

September/October 2016 Issue / Pamphlet



The Portal

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

1940's Fun Days By Carole A Hearn

Back in the 1940s; there was no TV to watch at least not in our home, no Game Boys or I-Pads to play games on, and no computers or cell phones.

We did however have a movie theater with popcorn, candy, and drinks. After paying your dime to get into the theater, you could stay and watch the movie more than once. Saturday was a special day for all of us. There were my sister Connie, three cousins - Arthur, Henry, and Jacob - from one family, and three cousins - Sherlene, Darlene, and Delbert - from another family. There were probably another ten or twelve neighborhood kids, mostly boys who always showed up on Saturdays too. Everyone was older than me except for my one cousin Jacob. The older neighborhood boys like to flirt with the older girls and throw popcorn at them.

For a nickel you could buy a Coca-Cola, and if you were fortunate enough to have a dime, you could also buy a Milky Way candy bar. That was my favorite back then and still is today. Candy bars for a nickel you say? Yep, I kid you not. We could also get a small paper bag full of penny candy for a nickel. Seems like everything back then was either a penny, a nickel, or a dime. Those were, as some would say, "the good old days." I can't believe the prices of soda and candy now in the theaters let alone the price of admission. I guess it's just a sign of the times.

I lived a quieter life compared to this day in time. No roaring loud sounds coming from mufflers and loud music blaring from car radio speakers at 2:00 A.M. People got up early for work and went to bed early unless it was hot summer, and then you sat on the porch till it cooled off a bit, and listened to my mom telling ghost stories. She was good at it too. She said they were true

stories that she was told, but who really knows? I'm sure she embellished them at any rate. I'll get back to her storytelling later.

Entertainment was what you made for yourselves. Like gathering your cousins, your sister, and the neighbor kids so you could have a softball game after getting out of the movie theater. Summer days were filled with hopscotch, jumping rope, playing Red Rover and a few other made up games. Didn't have a basketball hoop, football, nor did we have a soccer ball. Actually never heard of soccer or football back then. Don't recall any of the older boys having one either.

One of my cousins named Sherlene was one year older than me and she was always coming up with something that we knew we should not do, but if it wasn't a biggie, (we called them biggies) you could do it. Just don't get caught. Somehow it was always found out about

even when I didn't break down and tell on myself.

Like the time we sneaked into a pear orchard and ate not yet ripe pears and couldn't go to school the next day because of belly aches and sitting on the toilet. My Mom knew that whatever caused our ailments was one and the same for both of us. My mom was smart like most moms are, but we didn't realize that back when we were young. I finally broke down and told her what we had done. My mom felt like I had already suffered my punishment, so she just warned against it happening again. She said the farmer could have shot us for trespassing and that scared me at the time she said it. Being scared doesn't last long in an eight- year- olds head though.

Of course we went back. The farmer caught us. Told us he did not want us climbing his trees. Said we could come back in a few weeks when the pears were ripe and pick up some that fell on the ground. So we said we were

sorry, which really meant "sorry that we got caught." But we did as he asked since he was nice to us.

Another time my cousin talked me into something that could have been a lot worse than it turned out to be. My cousin Sherlene said, "let's rake up the leaves and burn them." "Ok," I said. All kids are fascinated with fire and while I knew never to play with matches, this wasn't playing. We were going to clean up the yard and make it look nice. Funny how when you want to do something you really shouldn't be doing, you find ways in your head to make it be all right. She had told her dad what we were going to do and he said ok and told us where to rake the leaves to burn them. All was going fine until she handed me a stick to poke at the fire. Well, I was wearing a scarf around my head which was tied under my chin. I leaned over the fire and poked it with my stick. The flame shot up and burned my scarf and

scorched a strand of my hair. I quickly yanked it off and didn't burn my skin but ruined my favorite scarf.

Now what was I going to tell my mom about the scarf? That the wind blew it off my head and into the fire? Well, nothing else came to mind, so I went with that. More explanations had to be told of course. I figured she knew what probably had happened. That I had been playing around an outdoor fire but she didn't punish me. She just warned again about the dangers and said no more burning leaves. My mom was cool, only I didn't know the word cool back then. She never whipped me. I got a slap on the arm maybe a couple of times but never a whipping. God knows I deserved a few along the way. But mostly I have to say that I heeded her word because something told me that she knew better than me about things, and I didn't want to make her ashamed of me for not minding her.

Any day that wasn't cold or rainy, we were outside getting fresh air and sunshine. We rode bikes to the zoo, the museum, the library and the city swimming pool. We packed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and went on picnics. We rode everywhere or we walked. My cousin had her brother's bike and my sister toted me on the handle bars. We were never in my mom's hair so to speak.

The winter days of cold would set in and we would look for other entertainment. Playing all kinds of card games. Monopoly was a big favorite. We colored, played hangman, created some of our own games, cut out paper dolls from newspaper and played dress up with old curtains and jewelry. Well the girls did. The boys didn't hang around when we were having tea parties and doing girly things. They spent time reading comic books, wrestling, and punching each other to see who was tougher. They also did tricks on their

bikes like wheelies, sitting on each other's shoulders while riding their bikes sitting backwards, and standing on their seats among other things.

Sometimes we played doctor and patients. I was usually the one who had to be the patient and got stuck with make believe needles that were sharp pointed little sticks. Had to wear a torn up piece of material for a head wound but got to drink Kool-Aid as medicine and that part I liked. Even got to eat Smarties because they were my pills to take away the pain from my wounded head. I was toted up and down the sidewalk in a wagon as the make-shift ambulance. I was the smallest you see so I fit in the wagon better, but my cousin wanted to be a patient too some of the times we played. She just wanted to drink the Kool-Aid and eat the Smarties.

We even started a club so that we could all go on a week's vacation to the old Clubhouse.

We had sales on our comic books and now that I think on it, we started what is now known as yard sales way back then. We hunted up soda bottles to get the return fees for them. The Coca-Cola was a nickel but you had to pay a nickel for the deposit on the bottle. If you took back the bottle you got your deposit fee back. So we were always looking around for bottles. We collected newspaper and sold it by the pound. A few favorite uncles donated some funds and we couldn't wait for our summer vacation to start.

