the gods of tragedy

Walls of water
inhale and swallow
these wretched souls
with no tomorrow.

The vast violet scar
of shifting hues,
the indigo abyss
of greens and blues
mocks the limbs with
hands outstretched
the dead hang limp
from jagged edges,
lifeless forms
no grip remaining,
eternally dying,
suspended in damnation.

Clammy flesh of
corpses
no longer craving soil
glorious pain conveyed on
canvas seared with oil.

Distorted faces lurch and wretch
from the ocean's churning,
a hellish vision
dark, exquisite,
conjured by an artist
still disturbing.

Salt eats the flesh of
those still breathing,

hearts and hope
ragged, seething,
currents tear at fragile wood,
timbers disintegrating,
splitting, screaming, gone for good,
dissolving all salvation.

Honorable Mention

Colors of the Morning

By Raisa Goltsin

The colors of the morning are simple,
Earthy darkness of coffee's streaming
Into the womb of my mug.
Brown toast jumps out emerging
From the tannery of the toaster,
Snowy cream cheese's spread on the top,
To be toppled with the red jam
Coming out from the glass jar.

Morning colors are simple colors
Of the dark soil, sand, and snow,
Of the red fruits of the earth,
Black and white, brown and red,
Like the people of this great planet
These colors are gathered together
On the altar of my breakfast table
To celebrate morning sacrament
Of the day newly emerging,
Smells of coffee and bread serve
As an incense for my simple altar.

I celebrate toasting my dark coffee
To the bright sky of the morning,
To the dark earth, to the clouds,
To the red sun of sunrise,
Eating my simple offering
As I celebrate properly

The new day in my life.



Game Over

By Meagan Cahuasqui

You blink into the brightening light, waking from a slumber you hadn't realized you'd taken. You're still standing in the same spot you'd stopped at when everything last went black. It's as if time had frozen when you lost consciousness, but you couldn't figure out why you'd blacked out.

You blink a few times, or at least you think you do. Why blinking is the first instinct you have you're not sure, but it appears to be the only instinct you have. The sudden light after an unknown period of darkness probably requires it. Where did that darkness come from though? And why were you in it? And why can't you remember anything? There's a tension in your limbs and you realize you haven't moved. You're not sure you know how to.

Memory floods back into your mind as you take in your surroundings. You're in a hidden

chamber underground, amid the rubble of ancient remains of a temple long since crumbled by legendary creatures no one had seen since the stories depicted on the walls of the archaeological dig you'd first learned of the adventure before you.

Your legs move of their own accord without your mind telling them to. In fact, your mind doesn't analyze or think or do much of anything. You try to look down at your moving legs, but you can only witness the vague, shadowy walls straight ahead in your journey as a vessel for whatever entity commands you to go forward. You don't even know why you are an archaeologist, or why you'd followed the signs that led to this lost civilization, or who you even are.

Why did you want to go on this adventure? What compelled you to take this trip? Or rather, who compelled you to take this trip? You thought about turning your head to find the master pulling your strings, but your body wasn't your own. You figured out you could only turn around if the master allowed you to.

Your legs, covered in smooth brown cylinders made of layers of polygons, glide over the plane

beneath your feet in unnatural, jerky motions with your arms following the same movement, an imitation of walking. You investigate a wooden crate in the dark chamber, and when your knee hits the corner and you're sure there are splinters stuck in your pants, you don't make a sound. Does your mind even process the sensation of pain? Do you know what pain means?

You want to scream in...in what? What emotion makes you want to scream? Is it the nonexistent pain that makes you want to scream? Is it the inability to feel pain that makes you want to scream? You're not sure, and that uncertainty alone feels like it should disturb you.

As your arms reach out of their own accord to uncover the crate, you're pretty sure you see your stiff extremities go through the top of it, but the lid still falls off and reveals a treasure trove of old artifacts. Somewhere in the atmosphere around you, you're aware of a voice saying you've just found an old journal, and it asks you if you want to read it. You don't say it out loud, but you answer, "Yes."

You think you've just agreed to something, but to what, you're not sure. And what was that strange silent voice that posed

this important question that you felt the need to answer? Did it belong to the master that controlled your every move and response? If he controlled you though, why would he ask? It could just be a sick game of giving you the false sense of free will only to yank it away as they make you say yes.

You open the journal and find frantic scrawling that barely seems like English. But wait, how do you know what English is? How do you understand language? The drawings that go with the symbols creating words don't help much either.

Gruesome beasts with sharp fangs dripping some sinister substance that would make someone's stomach turn, but for you, they stir a vague feeling of imminent danger.

You save the journal in your knapsack for later reference and continue to explore the old, dim chamber for clues to...something. You're not sure what you're looking for, but you know you have to find it.

Perhaps you're looking for a way to freedom, but that wouldn't make sense. Why would your puppet master make you look for your own way out of their clutches? No, it had to be something else. But could that

something the master wanted help you learn more about your own origins and who you were outside of these invisible strings? You'd have to find it to find out.

As you approach a shadowy doorway where no light seeps through, an ominous feeling swells up around you. It's the crescendo of violins and horn instruments ringing in your ears and you recognize the knowledge that someone or something dangerous is fast approaching.

Even though you can't see what lies beyond, if there even is a beyond, you walk through the shadow of the doorway and find yourself in something resembling an arena. The cacophony of warning is at an all-time high here, and as you stand and wait for something to happen, you hear a distant shout of, "Danny, it's time for bed."

You have no idea who said it or what those words mean, but it has made your body take pause. Everything seems frozen around you, but you're still conscious and aware of what's happening. Sort of, since nothing is happening at the moment, except a small whisper asking if you want to save. Save what, you don't know, but you mentally reply, "Yes." It's so strange to

realize you don't know the sound of your own voice, or if you even have one.

Could you be Danny? Danny, Danny, Danny. You say it mentally, repeatedly, trying to spark a sense of identity with the label, but nothing clicks. Who is Danny and who is he to you? Who are you to him?

"Just ten more minutes."
Another voice behind you bellows, and it's the first sign you've ever heard of the powerful entity that controls your very existence.

Maybe that's Danny. Danny the Master. How could you jump to that conclusion so quickly though without any other clues? Have you heard his name before? Have you come to this conclusion before and just can't remember?

Suddenly, the climbing atmosphere returns and your body turns slowly around the room, seeking the approaching enemy. You stop when you've reached a 180 degree turn and for the first time in your current memory see the master that controls your puppet form. Danny.

It's a distorted image, coming through a convex glass window,

and a snowy static that's almost invisible shading the being's face in uncertainty. You see an object in his hands, with red, green, purple and grey buttons on it. You feel your pixelated eyes rove back and forth, and it's the first motion that isn't controlled by Danny. You stare, unblinking but eyeballs darting side to side, painting the blotchy image of a creature with pale skin and some sort of spots on its face. You can't make out much more than that.

When he presses the grey cross you continue to turn back to your original position, and come face to face with an animal that looks like the drawings of the beasts you'd seen earlier in the journal, but you are not surprised. You feel like you've seen this before.

You bring your arms up to cover your face and see a flash of red as energy is drained from your life force, but you don't actually feel a drainage (or a life force), you just know it's there and it happened.

From some place unknown, you pull out a blocky weapon made of two rectangles and pull a small lever that sends a series of blurry pellets toward the animal that attacked you and you hear it give a haunting and eerie howl

that should terrify you, but it doesn't.

The beast charges forward and you can't move out of its way in time, so you take another hit and see the flash of red again. Something warns you this is not good and you can't get hit again. The time it takes you to stumble aside and replenish your pellets is too long though, and the creature pounds a thick, clawed hand straight through your chest, and you feel the world go black for a moment as you blink and are now back to where you'd last awoken, in the dark chamber with the crate in the corner, and standing in the same spot as before.

"Bed, now!" You hear the higher pitched voice call out behind you.

You're still not sure who any of these voices belong to, but the synthetic whisper that asked you before, "Do you want to save?" asks it again, and again you say, "Yes."

Everything starts fading to black and you can't wake yourself up. You'll have to wait once more, until the master commands you to arise and remember. Oh, but this time you'll remember. *You'll remember*, you keep mumbling silently to yourself as you

disappear into the darkness. You'll remember. You have to.



The Job

By CP Bialois/Ed White

Dan glanced over the edge of small hill. Seeing his target hadn't come out of the house yet, he went back to assembling his rifle.

With each piece clicking into place, he wondered if his neighbors ever suspected what his real job was or what was in his briefcase when he left the house on his "work days". If nothing else, it helped him to turn his thoughts away from the mark below.

It wasn't that he'd wanted to be an assassin. It was just something he was good at. Everyone had a talent, right?

His concern was the person going about their business below; completely oblivious to their death being moments away. None of his marks had

ever hurt him, so why did he keep doing this?

The money, jackass.

He shook his head at the voice. Yeah, the money was good. Great, actually.

Another click signaled the final piece of his rifle was in place and he pulled a pre-loaded magazine out of a pocket in his briefcase. All he had to do was wait for the mark to step outside and their brains would be the pool filter's problem.

The patio door below opened and a woman in a bikini and a long, opened buttoned shirt and black hair stepped out. He lifted the rifle and took aim as a ten-year-old boy followed her, yelling, "First one in is a—"

The boy didn't finish the sentence as the rifle's report filled the air before the scream.



Chances of a Lifetime
By Robert O'Connell

1937 – A young girl wearing roller skates is sitting on the stoop of a five story walk-up tenement in Brooklyn. She is struggling with one of her skates as a group of boys race by on the sidewalk. Two of the boys are tossing a pink rubber ball back and forth and a few of the others are carrying what appear to be broom handles.

Upon passing the girl, one of the boys pulls to a halt, calling ahead, "hang on a second, fellas."

Looking over his shoulder, one of the boys calls back, "C'mon Paulie, the Canarsies will get another game if we're late."

The boys keep running as Paulie replies, "I'll just be a minute." He turns to the girl and asks, "Do you need some help?"

The girl looks at Paulie and smiles. "I somehow have gotten something stuck in my skate. I could use some help, but I'd hate for you to miss your game."

"It's all right. They won't play without me. I'm their best pitcher. Let me see the skate."

He sits beside her on the stoop and she crosses her legs to place the bottom of the skate near him. He takes the skate, taking care not to touch her

ankle or cause her long skirt to slide up.

"I see it. There's a jagged rock stuck in there."

He pulls out a pocket knife and wedges the stone out of the wheel assembly.

"There, that oughta do it. Stand up and try it out."

"I'd rather not," she says.

"What's wrong? Did you hurt your leg?" he asks.

"It's not that...it's just that...well, I'm somewhat tall and with the skates on, well, I'm kind of embarrassed."

"Fear not," says Paulie, as he stands and goes up three steps to the landing. "You can't be taller than me now."

She smiles at his chivalry and stands.

"Thank you, kind sir. The skates are fine and I don't want to keep you any longer from your game. My name is Alice, by the way. I go to Sacred Heart."

Paulie hops over the stoop railing and starts running toward his game. "Paulie, P.S. 31, and it was my pleasure!"

1945 – Paul knocks on the apartment door as he calls out “refrigerator repair!”

After a few moments, a young woman opens the door holding a mop.

“I’m sorry,” she says, “I was trying to clean up the water. I don’t understand. My icebox literally held melted ice for over 20 years and never leaked a drop. I finally get a new-fangled refrigerator and I have a flood. Please come in.”

“Sorry, ma’am, I’ve been doing a lot of calls on this model. It appears that our delivery men were poorly trained as installers. Most of them aren’t used to the electrical devices.”

“Wait a minute,” she says. “I’m sure I know you, but...Paulie, right?”

“Why yes, but I go by Paul, now. How do we know each other?”

“You kindly removed a stone from my skate wheels, my, it must be nearly ten years.”

“I remember...let me see...yes, Alice, from Sacred Heart! I’m surprised that you remembered me.”

“I actually saw you once again at a basketball game a few years later.”

Paul moves toward the refrigerator and pulls it away from the wall. “You must have had a good seat as I rarely left the bench in High School.”

“I was cheering for your opponent, so I had a good view,” she says.

“Yep, here it is, just as I expected. This unit has a new feature, an evaporator to take care of any leakage. The delivery men never seem to install the hose correctly. Instead of into the unit, they have it directed to your floor. It’s all fixed, now.”

“Please sit and have a Pepsi,” she says. “Unfortunately, it’s not very cold.”

“Why thank you, Alice, but water will be fine. These easy repairs have me a bit ahead of schedule.”

She brings him a glass.

“So how did you get into this line of work?”

“This isn’t really my line, at least I hope not for long. Let’s see, after High School, I joined the Navy like most of the local boys.

I learned some electronics there, but was injured when a shell exploded on board my ship.”

“Oh, my!” Alice gasps.

“Actually, I was lucky. Some of my shipmates were killed. I injured my knee pretty badly and got some bad burns.”

“I was wondering why you were wearing long sleeves in this heat. Are you embarrassed by the scars?”

“Not so much embarrassed, but I don’t like to talk about it to strangers.”

“I’m sorry to pry.”

“Oh, no, not at all. You are quite pleasant to talk to. My injury made it difficult to find work, but the repair work is not too bad. The stairs are the worst part. What about you, Alice?”

“I was lucky enough to go to college during the war. I am a teacher in the third grade at the school around the corner.”