Then school was out, and it was time to go. We rode in the back of a pickup truck, and it was loaded with cardboard boxes full of food. We would go over the Ohio River Bridge into Kentucky which took us down into what was called the Bottoms. There in an immensely large corn field way back off the main road, was an old farm house that looked like it had been standing there as far back as the Dark Ages. By

day it just looked old but by night it looked spooky. We had to take brooms to sweep out the cobwebs and clean the floors before we could put down our blankets and pillows. The boys got the jobs of priming the outside pump and bringing in buckets of water so we could wash up after all the dirty work was done.

There were no windows with glass panes. Only boards that were I guess called shutters that pushed open and another board propped against them to hold them at an angle to let in the air. Of course we had to close them at night to keep out the unsavory creatures and bugs. We used the Coleman lanterns that were powered by gas for light.

During the day, we fished off the bank and we had a B B gun, so we shot at cans sitting in tree and filled balloons with water and shot at them. We explored around in the area and went picking blackberries and corn. We played hide and seek and

we brought along our cards just in case it rained.

All evening meals were completed before it got dark. If it didn't rain we would build a bonfire and sit around it, and my mom would tell her spooky stories, most of which I had already heard, but this particular night, it was raining and we had to come in early. We were snacking on cookies and chips while my mom began telling her story.

She was talking about the time my aunt and uncle had been traveling home from a neighbor's house in a horse and buggy when they heard what sounded like a scream. They knew that there were panthers out in the country and thought maybe that was the noise they had heard. They looked back and saw something white that seemed to be floating behind them. They had no idea what it was and it scared them. Even the horse seemed uneasy and started trotting faster. Then they came to

the bridge and whatever the white thing was just flew right over their heads and went quickly down under the bridge. Well, it was a while before my aunt and uncle traveled again after dark.

Then she told the story that still creeps me out all these years later about a couple who went to bed and went to sleep. Sometime during the night the cover that was pulled up over the couple started being pulled very, very slowly down to the foot of the bed.

The husband said to his wife, "What are you doing with the cover?"

"I'm not doing anything with the cover," she answered back.

"Stop it," he said.

"Stop what?"

"Pulling the darn cover off of the bed."

"But I'm not doing anything at all except trying to sleep," she said.

Then he reached over and lit a candle, but didn't see anything or anybody. He got up went through the house and searched throughout and then checked under the bed and just shook his head.

He straightened the covers, got back into bed, and settled down to go back to sleep, and it started again. This time, he knew it wasn't his wife because she was snoring. He woke her up and said, "Grab your pillow; we are going to sleep in the other room," and off they went. He didn't have any more trouble with his covers moving and declared the other room as haunted. He decided the next morning to let the ghost have that bedroom and bed and he never returned to it. It was just at the end of that story that there was a loud boom against the outside wall, and we all screamed at the same time.

While we were all engrossed at the telling of the story, my aunt had sneaked out and found our baseball bat, and she had

banged it on the wall scaring us silly. We finished our snacks and were told it was time to go to sleep, but I thought about that cover moving business for a while until I couldn't hold my eyes open any longer. The next morning, I asked my mom if that was a true story, and she said it was told to her as truth when she was a girl. I wasn't too concerned about it though

because I shared a bed with my sister, and I figured since I slept against the wall, if there was something like a ghost, it would get her first. So that made me feel better, and I didn't worry anymore except a few times growing up after I watched some silly horror movie.

So at the end of the week, we cleaned up, and burned all of our trash, which I didn't bother to help with. I just let the older ones do that bit of the cleanup.

Lesson learned from past mistakes. We left the old Club House before it was a Clubhouse a little cleaner than

we had found it and were ready to get back home to start saving all over again for next year's vacation



The Alpha

By Meagan Cahuasqui

In the beginning there was darkness, and then I opened my eyes only to be blinded by a beam of light, harsh as supernova heat. I wailed and moaned and cried and found stardust filled my lungs and sent me reeling toward the nothing.

My hands reached and grasped, fingers curling, all around empty air and nothing to attach myself to. Fear crept up my spine as I floated freely among celestial bodies, waiting for one to claim me.

Then, an invisible force swept me upward and I broke through a layer of black to find a softer light and something shielded my eyes, invisible, but warm and safe, it rocked me until my fears subsided.

As my vision came back to me I found I'd fallen among the moon and stars, still in darkness but no longer afraid. I still didn't see you but felt you near, so I let go and melded into the black, my eyes dim twinkles, new stars in the heavens until the omega comes.



Like a Dream

By CP Bialois/Ed White

The early morning dew was cold as it settled on my face. It

reminded me of the creek that snaked its way through the trees next to my folks' home. It wasn't much, but, during the humid summers along the base of the Appalachians, it was all a young boy needed. Those memories were like a wonderful dream, one I had every day since I joined the army to help me push through. It was so peaceful that

part of me hoped I was dead and in heaven. But then, who would help papa with the field work, or mama with the animals back home? The thought of them working so hard without help was what finally tore me from my dream and brought me back to the hell I'd left. It was during that time, the gray area between sleep and waking, that I realized

that everything around me was silent. The sound of gunfire and fighting that had rocked me to sleep in the early morning had ceased.

After what felt like an eternity, I couldn't hold my eyes closed anymore. The desire to know the fate of my comrades overrode my fear or common sense and caused my eyes to open as if they had a mind of their own. The first sight that greeted me was that of the green canopy of trees high above me. Though I was sure it was early morning, there wasn't the usual covering of mist that embraced the ground. Nor did the sun's light pierce the ceiling of leaves as if it were midday. Had it really been that long since I first felt the cold dew on my face? I thought that was strange, but I didn't dwell on it as I strained to listen for any movement in the underbrush. The familiar sounds of men were gone, replaced with the tranquil songs of the birds high above as they floated effortlessly through

the air. I listened intently, but there was nothing there that bore me ill will. That wasn't right; men should be all around me.

I carefully raised myself into a sitting position. Aside from some stiffness, I felt fine, better than I had in years. A pleasant surprise, but something I had expected to a degree. Try as I might, I couldn't remember ever sleeping as soundly as I had done. To be sure, I ran my hands over my wool coat and pants. I didn't know what I was looking for, but I was relieved when all I found was a dampness brought on by the dew. Not one to appear ungrateful, I cast my eyes skyward and said a quick prayer; it would do my folks good to know their little boy was safe.