“I hope to start college soon. There is a program where the government will pay to send ex-GIs. I plan to go for a business degree in September. If you don’t mind me asking, is there a Mister Alice?”

“There I have not been as lucky. I had a beau who fought in the infantry. We were not that serious, but might have been had he returned.”

“I’m sorry. I too, have been unlucky. I became engaged to my high school girl before shipping out, but when I returned, she was married with two kids! Well, I’d better get back to work. It was nice seeing you Alice, and I must say, that you have grown nicely into your height. I believe the fashion models call it statuesque.”

“Thank you, Paul.”

1959 – Paul walks on to the floor of Whiteman Appliances on Delancy Street from his office and sees a clerk arguing with a woman. He moves in to investigate and recognizes Alice.

“Alice? What seems to be the problem?” He asks.

The clerk starts to speak, but Paul shoots him down with a look that screams “we will discuss this later.”

Alice takes a breath and says, “it’s good to see you, Paul. I had a new television set delivered from here last week and I can’t get a clear picture. You can’t even tell Jack Benny from Rochester.”

“I see. Do you know if your antenna is wired to your roof, or are you using the rabbit ears?”

“To be honest, I’m not sure.”

“That’s not important, then. The delivery person should have set it up and explained it to you. When we are finished, this young man will accompany you to your home and will not leave until your picture is perfect.” He turns to face the clerk and says pointedly, “even if it means a trip up to your roof.” The clerk looks sheepishly at the floor. “For now, come with me to my office. I’d like to show you around.”

She notices that Paul still has a slight limp. “Is it Paul Whiteman,” she asks.

“No, not me. It’s Kreppel, Paul Kreppel.” He chuckles as they enter his office. “Actually, even the Whiteman’s aren’t Whitemans. They changed it from Weitzmann. Please, have a seat.”

She takes the chair in front of his desk. “In any case, you appear to be in charge here.”

“Yes, I am the General Manager of the entire store. It’s one of three and there are two more planned. I did go to NYU on the GI Bill and then got a Master’s degree in Management.”

“And is there a Mrs. Kreppel?” Alice asks, scanning the room for pictures.

Paul smiles. “Not yet, but I am currently dating the boss’s daughter. She’s a divorcee with two boys. Apparently, it’s a common practice these days. They sure didn’t cover it in Business School.”

“Do you still live in the neighborhood?”

“For now, but again, it seems like the management track also includes a big house out on the Island. I imagine that might be next. What about you, Alice?” He notices that she is not wearing a wedding ring and quickly changes his tack. “Are you still teaching?”

“Yes, I am, but that will be changing soon. I have been hired as a principal in a new elementary school in Levittown. It seems that I will be moving to Long Island as well.”

“Well, maybe we’ll be destined to cross paths again. You know, I don’t even know your last name.”

“It’s Alcott, Alice Alcott.”

“Like the author, Little Women I believe.”

“Paul, you never fail to surprise me.”

They head out to the floor. Paul says to her, “You let me know if Junior here doesn’t fix your set properly. This is an opportunity for him to learn about customer service.” He waves the kid over and bids Alice a warm goodbye.

1968 – Paul is on his way home from the office late one evening when he sees a Chevy Corvair with a flat tire on the shoulder. There is a woman standing beside it. The traffic is light at this hour, but the twilight makes it dangerous never the less. He pulls his Cadillac over and backs up to where the Corvair is stopped. He gets out of his car and immediately begins laughing.

“Alice! I should have known.”

“Paul? This is just too much. I can’t let you change a tire. You’ll ruin your suit. Let me wait for a tow.”

“Nonsense. Suits, I have, and dry cleaners, I have. It will give me something to do while we catch up.”

He moves toward the trunk when she stops him while opening the hood. “It’s up here, Paul.”

“In the engine?”

“No, the engine is in the back. It’s backwards in nearly every respect. I wish that Ralph Nader had published his book sooner.”

Paul gets everything out that he needs and begins to change the tire.

“Good thing we’re near a streetlight,” he says. “So tell me, what’s new.”

“Well, I’m no longer Alice Alcott, but....”

“Congratulations, Alice.”

“None needed, unfortunately. I married a man named Spencer shortly after moving here. It just seemed the thing to do, you know, dinner parties, children, suburban living.”

Paul is removing the lug nuts and carefully placing them in the hubcap. “I take it that it did not go well?” he asks.

“Sadly, no. We didn’t really know one another. He turned out to be kind of a bum and kind of a drunk.”

“I’m so sorry.”

Paul moves to the rear to operate the jack.

“Neither of those were the biggest problem. He just wasn’t a nice person. I could live with

his faults, and so could he. He just couldn’t live with the fact that I could live with them. Do you know what I mean?”

“I think I get the picture. Divorce?”

“Yes, after three and a half years. With no children it was almost as though it never happened. It seems to be growing in popularity these days. Still, I have a nice home that I will soon sell for a nice profit, and my work is going very well. I am coming from a city-wide Board of Education meeting. I may be looking at a state appointment in Albany.”

Paul lets the jack down slowly. “Good for you,” he says. “Is that why you’re selling your house?”

“That’s one possibility. I also have an offer to be Assistant Superintendent in a new district in South Florida. I have some family there and they say it is a wonderful place to live. It’s called Coral Springs. It sounds so exotic.”

“Near Miami?” Paul asks, as he tightens the last of the lug nuts.

“No, it’s closer to Fort Lauderdale. I’m flying down on National in a few days to check it out. Now tell me what you’ve been up to.”

“Let’s see. In a nutshell, I married the boss’s daughter. You’ll find this amusing. I’m no longer a Kreppel. My wife insisted I gentile it up before we married. I’m now Paul Kane.”

She laughs and says, “Wait, Kane of Kane’s Electronics?”

“Yes, I grew as manager and was practically running the entire operation anyway. When her old man retired, I took over. I drive a fancy car, and commute from a big fancy house on the Island.”

“That sounds wonderful, Paul.”

“I suppose so, but between the stress of running a business, and my wife spending money faster that we can earn it, it’s hardly paradise. Coral Springs sounds pretty exotic to me, too. Oh, and my two genius stepsons alternate between dropping out of college and wrecking the business.”

“They sound spoiled,” she says.

“Like their mother, I suppose. Well, you’re all set to go. I imagine that with you moving, this will be our last meeting.”

“We’ll leave it to the fates, Paul. Thank you so much.”

1982 – Alice is sliding a dollar bill into a vending machine, but no

matter how much she flattens it or reorients it, it just comes back out. Paul pulls up in his golf cart and sees that the woman is frustrated.

“Maybe I can help,” he says. “I have some new bills here.”

Alice turns around and immediately begins to laugh. Paul smiles and shakes his head. They embrace.

“Oh, Paul, you are truly my knight in shining armor.”

“This is just too much,” he says. “I’m heading back to the ninth hole. I think I left my wedge by the green. I’m here visiting a friend. He’s waiting since there’s a backup on the tenth tee.”

“But here in Coral Springs, what are the odds?” she asks.

“You made it sound so wonderful. How could I not check it out? So I assume that you moved here.” He puts a dollar in the machine and of course it goes right in. He bows and waves his hand toward the machine. “M’lady?”

She smiles and makes her choice. She offers her dollar to him, but he declines. “Keep it. It may allow us to meet up at another machine someday.”

“As usual, thank you for saving me, Paul. I did not come here right away. I did five years working with the Board of Regents when my sister took ill. I came down in ‘74 to take care of her and my parents. I worked in the Broward School System in a number of capacities and hope to retire in a few years. The move to Florida has been good for me. My golf partner dropped me off at the machine when we finished our round. She’s getting the bags in the car.”

“I won’t keep you, but I will tell you that it has been up and down for me. My wife left me for a man with deeper pockets.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“It was actually a relief. Business has been a struggle competing with the department stores and my stepsons are pretty incompetent. I will lose my shirt, but I am considering letting them buy me out and starting over, possibly down here.”

“What about your knee? I wouldn’t expect you to be playing golf.”

“Arthroscopic surgery. It’s pretty new, mostly for athletes. It’s amazing. They cleared out 40 years of junk and it’s nearly as good as new.”

“Oh, I wish I had time to chat, but...”

“Let’s do it again in ten years.”

1997 – Alice is looking at the net on Court 5 at the Kings Point Tennis Club in Tamarac. It is clearly dipped several inches below the proper tension. A ball bounces by from Court 6 and a man calls out, “A little help?”

She picks up the ball and turns to toss it to the man and says, “As usual, I think that it is I, who needs the help.”

Paul lets out a big laugh. He turns to his doubles partner and shouts, “Larry, volley without me for a little while, OK?”

Alice tosses the ball to Larry who rejoins his warm-up.

Paul goes over to the net pole and begins to turn the crank. The net tightens. “How’s that?” he asks.

Alice measures the height with the racket and says, “Perfect as usual. Paul, I just moved here. I have a match in a few minutes.”

“What an amazing world we live in,” he says. “I retired here ten years ago after I cashed out of the business. I had a nice nest egg. My knee feels great and I kind of run the Tennis Center

here. I did a little consulting, but what I really loved was teaching.”

“Really?”

“Yes, I taught some business courses at the college level, you know, as an adjunct professor. I loved it and I think the students enjoyed it as well.”

“Good for you, Paul. Amazingly, after sixty years, we are both in the same place again. My relations down here are all gone, so I got myself a nice condo, and here we are.”

“It looks like we both need to get to our courts.” He begins to walk away, but turns back toward her. “Alice, would you think it too forward if I were to ask you out for a cup of coffee?”

Afternoon Encounter

By Alice Kashuba

cold wind across the island
hunched shoulders hurried
toward the waiting boat

shadow sailed overhead
dark body against a gray sky
white tail and head in clear contrast

hovering
two golden eyes met mine
we were one

a moment in time.
she sailed away.
I hurried on to the dock.

boat aimed at opposite shore
moved quickly across the cut
engine failure

current carried the craft
toward the open sea
she had not left

circling above
her eye upon me
the motor sparked

she banked
dipped one wing
flew towards her nest

the boat flew across the water
home

Alice smiles for a moment, then steps forward and takes his hand.

“Oh, Paulie, I thought you’d never ask.”

Time Travels

By Carole A Hearn

You woke up from that repeating dream. Asking yourself the same question as before. *Do I believe in such things happening? Is it possible?* You write about your dreams, first in a poem, and then start slowly changing the bizarreness into a story. Your dreams take on a life of their own. Dwelling on these dreams has brought you full circle with your focus on been there and done that, literally.

It all starts becoming clear to you as you write down the words. Time travel. You give yourself time to adjust to that analysis as you drift into one of the times when you were a small child. You are picked up by a furry beast, or so you think at that moment. The beast as it seems, is a man dressed in a cape of sorts that is made of furs, and he delights in you, because of your smiles and giggles.

As more of your time travels emerge, you are sitting at a camp fire with other children

watching the amber blaze of sparks shooting high into the air. There sits a young boy who has chosen to be your guide, teacher, and protector. He annoys you, because he can do many things that you cannot, but he is your friend.

Another time brings you to experiencing the washing of clothes outside in boiling water. You ask many questions to learn more. You share in the cooking when it comes time to put skinned and gutted rabbits on a roasting spit, and because you are famished, the smells fill your nostrils with longing.

Gathering wood for a cold winter's night is a preparation you have learned well in addition to making your bed of soft furs, which have been given to you by your friend. He has also taught you the art of fishing and laughing when you fell into the water.

You have your first glimpse of ocean meeting mountains, and you are in awe of it because of the vast beauty that lies before you. You are realizing more and more as you reflect on all these times of travel that you have been there on many occasions and that someone very dear to you is a part of your life. You feel a sadness come upon you and

you feel the tears sliding down your cheeks.

In this last day of your time travels, you must make a decision. You know the answers to the questions that you have ask yourself. Do I believe in such things happening? Is it possible? Yes and yes.

Willing yourself to gain control of your emotions, you think on all the times you have traveled back and forth through time as a child, through teenage years, and now into young adulthood.

The time has come to make a decision. Do you stay in this time or do you go back in time to where you found the most happiness? The decision is not a hard one to make, so you write out a few words to the one person who is a friend to you in this present time and leave it on your desk for her to find.

You gather a few objects to take with you on your last journey and arrive at the spot where you last traveled to. You look up and there before you are all the clan's people awaiting the bride to be. They have smiles on their faces and their eyes are shiny with moisture. Your friend and mate approaches you with hands that are rough and worn but that know a gentle touch. He has

watched you grow up and has waited for you to return one last and final time.

The laird wraps a binding of cloth around his and your wrist to bind you forever. You can now spend the rest of your days in happiness. You have finally come to the realization that the dreams you had weren't dreams at all but a time and place where you were meant to be.

This is the end of your time travels now that you have finally become aware of them. Now is a new beginning of adventures into your future, living in the past.

Misunderstood

By Bernensky Pierre

He heedfully stared at her picking up the gifts he left on her doorstep. He was observing her with binoculars from afar in his car underneath the shadow of the tree, while he guzzled a large cup of coffee. She looked around, wondering who would do this. She brought it inside and came back outside and got the mail. She went back inside and he waited for her, knowing her schedule. Hours passed and there she appeared with tight ripped black jeans, a small grey shirt, and Black Flat Gladiator sandals. She got in her 2012 black Nissan Maxima and drove

off. He followed her, keeping a great distance from her car. He knew that every Tuesday she was off and would meet with her friend to talk. For weeks he did this, every time he followed her to a new place.