The sense of security I felt a moment earlier quickly left me as I stood and looked around for my rifle. Being that I had joined the army a few months previous, my papa had bought me a Henry rifle as a present. He said that it

was far better than the musket rifles they gave us enlisted men, and I quickly learned that he'd been right; much to my relief. Since then, I'd grown quite attached to it as it had saved my life on more than one occasion, but, at that moment, I couldn't find it. I remembered having it in my hands after a canon ball had exploded off to my right side, but it was nowhere to be found. As if that wasn't strange enough, there weren't any signs of my regiment or the battle that we'd been fighting against Johnny Reb. Even stranger was that there wasn't any sign that we'd been there aside from myself.

I don't mind saying it unsettled me rather quick. I thought that maybe I had wandered off in a daze during the fight. I didn't remember doing so, but that didn't mean it hadn't happened except for the fact that I recognized a tree off to my left. Not more than forty paces from where I stood was the same tree the Colonel had stood by just

before we were attacked. I'm as sure now as I was then that they wouldn't have gone off and left me there like that, but that was sure as hell what it seemed they had done. I didn't think of it at the time, but there was really no place for them to go.

Still, I couldn't lose heart... Even without my Henry rifle and regiment I was far from helpless. This was my home, well, not exactly as I was from a bit further up north, but I knew the layout of the land decent enough that I couldn't have gotten lost even if I tried. I took comfort from that as I set out toward what I believed was North. I knew there was a town just over the top of the hill I was on. I believe the hill's name was High Knob— it's the smaller of the two hills we were to defend against the Confederates. Being near the top of the mountain I figured it wouldn't take long to see the town of Gettysburg. How I'd mistaken West for North was the least of my worries as I

happened upon the Devil's Den. It's well named, if you want my opinion. The terrain was in such ill humor that you'd think you were in the pits of hell itself. If there's a more inhospitable place in the world, I don't want to see it.

As I entered the rocky area, I felt a wave of sorrow and anger come over me. I couldn't imagine what would've brought this on, so I tried to push it far from my mind. The Confederates had to move through here to reach us, so I knew there would be Sessesh and maybe even some of my fellow soldiers there, but for as long as I looked I couldn't find any. I had to stop, so I leaned against a large boulder that jutted from the ground and scratched my head in thought.

Something was going on here that I didn't understand and things only got worse. I tell you, I couldn't have been there longer than a few minutes when I heard a rustle in the bushes behind me. I leaped back behind the

boulder just as a Confederate soldier stumbled out from the brush. Damn, if I hadn't nearly messed my drawers! He'd made enough noise to wake the dead!

It took only a minute before I noticed he wore a bandage across his eyes. The damn fool was lost and blind! I had myself a prisoner! Wouldn't mama and papa be happy to hear that their little boy was a war hero? I stepped out from my hiding place and grabbed the Sessesh. He wanted to fight at first, but he quickly quieted down when he realized there was nothing he could do.

"Son," I said, "you're damn sure lucky that I happened upon you. Another few steps and you would've broken your fool neck."

He just looked at me like he could really see me and replied, "Be a might better 'n being led by a Damn Yankee." Despite his tone and him being from the South and all, he wasn't a bad fellow. I didn't even have the

heart to tie his hands as I guided him through the forest. I hoped to find the Emmitsburg Road and any Federal soldiers I could. They couldn't have all disappeared into thin air. Someone had to have seen where they'd gone, I was sure of it.

I led him by the arm since there seemed no point in causing the poor fellow to trip over a root or some other entanglement. We soon came upon a clearing that was as peaceful as death. I figured it must've been a field of some sort, but it gave me such a queer feeling. Like something had crawled under my skin and taken up residence there. I ain't lying when I say I wanted to keep going, but my prisoner, the damned fool he was, wanted to rest. Grudgingly, I took a seat next to him but I couldn't relax, no sir. I had to keep alert for someone might try 'n sneak up on us.

To make myself feel better, I told him about my Henry rifle and

how I'd lost it just before I found him. When I mentioned it he just snorted. Can you believe that? He snorted and laughed at me! When I asked him why, he said, "That damned Yankee rifle could be loaded on Sunday and shoot all week and it was better off lost." I was much to hurt to talk for a while after that, but, damn, if I had it, I would've shown him a thing or two. You bet your life I would've. Yes sir.

Without anything to say to one another, we sat and listened to the birds as they flew from tree to tree, singing their song for a short time. Presently, we struck up a conversation and I found my prisoner to have much the same interests that I do. We talked about the deer and bear we'd hunted and about the best fishing holes around. He told me about a little place near where he lived that was so full of trout they practically jumped from the water and into your lap! I told him I'd like to see it sometime, and I bet I could out fish him.

That brought out a laugh as we sat there. I never thought I'd enjoy the company of a Rebel before.

It struck me strange how he suddenly fell silent. We'd just been laughing ourselves senseless when he suddenly stopped and leaned back against a small stump at the edge of the field. I asked him what was wrong. I ain't ashamed to say that his answer depressed me. Hell, I even felt partly to blame for it, and I don't even know what I dun! He must've sensed my change in mood as well, for he told me what was bothering him.

"Know what I'd like ta see, Yankee?" I expected it to be something inane like the Union Army in tatters or old Abe Lincoln pushing up daisies. But being a good host, I asked him what that was.

"To see my wife and daughter again."

His answer struck me dumb, so I just sat watching him for the

longest time. Finally, I managed to say what I thought would be best. "The war won't go on forever. I'm sure you'll be able to see them any day now--"

"You damn idiot! I want ta see them again. I swear, ta think we could lose the war to group of jackass brained injits like ya'll. I suppose you couldn't figure out how ta pour piss from a boot with the directions written on the heel, could ya?"

I don't mind saying that I was a bit irritated with the man after that. Here I was, just trying to help him and he goes off half cocked! But being a Christian man, I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. I did feel awfully bad about not understanding him before. But that was no call to insult me like that and I told him so. I won't tell you what he said, being it wasn't nowhere near polite enough to bear repeating.

At the tail end of his ranting and raving, he held out a small silver

locket for me. "Been in my family for generations. It's gonna be my baby girls when she's old enough." The smile on his face was so sincere that I couldn't help but take it to have a look. "Open it, they're all inside." I glanced at him, then back to the locket. Its silver coating shone bright in the afternoon sunlight.

Carefully, I pushed on the small clasp on its side and opened it. Inside were a picture of the prettiest young girl I ever did see, along with another woman that I took to be his wife. I handed it back to him and told him I thought they were beautiful, and if I could, I'd give him one of my eyes so he could see them again. Knowing that wasn't possible, he nodded his thanks as he tucked it back under his shirt.

I watched him for a few minutes. It was a good thing we'd stopped talking or I might not have been able to speak because of how bad I felt for him. He was just a bit younger than my papa, with

gray hairs and a thick set of whiskers. I didn't feel like the big hero anymore after I got a good look at him, but I bet he still would've whooped my tail if he'd be given the chance. With that thought in mind, I motioned towards his bandaged eyes, only then I realized he couldn't see me and asked how he'd gotten hurt.

"Canon hit a tree near me. The splinters were in there before I knew what hit me." He began to fidget with his hands, and I figured he liked to whittle. Only problem was, I had no intention of giving him a knife. As pleasant company that I am, I was sure I'd wind up dead.

Suddenly I had a thought; one of them inspiring ones that you hear about in the bible. If he'd been hurt by something as simple as wood splinters, then why couldn't he see? I mean, they hurt like the dickens, but it's easy to pull them out. He was a tough old bird, I'll give him that. He hadn't complained about any

pain since I found him. Hell, he'd spent more time complaining about me than anything else. So I had an idea, maybe I could help him if I could look at his eyes. At first, he was against it saying Yankee doctors couldn't pour piss out of a boot with directions written on the heel, but since I'd heard that one already it didn't bother me. After a few minutes, I convinced him to let me have a look and that was all.

He grudgingly accepted, though he kept his hands close to mine at all times. I figure it's safe to say he didn't trust me. Well, the feeling was mutual. But I still wanted to help him if I could. I slowly unwrapped the bandage that covered his eyes and was surprised that there wasn't any blood on it. At that moment, I knew it would be easier than I had thought, so I finished unwrapping the bandage, but what I saw... Oh Lord... There was nothing there! I mean nothing, not a single thing! Behind his bandage there was

nothing but two black holes where his eyes should've been.

I fell away from him terrified and I must've screamed for I heard something that sounded like it came from me, but I'd never heard it before. I landed on my back and stared into the sky unable to think. My prisoner was saying something but I couldn't make it out, his voice was drowned out by the loud beating of my heart. I could hear it... wait... no, I couldn't. He must've killed me! That son of a bitch Rebel must've shot me and now I was dead! Slowly, I raised myself to try to look at my body and I lost my breath. A large boulder stuck up through my stomach! I tried to twist away and I did without any pain or effort. I was on my knees looking at the rock I'd just been impaled on, but there wasn't any blood or even a mark on it or me! What the devil was going on? I wanted to see my papa and mama again. I wanted to go home,

that's all I wanted, just to go home.

Just as I started to cry I heard a new voice that called to me. When I looked up, I saw ten men; some wearing Rebel gray, a drab olive green, and others had the same blue uniform I did. Each was wounded somehow, but there was no blood. That was when I heard the voice again.

"What?" I asked.

The man nearest me, a Union officer, a captain, I think, motioned for me to join them. "We're here to help you."

"But... How are you going to do that?" I looked over and saw my prisoner being helped to his feet by some of the others. The bandage had been replaced over his eyes.

The officer smiled at me and his moustache swayed slightly in the soft breeze of the afternoon. "We're looking for stragglers. We're here to take you home,"

he said, offering his hand to me. At first, I didn't want to take it, but I did anyway, though I'm not sure why. The captain's hand felt warm and strong. I was so happy to feel the flesh of another being I think I actually smiled when I got to my feet.

Over the man's shoulder I saw a beast that shone brightly in the sunlight. The sight of it caused me to shrink back, but the captain's grip was firm. "Don't worry," he said. "It can't hurt you where we're going."

I nodded. "Home."

The captain smiled at me.

"That's right." Without another word, he turned and followed the others down a trail I hadn't noticed before.

I started to follow and found my friend waiting for me. It didn't feel right to call him my prisoner anymore. He held out his hand and I took it to help guide him. As we followed the rest of the soldiers, he offered his final

words to me. "See you in hell, Billy Yank."

I smiled. "See you in hell, Johnny Reb."

As we disappeared down the trail, I heard the voices of others behind us. They were the living. The last words I heard from a living person was one who said he was a park ranger as he talked about the ghosts of a Union soldier and his Rebel prisoner that made their way through the woods every day and night. I thought it strange that I had never seen those ghosts he spoke of. Until now.

Peacock

By Alice Kashuba

The Gods dressed him
For a grand entrance.

Undergarment of
iridescent hue
cascading into midnight blue

Sleeves ebony
ending in many fingered
golden gloves

Rust colored trousers
lined with silver grey
top soft downy gaiters

above spindly legs.

An onyx tiara crowned
with Sapphires
Rises above a mask of white
outlining dark eyes.

Shawl of brown and tan
flecked with green
black, and white
in a paisley design
drapes his shoulders.

Magnificent folded train
flows in a long single green line
down his back.

Dressed to the hilt
He struts across a stone balcony
to the top of the stairs.
Rustling and a dazzling array
sends other birds flying away.

His outrageous attire
overshadowed by
a thousand brilliant eyes
mesmerizes the mind
dazzling the senses
His loud raucous call
(Background for every jungle
movie ever made)
Claims his territory.

His independent fearless nature
invades neighborhoods
pecking at cars
damaging homes
occupying roads
stealing fruit

Challenging those who like the
quiet
peaceful life.

An enigma of beauty and
arrogance.

On Fire
By Sue T.

"Help me, God!"
My hair's on fire.
Fire's spreading to my clothes
My flailing arms
Beat down the flames
I hear the screams
"We must go higher."
Stairs are blocked, but someone
knows
Another way we might be safe
"A window's there."
I hear them shout
Our one escape
Our one way out.

The window's there
Without its glass
The glass is smashed
From the sudden blast
The building shakes
Can't take much more
Me and this broken
World Trade Tower

The heat's intense
My hands are charred
The screams are loud
My ears can hear
Not just the cries
Thuds and groans
I can't see
Smoke's in my eyes.