This time it was the mall. He parked six spots away from her. He got out of the car contemplating on words and how to approach her. She walked in and walked to the other side of the mall, while he was steps behind her looking as customary as ever. Her friend was sitting on the bench and she sat next to her. He was standing nearby looking the other way, while his heart was infused with nervousness. Suddenly his heart comported, as his disposition changed.

He treaded to them. "Hey Natalie, did you receive my letters and gifts?"

She was confounded. "Yes, you're very sweet," she responded with a bit of sarcasm.

"Thank you," he said. "Are you free tonight? I would like to take you out to dinner."

"No," she replied. "I'm seeing someone right now."

He was mute with a stolid look on his face, but inside one could

hear cracks of his heart take place. He nodded his head, turned his back, and walked to the bathroom. He smacked water upon his face and shook his head in disbelief. Meanwhile, the two girls were talking about what just happened. Natalie's friend was disturbed by their conversation.

"Where do you know that guy from?" she inquired. "He sounded creepy."

"I know him from high school and back then he had a crush on me," Natalie responded. "I didn't know he still liked me."

"Be careful," she sagaciously said. "He knows where you live."

"He likes me, he wouldn't hurt me," Natalie lightheartedly said.

As they continued to communicate, he stormed out of the mall exuding anger. His heart was pounding with malice schemes. His anger continued to build, forgetting how much he loved her. He walked back and forth in front of the entrance.

"I'm done being a gentleman."

He got into his car and sped to her home with an idea, a plan that only seemed sensible to him. He arrived at her home; parked under the same tree he

was stalking her from for weeks. He got out, jumped the gate, and broke into the house from the backyard. He examined her home, and eventually he got to her room where he hid himself in the closet waiting for her to come home.

It was dawn and she finally came home. The front door woke him up and he got himself together for this moment. All he heard was her footsteps coming and his portentous heartbeat. She opened the door of her room, sat on the side of her bed, and started undressing herself.

"I've spent too much time on you for you not to love me," he said, while he came out of the closet.

She screamed, but he quickly shut her up. He punched her, pinned her on the bed, and drove a pillow to her head to suffocate her. She was trying to fight him off, but his determination was stronger than her will.

"Since you are not going to love me, you are not going to love anybody," he said in an irate voice.

All of a sudden, she stopped fighting. He continued to press down on her head, making sure she was out. She was dead and

he finally removed the pillow from her head and he raped her. After, he took a couple of minutes to stare at her body with disdain. He stayed there.

A week passed by, it was reported that she had not been seen for days. Her parents and her close friend were worried about her. Her friend told the police of this strange guy that approached them that day they met at the mall. Finally, the police arrived at her home and kicked the front door open. As the police was looking around with their guns, he was lying with the corpse in bed. They got to her room, kicked the bedroom door down, and they saw him next to her. They pointed the gun at him.

"Lift up your hands," the officer yelled.

He did so. "She deserved it, she never loved me back."



Alliance

By Jamie White

I hate when people underestimate me.

What makes it worse is when I am already in a mood, and just want to be left alone. I can't tell you how many times I've had to deal with misconceptions, judgments, and crap like that. Just my luck, I can hear someone behind me. I imagine they think they're being stealthy, but they're not.

Just as I'm starting to tire of this game, he makes his move. He jumps out of nowhere (well, I presume he thinks he did) and blocks my path.

"Be gone with you," I say.

Before I can say another word, large teeth protrude from his mouth, and he jumps to attack me.

I grin and flick my wrist. Suddenly, he's frozen in place, a confused expression further marring his already gross appearance.

"What the hell?"

I give him a sly smile. "Assumed I was a helpless normal, did you not?"

"What are you?"

"Someone that could cause you to burst into flames with a thought. Are you willing to listen?"

I can see by the look on his face that he wants to rip me apart, piece by piece. He can't, though, and I can see the frustration all over his face.

"What do you want?"

"For you to get the hell out of my face. That is, until you're needed."

"I'm sorry?" He frowns, confusion in his eyes.

"You'll understand soon enough."

These days, it pays to have non-magical help. Those puritans are so troublesome...



The Waterbed

By DiVitto Kelly

Matthew Swain's older brother Russell, age seventeen, and

already too cool for his own good, made it quite clear. "Do NOT go into my room for any reason while I'm gone, do you understand me?" Matthew, age eleven, made a big gulping sound and nodded in understanding.

"I know how much you like jumping on my waterbed so if anything happens, or if anything is out of place, even one single thing, I will hunt you down and pummel you," he added, making a balled-up fist motion.

Matthew was a good kid, but he could be a wise ass at times. Last year, he accidentally popped a pencil-point hole in his brother's lake-sized king bed, located in the remodeled basement of their two-story home.

"Bad aim," claimed Matthew, while playing darts with his friends. Truth was, the dartboard was in the game room, located in the other room of the basement.

Russell, a shade over six-foot two and star high school wide receiver, would be college shopping with his parents over the weekend so Matthew's grandmother, Susana, would be in charge.

"I've put an evil curse on my room so if you even attempt to sit on my bed, you're toast, I guarantee it!" boasted Russell, a strange seriousness imbedded in his dark brown eyes.

"Alright, alright, jeeze, I get, I get it!" cried Matthew, who was still small for his age and wondering when his growth spurt would occur. "I not touch bed!" he added in caveman speak.

"No fighting guys," yelled their father, grabbing the last of their matching brown leather LL Bean luggage from the hallway.

Matthew stood just outside the front door, watching everyone assemble into the car. As they pulled out of the driveway, Matthew blew his brother a kiss, which infuriated him. Russell rolled down the back window of their pearl blue Subaru wagon and pounded his fist into his open hand.

It started to rain; the weekend forecast predicted gloomy weather with a strong chance of severe thunderstorms. Matthew invited his best friend Kip over for dinner and a sleep over, with his parent's permission. Abuela Susana made homemade chicken fajitas that both children devoured in record time. Afterwards, Matthew and Kip

grabbed a bowl of ice cream then played pool in the game room in the basement. After cleaning up, the two watched a pair of shark-themed movies, Stanley – about a hammerhead shark that wants to become a vegetarian, then Open Water, a film about a couple left alone in the ocean by accident while on a diving trip.

“You know what made that film so scary?” asked Matthew to his friend. “It was based on a true story.”

“And in the Great Barrier Reef!” replied Kip, whose dad was a commercial fisherman where they lived in Sarasota, Florida. “With all those great whites swimming around, what the heck would you do?”

“Don’t even want to think about it,” chimed Matthew, who last week went snorkeling with his family in nearby Venice Beach, home to thousands of fossilized shark’s teeth.