I'm thinking
Death is coming fast
Me and this tower
We won't last
In seconds, seems
My past flies by
Then I cry out
For one last time

"Help me, God. My worlds' on
fire."

I have to jump
Just one way out
I look below
I try to shout
My throat is dry
I think
Good-bye
For now I know
I'm going to die.

I jump, heart pounding
Look around me
Eyes are foggy
Brain is groggy

I wake to see my world's ok
I hear the glasses, plates and
knives
Table-setting by my mother
Shouting by my younger brother
Frying bacon, burning toast
Morning news is getting louder
No music on September 12th
It's 9:00 a.m. and time to rise
To live another day.

I AM alive and well
But now I feel I lived the terror
Of nine eleven – and – its hell
In the shadows of my mind
A new fear comes to me
I feel an evil worse than death
Words to explain, I cannot find
I fear for me, my family
My world has felt the blow
Madness, meanness, horror
In acts I cannot understand
I can't control, I can't forget
The emptiness I feel.

I think back to my nightmare
It still just feels so real
I thank my God
I wasn't there
But hurt for all who were
I vow, today, to change my life
To try to be more kind
To try to ease the pain I see
To put this awful memory
Away and far behind me.

I praise you, Lord
I finally see
The world is not about just me
My purpose now
To preach, to teach
To lead, inspire
The lives I touch
To love
To care
To give
To share.

I thank you, God
I've learned so much
Good will conquer in the end
The damage done by wicked
men
I swear
Today
To change my ways
I vow
Right now
To do my part
To spread this fire
That's in my heart
Amen!



The Club

By Bernensky Pierre

“I don’t want to go,” I said.

“Why won’t you just go to your prom?” Jenn replied. “You’ve been there for all four years and your parents already paid for it.”

“Jenn, I didn’t tell my parents to pay for it. That’s their fault,” I said. “I envisioned myself going to prom with the people I grew up with as a kid, not with a bunch of people I knew for a couple of years. I never wanted to go to this school, so why should I go to prom? Instead, I’m going to Miramar high school’s after party at the club.”

“Really?” replied Jenn. “You’re going to waste your parents’ money?”

“Yeah,” I said. I looked at my watch. “I have to go. Bye.”

The time had come. Eight o’clock. I got ready to head out. I opened the closet and ransacked through, trying to find the perfect outfit. I dressed in black and blue, a deep blue sky jean jacket with a long eerie black sleeve shirt beneath it. The pants were long black skinny jeans and the shoes were the same color as the outfit. I stood still, gazing into the mirror, looking for any wrongs.

I informed my parents that I was going to a party, feeling confident that it was going to be a great night. I made my way out and looked into the opaque skies and stood there, letting the stiff breeze slap me in the face. Mesmerized, I snapped out of it and entered into my slate gray 1996 Acura. I peeled out of the driveway and headed for my friend’s house. I arrived at his house. He opened the door and I strolled in, ready to dismantle him in video games. After engaging in small talk and video games until midnight, we went our separate ways.

I found myself at Burger King in the drive-thru near my house on

Northeast 167th Street across from the McDonalds. My friend was eager to go and wanted no delays, so I told him to meet me there. I received my food and parked my car in the parking lot, savoring a double whooper and fries. Moments passed and I realized time was flying by. It was nearing half past midnight before heading to Broward County, so I began to drive. After driving forty minutes, I felt apprehensive. I didn’t know where I was going. Suddenly, I made a turn and found myself in a mist of darkness. The car lights were the only source of light. I kept driving only to realize I was totally lost. I started to panic.

“I’m lost,” I uttered. Then, up ahead, I spotted something that seemed to be the destination. I saw lights, and just past it, the club.

I parked near a light post and got out of my car. I heard the incessant music thumping. It was one AM and I called my friend, but there was no signal. As I walked towards the entrance, I spotted a beautiful girl. She was wearing a black tight small high neck dress. She had long ebony

hair, terra cotta cheeks, violet lipstick, but her eyes were beyond description. When I got within arm's length of the door, she spoke.

“Hey, can I be with you tonight?”

I did my best to act cool. “Okay, no problem.”

I smiled; she did the same with her dimpled cheeks. She took my hand and led the way into the club. We stood there, motionless. She was in awe, but I felt something was strange. I didn't recognize anyone that went to Miramar high school or my friend. A rush of doubtful thoughts hit me squarely in my head.

“I'm at the wrong place,” I said.

I felt uneasy, but she again took my hand, a firm grip, and led me to the center of where everyone was dancing. She ignited the smile that I had when we were talking at the entrance. We both headed for the middle of the crowded dance floor. We danced for hours. I finally stop; I was exhausted, but she was still high-energy.

“Let's take a break,” I said. She headed away from the middle of the crowded dance floor to the bar to get something to drink.

I stood in the midst of the club, still searching for my friend or anyone I might recognize. I turned myself to the entrance and pulled out my phone. It was 2:59. Suddenly, at the strike of three AM, everything and everyone vanished. The dance floor, the ceiling, the people, and the bar -- were all gone.

Startled, I spun around in place wondering what the hell was happening. I found myself outside in a graveyard. I stood there, my heart exploding with pulsating heartbeats. Then, I heard the girl's voice behind me. I turned. Her eyes were clear and haunting.

“I wish you were dead because we would have never stopped,” she uttered. She abruptly turned around and walked deep into the graveyard until her figure faded into the darkness.

My heart sank in an ocean of terror. I turned back around, shivering.

Suddenly, I spotted the familiar light post hovering over my parked car. I ran to it with such legerity and got in. Her haunting words continued to resonate in my head as I sped off.



Employees of Buymart
By DiVitto Kelly

It wasn't exactly a festive Sunday evening for Ben and Ellie Gardner. He needed to pick up medicine for his wife, who was suffering from a nasty cough, congestion, and runny nose that wouldn't stop running. Ben wasn't feeling so hot either.

The couple, originally from sticky, humid Miami, recently pulled up stakes and relocated to the cool, rural confines of Wakefield, North Carolina, an hour's drive east of Asheville. Apparently all that fresh

mountain air wasn't agreeing with them.

"Are you sure you don't mind?" said Ellie, her cough approaching sea lion-esque proportions. She looked at the clock – 1:17AM to be exact. "Ugh." And she had to be at work in less than seven hours -- double ugh.

Ben slipped on his worn blue jeans and Miami Heat long sleeved t-shirt. "Don't be silly. Besides, it'll give me a chance to pick up a box of those chocolate-peanut butter Pop-Tarts; they look tantalizing."

"Don't you dare," replied his wife, lying miserably in their queen-sized bed. "You keep whining about your love handles – it's time to start eating like an adult." Ben had introduced their six-year-old daughter Sophia to the rectangular pastries and she loved them too, especially the cinnamon frosted. Like father, like daughter.

"Bah humbug," he said.

"Besides, I've been doing my sit ups regularly, see?" Ben pulled up his shirt showing off his partially svelte frame. "No too bad."

Ellie fluffed her pillow and sat up. "Do you know what medicine to get?"

"Sudafed, right?" answered Ben.

Ellie's bleary eyes were itchy and irritated; her nose tomato red from all the excessive blowing. "Nah, get Nyquil Cold and Flu, and make sure it's the nighttime stuff; I need to sleep"

Ben finished tying his sneakers. "Anything else?"

"Chamomile tea would be nice, the one with the bear zonked out on the recliner."

"Got it."

The Gardners were three months new to the area, enjoying the refreshing change of climate, but one thing that immediately took getting use to

was driving far and away to the nearest anything. Before, trips to the doctor's office, grocery store, or gas station were always within a mile or two, and in every direction. Now, they practically needed a GPS to go anywhere. The alternative would be moving back to the Sunshine State, but they'd had their fill with the stifling heat, hurricanes, not to mention the robberies, three to be precise. No, a little driving would be fine. Having the convertible top down on their gecko green VW Beetle in the Carolina mountain air was all right.

"How do I get to Buymart again?" asked Ben, who was a terrific driver – no accidents ever, but had an incredible knack for getting lost.

"Go left out of the driveway, drive about five miles then make a left at the blinking light. Make another left at Fletcher Street, then a right on River Road; you can't miss it," replied Ellie, who'd been there at least two dozen

times already. She applied more Vapor Rub to her upper chest and added a touch just under her tender nose. Ben jotted everything down on the back of a grocery store receipt.

“You know I’ve never been there late at night,” said Ben, who’d been told by fellow coworkers at his new job with the community college that things got creepy after the sun went down, especially after the witching hour. He was introduced to the People of Buymart website and had to admit it was ‘interesting’, but at the same time there was something a bit off kilter about this particular store. He couldn’t explain it.

“Wish me luck, honey.”

“You have your cell?”

“Uh, I do now,” Ben replied, picking it up off his dresser.

“Seal you soon.”

“Very funny,” barked Ellie. “Oh, would you mind picking up some canned sardines for me too? The

ones packed in olive oil; I could use a salty treat.”

Ben grimaced. He despised the smell of those tiny tin-housed fishies. “Then I get to buy my Pop-Tarts.”

“Your choice, Mr. Lipid.”

“Everyone loves a good fat cell joke.” Ben replied with a grin. He donned his Miami Marlins baseball cap backwards to conceal his springy black curly hair. “I’m off!”

Early summer in NC was cool and refreshing so far. Their new home was twenty years new and spacious: two stories, three bedrooms, two baths, a fireplace, and a towering oak tree in the front yard big enough for a tire swing, a specific request made by their daughter. Ellie had relatives in nearby Carrboro, which made relocating to the Tar Heel State a less harrowing task to manage.

Their former home in Miami was a quaint two bedroom, one bath

bungalow. The corner property was a mini tropical paradise with native Florida plants and citrus trees soaking up the sun in every crevice of the yard. But the third and final robbery was the last straw. On one splendid late Sunday afternoon, Ben planned to grill skirt steak and Argentine chorizos on their brand new stainless steel gas grill. He went outside only to discover it had not so mysteriously disappeared. Frustrated, they ended up dining on frozen pizzas and pink lemonade.

The young couple craved a bit more normalcy. The new neighborhood was one part trendy, one part Mayberry, a quaint parcel of town distinguished by its friendliness, historic downtown, and a barbeque joint named the Southern Pig that served up the best pulled pork sandwich Ben had ever tasted.

The English professor drove down the gravel strewn driveway and made a left onto the

meandering five-mile stretch of road, forests encroaching on both sides. He loved the dips and turns of the piedmont terrain, but at night it could be harrowing. Following the directions to the tee, Ben pulled into the half lit Buymart parking lot nineteen minutes later, most of it surrounded by soaring loblolly pine trees, some reaching ninety feet tall. It was a cozy location even for a mega store the size of a football field.

The first thing Ben noticed was he could count the amount of cars in the parking lot on one hand. In fact, there were only two, and his was one of them. Prior to moving, their local Miami Buymart, open twenty-four hours, was always packed to the gills no matter what time it was. He'd seen his share of oddballs there too: extremely overweight women spilling out of their tiny spandex garments, men drinking beer concealed in brown paper bags, stupefied employees, you name it. Having spent most of

his adult life in weird and wonderful South Florida, Ben mused the only thing that would ever surprise him would be a person sprouting two heads.

As he got out of his car, Ben spotted two employees, a pair of twenty-somethings for sure, pushing shopping carts towards the entrance of the store. The two were moving at a snails' pace. It was almost as if they were battling to see who could move the slowest.

"Good evening gentlemen," said Ben as he walked by. The two employees barely raised their heads, mouths agape, with a pair of blank stares. "Ah, millennials."

People of Buymart indeed, thought Ben as he entered the store. At least it wasn't one of those cavernous megastores like the one he use to frequent; this one appeared to be a third smaller, almost intimate if that was possible for such a mega store chain.

The shopping carts were in complete disarray, blocking most of the inside entrance. Ben zigzagged around them like an obstacle course before finding a lone cart up ahead. He grabbed the handle only to find it sticky with some sort of drool.

"I've been here a total of five seconds and I'm already grossed out." He quickly doused his hands with hand sanitizer stationed at the returns desk.

Ben took a deep breath and rolled forward, passing multiple displays of sodas, cookies, and snack foods stacked precariously high like skyscrapers. Next, he eyed the produce section on the left where the fruits and vegetables appeared way past their prime. Ben was taken aback; usually their produce departments were exceptionally good -- this one not so much. His mind was so preoccupied that he accidentally bumped into a wall of a man with a stone-faced expression.