It was nearing midnight. Matthew’s abuela called down in the basement, “Bedtime niños.”

“Un momento,” sighed Matthew. “Can we sleep down here? Kip brought over his sleeping bag.”

“Bien, just don’t stay up too late,” she replied.

“Cool,” said Matthew. “Forget the sleeping bags; let’s sleep on my brother’s huge waterbed! It’ll be like sleeping on a boat!”

“Didn’t your brother say he will officially kill you if he finds you slept on his bed?” asked Kip, “And I’ll be an accessory to the crime.”

“That’s against the law,” said Matthew, motioning off his older brother’s threats. “He’s said stuff like that ever since I put a barbeque rib in his piranha’s fish tank when was eight years old.”

“Why would you do that?” asked Kip, puzzled.

“Well, you know how they say a piranha can debone an animal carcass in like, twenty seconds? I wanted to see it for myself.”

“And did it?”

“Uh . . . no.”

Where’s your brother’s fish now?”

“My guess it’s probably floating around somewhere in the Sarasota sewer system.”

“I’d kill you for that,” said Kip.

“Hey, I was a kid,” replied Matthew, shrugging his shoulders. “My brother’s not getting back for two days so it’s

cool, but let’s study how he has the bed made up, every angle, you know?”

“I have an idea,” boasted Kip, who had lost one of his front teeth just last year trying to field a hard-hit ground ball in the face. He went to the dentist and had an implant tooth made, but it took a week so in the meantime, he looked like some middle class street kid, Polo shirt and all. Kip took out his Smartphone and snapped away.

“Now we can compare!”

“That’s why we’re friends Kip, ‘because you’re smart like me,” joked Matthew, as he turned on a camping lantern. Kip shook his head and rolled his eyes.

After two dozen rounds of poker, playing for small change, the two boys started yawning. “Crap, it’s almost two in the morning!” said Kip.

Matthew gathered up the cards and his winnings and placed them inside his baseball cap on his brother’s night table. Kip picked up the lantern by the handle, turning the knob all the way until it clicked off.

The rain thrashed against the above ground basement windows. His brother’s room, originally the guest bedroom,

had its own full bathroom and was much bigger than his old room on the second floor. Flailing branches danced in the wind, creating creepy shadows. The storm was a holdover from a tropical storm that had meandered out into the Gulf of Mexico. Matthew's parents were traveling northward, towards Tallahassee to visit Florida State and then to Gainesville to check out the University of Florida. Russell was a big-time gator fan and preferred the Swamp to the Seminoles, which was his dad's alma mater. Still, Russell promised his dad he'd 'kick the tires' and play it by ear.

Kip, who was not used to staying up late, had fallen asleep quickly; his parents were always strict when it came to bedtime hours. Matthew on the other hand, was nocturnal. He'd developed a bad routine staying up late even on school nights. His parents told their youngest son he could stay up late as long as he was either reading or drawing. It was a policy Matthew savored; often reading the Harry Potter series till midnight. One of Matthew's teachers actually wanted to conference with his parents about the dark circles under his eyes; wondering if everything was okay. Matthew was a good student, but it

usually took a pair of Strawberry Frosted Pop Tarts and coffee diluted with half milk to jumpstart him in the morning.

Matthew finally dozed off as it neared half past two, the heavy thunder and lightning bombarding the Swain residence in between the faint caws of seagulls.

The waterbed began to ripple, gently ebbing and flowing as Kip rolled over on his side. Drops of water tapped Matthew across the face. He brushed it off, still sound asleep. More drops hit the side of his face, some managed to drip down, finding his inner ear. Again, Matthew brushed his face then slowly opened his eyes, like stuck blinds. There, about twenty feet to his left, was a great white shark, poking its conical snout from the calm water, its eye, black as coal. The massive gray and white frame gleamed in the moonlit night.

Matthew sat up hastily. The shark submerged like a submarine, the familiar triangular dorsal fin dropping below the water. Matthew's eyes practically popped out of his head. A dream of course, he thought before dozing off again. The moving waves made the large, rectangular bed rise and fall. Matthew dropped his hand over

the edge of the bed. "Huh?" He felt something rough, then pointy. The boy opened his eyes again. This time, the shark thrashed its crescent tail against the bedframe and vanished.

Matthew screamed as loud as he'd ever screamed, until it hurt. His friend Kip sprang up, "What the?" discovering the bed soaked. "Oh no, I didn't pee on your brother's bed, did I?"

"We're at sea Kip!" Matthew bellowed. He saw the dorsal fin heading towards Kip's side of the bed. "Get your hand out of the water, now!"

The shark bashed against the bedframe, knocking Kip into Matthew, who almost spilled into the briny water. The full moon above, the color of grapefruit, hovered above the two boys, afloat on the king-size mattress, alone.

"What happened?" asked Kip, "Where are we?"

"I don't know," answered Matthew, his long, straight hair sopping wet.

"I knew we shoulda watched Three Stooges episodes instead!" cried Kip, frantically looking out into the black water. "We're dead!"

“No, we’re not,” said Matthew. “I mean, this can’t be real.” The boy could make out the shape of a large buoy, possible light blue in color, about fifty yards away.

“There’s the . . .” Kip trembled, pointing out in the direction of the fin. The shark torpedoed towards the front end of the bed frame. The nose lifted above water, the pointed, serrated white teeth, made perfectly for cutting through prey, framed its cavernous mouth. Matthew scrambled around on the wet surface of the bed, waves toppling over the mattress now.

“Help me with this!” barked Matthew. Both boys grabbed the top of the headboard, prying off a long piece of wood. “My brother is gonna kill us for this!”

“Us?” gulped Kip.

The two raised the six-foot long plank of wood and pointed it as the massive fish, nearly fifteen feet in length.

“Hold on!” yelled Matthew. The shark jumped up on the bed, jaws furiously wide open. The back end of the bedframe lifted out of the water, both boys holding on to the headboard for dear life. They managed to plunge the wood plank into the shark’s maw, like a supersized

tongue depressor. The fish gagged and backed off, recoiling back into the dark water.

“That was close,” gasped Matthew, wiping the saltwater from his eyes. Kip stood up, scanning the vast ocean.

“We’re all alone out here!”

“I know, but we’ve got to stay calm,” replied Matthew. “We need to think, and quickly!”

“How about using part of these headboard shelves; we could paddle to the buoy?” suggested Kip.

“That’s why I’m friends with you Kip, because you’re smart like me!” For the first time the two kids actually smiled. They positioned themselves on each side of the bed and paddled, luckily the ocean current was still. As they approached the bobbing object, Matthew’s friend noticed something.