“Oh my gosh! I’m so sorry sir,” said Ben, feeling like a complete idiot.

The employee glared down at Ben, who must have been at least a foot taller than the educator. The human monolith had trouble speaking but managed to utter the word help, minus the H. It came out more like a grunt than an actual word.

“Uh, yeah,” replied Ben, being polite. “Could you please tell me where the pharmacy is?”

The name Sven was scribbled, Kindergarten-style, on the man’s extra-large nametag in bold blue letters. He gawked at Ben for a moment, trying to process the question. “E-I-p.”

The employee finally did an about face, rotating in slow motion before pointing towards the back of the store. Ben followed the sloth-like man before speeding ahead, yearning to return home at some point, preferably before sunrise.

Ben couldn’t believe how sluggish the man was moving. In fact, as he scanned the rest of the store, he noticed the handful of employees moving at a turtle-like velocity. They all looked like they were sleepwalking.

“Ah, there you are,” he said, spotting the pharmacy section. “Nyquil, Nyquil, where art thou, Nyquil?”

He browsed the endless shelves, finally locating the cold and cough medicines. After picking up a bottle, Ben strolled around the corner shelf and snagged a carton of cherry lozenges for his minor sore throat. He then made a beeline for the chamomile tea before heading over to the cereal aisle. Like all Buymart’s, the Pop-Tarts were located just past the assortment of nutrition bars.

“Let’s see, cinnamon frosted, strawberry frosted, cherry, chocolate chip, berry blast – all good flavors, but where is the elusive . . . ah there you are, chocolate-peanut butter. Yum!”

Ben looked around slightly embarrassed. A thirty-eight year old man shouldn’t get that excited about a crummy pastry, but he was. Last stop, sardines. How *not* exciting, he mused.

As Ben rounded the corner, he heard a peculiar grunt. It was getting louder, now sounding more like multiple people. There was a sudden shriek then silence. Ben hid behind a leaning tower of pasta display. He parted a couple of boxes of rigatoni to get a better look. “What the hell?”

He stood frozen, unable to move a muscle as a trail of blood flowed down the linoleum floor. Ben placed his hand over his mouth to keep from screaming. He watched as a pair of employees chomped down on a hapless shopper, a husky-framed man, possibly in his late fifties. Around the corner, a short man appeared.

“Oh no, what the hell are you two doing?” shouted the voice. The

man stormed over and threw down his clipboard. The two employees lowered their blood stained faces, behaving almost like young children being scolded by a parent.

The man was very upset, ranting, as he looked up at the ceiling in full-fledged disgust. "After all the training, how could you do this? Rule number one, you never, ever eat the customers!" He picked up his clipboard off the floor, trying to regain his composure.

"You know what this means? The two employees appeared in full shame mode, one almost weeping. "This is absolutely, positively gonna kill my promotion!" He ran his left hand back and forth on his bristly, AstroTurf textured hair before storming towards a metal column. He gathered in a deep breath, exhaled, before picking up the phone.

There was a screech of feedback before the man's voice

boomed over the loud speaker. "I need a cleanup in aisle thirteen. I repeat, clean up in aisle thirteen."

He shook his head, placing his hand on his chin before calling again. "And make sure you bring the big mop."

"You two, go get washed up, and try to move quickly."

Ben spaced the pasta boxes farther apart when they suddenly came tumbling down. He stared at the employees and offered up a harmless wave. He almost wet his pants.

"Don't move," said the man, a no-nonsense Ross Perot looking type, possibly a former military man.

"I'm not moving," replied Ben, still staring at the two killers, the lifeless body lying on the floor like a beached seal.

The cleanup crew finally showed up; it was the two dolts from outside the store. One of the

men wrapped the dead person in a plastic body bag; the other brandished a damp mop and began wiping up the mess.

Ben slowly regained his composure, the blood starting to flow again in his veins. "What the hell is going on here?"

The man walked towards him, sidestepping the stream of blood, almost skidding. "It's a tad complicated, sir."

"I've got time. Now tell me what the hell's going on here before I call the police." Ben was ready to dial 911 when the employee asked him politely for a chance to explain.

The man hesitated. He took off his black-rimmed glasses, rubbed the bridge of his nose, and slipped them back on.

"This is strictly off the record," said the man, reminding him that loose lips kill ships.

"I believe the word is, sinks," said Ben.

“I stand corrected,” he replied, with a jocular grin. He placed his arm around the young man’s shoulder, steering him away from the bloodstained aisle. “Do you know why Buymart is able to offer customers the best prices, anywhere?”

“Everything’s made in China?” replied Ben.

The man smirked. “No, that’s a fallacy, only partially true. Check out any other big-time retailer – we’re no different than anyone else. By the way, the name’s Silva, Frank Silva, overnight manager. And yours?”

The man extended his hand out. The transplanted Floridian, still in disbelief, shook it reluctantly.

“Uh, Ben . . . Ben Gardner. My wife and I are new to the area.”

“Terrific! And welcome to the Tar Heel State – hope you like pine trees,” the overnight manager added.

“By the way, is Ben short for Benjamin?”

“Uh, yes it is.”

“Swell.” Mr. Silva glanced over at the two employees, instructing them to make everything clean as a whistle. Ben observed one of the employees attempting to whistle, but all that came out was dribble.

Silva turned in awkwardness. “Well Ben, we’ve developed a unique evening workforce that doesn’t require monetary fulfillment. They’re dedicated, hardworking people, guaranteed to give their best effort a hundred percent of the time . . . well mostly. Best of all, we just feed ‘em expired deli meats and they’re content. They seem to like Boar’s Head a lot.”

“Hold on,” Ben interrupted. “I must be missing something here. You mean you feed your workers meat instead of paying them?”

“Yep. You see our nightshift employees are kinda of the non-living persuasion.”

“I’m confused,” said Ben, trying to put two and two together, but coming up with five instead of four.

“It’s a unique program we’ve instituted at select Buymart stores across the country. This unique ‘workforce’ are all . . . expired as they say.” The guy was coming off like a used car salesman.

“We’re not talking . . .” asked Ben, stopping himself. “No way.”

Mr. Silva nodded in a yes gesture. Ben shook his head in an implausible *no* motion. The evening was turning into full bloom weirdness. He glared at the overnight manager, who sported a pencil-thin mustache and a false smile that would rival a politician’s. It was starting to dawn on Ben that the man was completely insane, or . . .