“Hey, I’ve seen this before,” said Kip, recognizing the orange stripes running across the towering cone-shaped buoy. I’ve seen this while fishing with my dad. I think we’re in the Gulf of Mexico!”

“So we’re close to home then?” asked Matthew, hoping it was true.

“Yeah, I’d say we’re about two miles from shore.” Kip was optimistic then came the realization. “Uh, two miles . . .”

“At least we know where we are, and that’s a start,” said Matthew. The flat, broken pieces of wood made it difficult to paddle, but at least it was something. “We’ll get there!”

Kip, paddling on the left side of the bed, lifted his head and saw the familiar triangular shape cutting through the water, approaching full steam ahead. “It’s coming back!” Both kids dropped their makeshift paddles and picked up the large plank. The shark zeroed in on the bed, mouth open. The two boys raised the piece of wood like a blunt harpoon.

“Now!” screamed Matthew. With all their might, the boys rammed the oncoming shark straight in the snout, but this time, the two-inch thick plank snapped like balsa wood. The great fish submerged, thrashing its powerful tail then swam away. The rush of water propelled the bed 360 degrees, the tail scraping underneath the wood frame. Both kids screamed as they jostled towards the center of the bed for safety.

“Grab the paddles!” yelled Kip, looking desperately around for them. But during their epic battle, the two pieces of particleboard had floated away.

“Now we’re really up a certain creek without our paddles,” said Matthew, half joking, but feeling near hopeless. The two felt a sudden jolt from underneath. The shark pressed its nose against the thick, polyvinyl mattress, lifting it out of the water. Matthew tumbled over the headboard, landing in the warm surf. The shark snapped its bear-trap jaws wildly, breaking through the wood and metal frame surrounding the rubbery mass. Kip slid over and reached out his hand. Matthew grabbed it and crawled up, banging his left knee on the solid oak frame.

Both boys tumbled over to the center of the mattress as the shark elevated the frame again. This time the shark retreated, as if punched solidly in the nose. The fish quickly swam away, but for how long, they thought.

A few moments later, the dorsal fin broke water, the shark circling the drifting bed. “We’re almost there!” pointed Kip, as they neared the buoy, now only a few yards away. Both noticed a rusted ladder and safe perch up top.

The shark tightened its circle, prolonging the agony for the two children. “It’s toying with, isn’t it?” said Kip, his lips quivering.

Matthew gazed at his leg in horror. “Oh God, no wonder it won’t leave, I’m bleeding; I must of cut myself when I fell off the bed!” Kip turned, gasping at his friend’s wound. Both looked up, eyeing the familiar dorsal fin in the reflecting moonlight . . . then it charged.

“It’s coming again!” screamed Matthew, but with no paddles, both boys lunged for each side of the bed and began rowing with their hands.

“This is taking too long!” yelled Kip, already running out of energy.

The shark loomed closer and closer, the snout of the beast rising; it was only twenty feet away.

“Come on; come on!” screamed Matthew, “We’re almost there!” But they weren’t. The great white shark flicked its powerful tail and pectoral fins and leaped onto the bed, rows upon rows of white daggers eager to snap up its victims. The weight of the beast caused both kids to bounce off, landing hard onto the . . . floor?

“Aahhhh,” Russell screamed, “What are you two fish sticks doing on my bed!” Both Matthew and Kip fumbled for words, still half asleep as they picked themselves off the burnt orange shag carpeting.

“What the . . . ? I thought you were supposed to be in Tallahassee?” yawned his younger brother, still rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

“He made me do it; he made me do it,” trembled Kip, as he pointed to Matthew.

“I’m sure he did,” replied Russell, who had planned to simply jump in bed and sleep like a rock. “You’ll live; my brother – that’s a different story.”

“What happened?” asked Matthew, hoping to leave the scene unscathed.

“The stinking car broke down – overheated when we were stuck in traffic. So we took a cab back. Man was dad pissed. And now I am too!”

“Please don’t kill me,” his brother begged.

“I’m actually too tired to kill you right now,” said Russell yawning. Matthew gave a sigh of relief. “But we’ll make an appointment sometime tomorrow late

afternoon after I wake up.”
Matthew gulped.

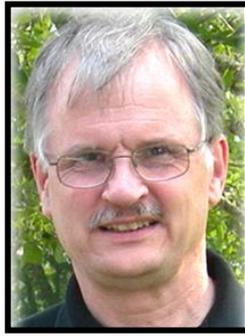
“I believe my schedule is all full tomorrow, brother,” replied Matthew. “You know, baseball practice then cutting the grass, washing mom’s car, tidy up my room, feed the cat, hit the books. I’ll have to take a rain check.”

“Leave now!” said Russell, yawning for the third time, revealing a row of fairly straight white teeth.

Matthew and Kip picked up their belongings and zombied into the game room, rolling out their sleeping bags and crashing on the spot.

“What just happened in there?” asked Kip, eyes closed and secretly hugging his stuffed animal seal.

“I think maybe we shouldn’t watch any more shark movies or sleep on my brother’s waterbed,” replied Matthew, as he nestled inside his navy blue cocoon. “Sleeping at sea can be hazardous to your health.”



To Life

By Rick Weber

I am now an old man and have lived a full life, full in every aspect. I have experienced deprivation, humiliation, and pain but, I have also known fulfillment, acknowledgement, and joy. My youth was taken from me by a power bent on destruction when that force sent me to a place of despair. There I saw my family members die around me. Our names were taken from us and we were given numbers. I should have not made it out of that place but, I did. I did because there were others around me with the same fate who gave me hope. In the end, I survived and I knew I had to go forward with living.

I was given the opportunity to move far away from the place of my birth to a land which gave me hope. Many others, who like me, had faced the darkness now traveled into the light. We went into the sun knowing that the abyss would always loom around us.

With this new life came the responsibility to preserve what had been entrusted to us. I found my niche in the form of being a civil servant who had taken an oath to protect our new homeland. I was committed to my new position with everything my being had to offer but I was still young and in need of someone to help me achieve my potential.

I found this person in the mostly unlikely form of an individual. He was a man who stood only about five foot tall with a nebbish persona to match his stature. He was known to have said that he only took orders from two people, the country’s leader and his wife. Yet, this man was my boss and I got to know his other side. I was recruited by him personally not too long after I set down my roots in my new home. He molded me into the professional that I would become and added to the person whom I am.

One of my colleagues remarked that one look from the boss made him feel that he was already in prison but I disagreed. He held us, his subordinates, to the highest moral and professional standards. Misjudgments by any of us would be dealt swiftly and harshly by him but yet, if one of

us ended up in the hands of our adversaries, he would go to no end to rescue the person in trouble. His qualities bred loyalty, which all of us had toward him. His eye for talent ensured that we complemented each other in our efforts. He was a leader unafraid to get his hands dirty.

After working for him for several years, he would present us with what I would deem the ultimate test of our work skills and also of our souls. None of us knew how long he had been planning our mission. His obsession with secrecy was also our obsession. We never asked any questions beyond what we needed to know to get a certain job done. When he made us privy to this new operation, everyone knew that this would be the greatest challenge of our careers.

Our target was to go out and capture the man whose past actions were beyond demonic. The number of lives he extinguished and the damage he had inflicted were beyond comprehension. At first, we thought that we would simply go out and neutralize this perpetrator but we were wrong. The boss told us that this target had to be brought to justice. This order was hard to grasp and even harder for me to believe that I would follow it. The boss,

our mentor, was trusted and we would have to put our faith in him.

He was the first to tell us that this would be a most difficult undertaking in an operation which would be rife with many obstacles to overcome. He stated that our nation depended on us. To me, nothing more needed to be said. I had to put my rage and my nightmares aside. A day still does not go by when I do not have flashbacks from my dark past but, in this instance I found myself fortunate that I could draw support my coworkers who lived through the same experience. Although the boss was not one to give a shoulder to cry on, his leadership supplied each of us with the fortitude we needed.

Other entities supplied resources for our mission. The operation was to take place thousands of miles away on another continent. Our target had been in hiding for a decade and a half. Twice before he had been captured but was able to slip out of the grasp of justice. He moved like a chameleon across one continent and then on to another with the aid of others and his ability to blend into his new environment.

Our information was that our prey had held a variety of

occupations from farmer to factory worker, much different occupations from the high position he once maintained. His goal to remain hidden had served him well over the years but now fate was about to intervene.

The plan for his final detention was now in motion. Our boss was its architect and he would be with us to carry it out. Each of us made our way to the site where it would be initiated. A plan like this had not been carried out before. The logistics alone were overwhelming. With the boss in charge, I felt certain that we would be successful in this endeavor.

With our target's daily routine in hand, we were ready to proceed with the operation. The location was on the street where he lived, a street ironically named for a foreign military man who has his own tribulations. It was evening when the target was accosted by us as he walked home from a bus stop. His transfer to a secure location went relatively well and he already resigned himself to the process that awaited him even before his identity was confirmed by the team. Interrogations began prior to his removal from his adopted country to ours for the next phase.

I found the most revolting admission from this pitiful excuse of a human being was that he was only following orders when it came to his past deeds. Any vigilante thoughts we harbored were long extinguished by the intervention of the boss. We were committed to bringing him to our courts. We smuggled him out of the country and delivered him to face justice.

There was diplomatic fall out about the rendition of this man to our country. The outcry was tremendous from his adopted home rising to the attention of international circles. The reality was that the only people who missed him were his immediate family. Others hiding there from similar pasts feared for their own captures and did not care about him. For us, we had done our jobs. Our talents were now needed for other operations but this did not keep us from monitoring the defendant's progress through the criminal justice system.

Almost a year after his arrival on our soil, his trial began. After months of testimony and evidence being presented, he was found guilty and sentence to death. I spoke with my colleagues and we wondered when the sentence would be carried out. Due to the high

profile nature of the case, we knew that it would be done in secret. Only one of us asked to be present. As for me, I did my job. During this man's tenure, I had seen death firsthand, many times by those who carried out his orders. I had no desire to see death again, even though death was part of my chosen profession.

Two years after our operation, the execution was carried out. His body was then immediately cremated and his ashes were later scattered at sea beyond our country's territorial limits. In the end, he would go the way in which he had sent so many. I felt nothing for him, neither sadness nor joy from his demise.

I still grieve every day for those whose lives were cut short by this man and his co-conspirators. I recently saw a media report recounting the fiftieth anniversary of his execution. I needed nothing to remind me of that date because it was forever etched in my mind.

I once lived in darkness but I was given a second chance at life, a chance bolstered by a fine mentor. I look ahead even though my own time is coming near its end. The way along my new life has not always been smooth. I married and had two

sons. Both served our country in war but only one came home. The other would establish himself professionally, marry, and give us grandchildren. My wife died a few years back but my grandchildren had children of their own.

As I stated, I am an old man but, I am still able to live on my own. Although I am alone at night, my days are filled with the laughter of my grandchildren and my great grandchildren in my home. Much of this, I owe to the boss who gave me a sense of purpose and kept me focused on that which was important. Besides teaching me my job, he also taught me about life. Here's to Life!



Authors!

Niccolo Machiavelli (May. 3)

Thomas Pynchon (May. 8)

Sir James Barrie (May. 9)

Daphne Du Maurier (May. 13)

Walt Whitman (May. 31)

William Butler Yeats (June. 13)

Harriet Beecher Stowe (June. 14)

George Orwell (June. 25)

Helen Keller (June. 27)

The Writer’s Group meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month in the second floor conference room from 6:00 – 7:30pm.

***Upcoming dates for 2016:**

Aug 2, Sept 6, Oct 4, Nov 1, Dec 6.

The Poetry Club meetings are held the third Tuesday of every month in the second floor conference room from 6:00 – 7:30pm.

***Upcoming dates for 2016:**

July 19, Aug 16, Sept 20, Oct 18, Nov 15, Dec 20.

From picture books and novels to poetry, stop by and discuss your ideas. Submit your short story or poem to be published in the monthly Portal to Daniel W. Butler at dabutler@broward.org. All communications with the editor and all inquiries concerning this publication should be addressed to: Daniel W. Butler, the Portal Editor

South Regional/BC Library
7300 Pines Blvd.
Pembroke Pines, FL. 33024.
Telephone: 954-201-8896
dabutler@broward.org

The PORTAL was designed, produced, and edited solely by the instructor and students of the South Regional / Broward College Writer’s Club and Poetry Club for non-profit.

The opinions expressed are those of the members of the Writer’s Group, and does not necessarily represent those of the staff, administrators, or trustees of the Broward County Libraries Division.

The PORTAL pamphlet is paid for by the Friends of South Regional / Broward College Library and is not to be duplicated or used for commercial purposes.

***All copyrights revert back to the original artist and authors after publication.**

Copyright 2016

FEEDBACK CORNER

We want to hear from you! Let us know what you think of our stories. Feel free to email Daniel W. Butler, head of the writer’s group at dabutler@broward.org or call (954) 201-8896.

Contributing Authors include:

Cheryl Sheinman

Carol Ann Howell

Donna Ragland-Greene

Raisa Goltsin

Meagan Cahuasqui

<http://meagankimberly.tumblr.com/>

CP Bialois/Ed White

<https://cpbialois.wordpress.com/>

Robert O’Connell

Alice Kashuba

Carole A. Hearn

Bernensky Pierre

Jamie White

<http://www.jamielwhite.com>

DiVitto Kelly

www.divittowrites.com

Rick Weber