“They don’t call it the dead shift for nothing,” he said, offering up a mild stab at humor. Ben corrected him – night shift, not dead shift. The guy shanked his

brows up and down in patented Groucho Marx fashion. “Hint, hint.”

“Hold on . . . Zombies? You’ve hired real zombies to work at night?”

“Bingo!”

Ben nearly jumped out of his skin. “No way!”

“Yes way. It’s a pilot program we’ve developed over the last couple of years, mostly at our rural locations; also where we find a large congregation of weirdies so they can blend in easier. By the way, where’d you move from?”

“Miami,” answered Ben, feeling like he’d stepped straight into a George A. Romero parody film.

“Holy crap! That was practically ground zero for the ‘Z’ program. Corporate thought it would be less conspicuous, especially in south Florida. Betcha didn’t even notice ‘em where you shopped.

Lots of oddballs there – but I guess you already know that.”

All those times Ben went night shopping at The Mart -- as he and his wife dubbed it, and he didn’t even notice. He thought of himself as a fairly observant guy, but apparently not.

“This is extremely bizarre. I mean undead workers? And what about . . . this?” Ben pointed at the victim, all ziplocked tight in a black body bag. “This is murder plain and simple.”

“Mishap Ben, we call them mishaps. Now, I must admit things can get a bit tricky dealing with the dead shoppers. We usually try to make it look like a traffic accident somewhere on the outskirts of any town, USA.” Ben shook his head, mouth agape.

“Bottom line, my friend is that Buymart will always do what it can to give you the best price – that’s our pledge to you.”

“How noble.”

“You’re welcome.”

“That was sarcasm,” said Ben, angered. “A guy is dead and you say it’s a mishap? That’s a bit frigid on your part.”

“Look, I feel bad for the guy, but it *is* extremely uncommon,” replied the overnight manager. “In fact, I can’t remember the last time we had a death. We spend weeks training ‘em. Our ‘Z’ staff does a terrific job; the only real issue – besides on the very, very rare occasion when they dine on a customer is their speed. These guys are slow as molasses.”

“Sorry to burst your bubble, Frank, but they can barely communicate,” chided Ben. “And they’re not very helpful.”

“And the day shift employees are any better?” joked the manager, blurring out in full-fledged laughter. Ben shrugged in agreement offering up a slight smile. “But seriously.” The manager straightened his tie and

vest then looked at Ben. “Did you know we even have a speech therapist working with ‘em? Trust me; they’re getting the hang of it. And I trust you don’t mind paying pocket change for your Pop-Tarts.”

Ben shrugged before glancing down at his watch. “Is it safe for me to leave now? I gotta get back home to my wife, she needs her medicine.”

“You seem like a decent guy, and I know you won’t say anything about tonight’s mishap - or ‘murder’ if that makes you happy. Besides, the whole story is so whacked no one’s gonna believe you anyways. Tell you what; your shopping is on us this evening.”

The store manager patted Ben on the back again. “Oh, watch out for the blood – looks like the night crew missed a spot.”

“Guess they need some more training,” replied Ben, dryly.

Ben thanked the manager then proceeded to skip over the puddle of blood. As he walked out the store, Ben noticed a few employees following him, waving their stiff upper limbs, attempting to wave good-bye. Ben jogged over to his car, hopped in and sped out of the parking lot, not looking back. When he got home, his wife was thankfully asleep, but snoring like a Harley Davidson.

The next morning, husband and wife sat at the kitchen table sipping tea. Their daughter was still sound asleep.

“Thanks for getting the medicine honey,” said Ellie, still sniffing, but her cough subsiding. “I trust you didn’t have a problem finding the store?” The morning television news was on in the kitchen.

“No problem, dear,” said Ben, taking a hefty crescent shaped

bite from the chocolate peanut butter Pop-Tart. He sported a satisfied smile. “By the way, do you know why Buymart is able to keep their prices so low?”

Ellie lifted her stuffy head, annoyed by the string of brazen car commercials. “Everything’s made in China, right?”

“Not everything,” said Ben. They actually keep their prices low by hiring zombies to work the night shift. They pay them in deli scraps.”

“You have a warped sense of humor, you know that?”

“Every joke has a half truth,” replied Ben before polishing off the rest of the sugary pastry.

“Man, these are delicious.”

“How sad,” said Ellie.

“What, that I like Pop-Tarts?”

“No Chubs, the news.”

“What’s that?” asked Ben, getting up to retrieve the orange juice from the refrigerator. He

picked up the remote and kicked up the volume.

“A man identified as Carl Gottlieb, age fifty-seven, died late last night as he apparently plowed into a tree, dying instantly.” The news reporter added. “Police, however, are investigating the strange bite wounds located on the man’s neck and arms.”

Ben got chills, almost dropping his juice glass onto the tile floor. “Bite marks? Uh, maybe it was a bear or a mountain lion. I read that . . .”

“Or maybe there are man-eating deer lurking in the deep, dark woods.” replied Ellie. “How’s that for warped?”

Ben plopped another Pop-Tart into the toaster. “Not even close, dear.”

Blitz Poem
By Carole A. Hearn

Soup taste good
Soup is good for you
You should try chicken
You should try chili
Chili is soup
Chili is hot
Hot makes you drink
Hot makes you sweat
Sweat makes you cool
Sweat when you exercise
Exercise for health
Exercise for fun
Fun is laughing
Fun is playing
Playing ball
Playing games
Games with friends
Games make you think
Think how you feel
Think what you do
Do what is right

Do what you like
Like what you do
Like how you feel
Feel kind to yourself
Feel kind to others
Others care
Others know
Know what is good
Know what's the kind
Kind of soups
Kind to make
Make some today
Make your favorite
Favorite soup
Favorite is chicken



Authors!

Richard Wright (Sep. 4)

D. H. Lawrence (Sep. 11)

Roald Dahl (Sep. 13)

Agatha Christie (Sep. 15)

Upton Sinclair (Sep. 20)

Stephen King (Sep. 21)

H. G. Wells (Sep. 21)

F. Scott Fitzgerald (Sep. 24)

Shel Silverstein (Sep. 25)

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:**

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:**

Oct 18, Nov 15, Dec 20.

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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.

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