



The Portal

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

South Regional / BC Poetry Contest Winners

First Place

Rome, Resting

By Donna Ragland-Greene

Last night we kneeled at the altar of perfect pasta,
firm and fleshy
godlike
Our meal still lingers on the tongue,
tastebuds stunned
by precious shavings of truffle
gracing al dente strands
the memory of our wine whispers,
smoky and sensuous

We are
groggy and coffee starved
as we bump predawn
over the boulders of Rome's backstreets
This chaotic city slumbers
in a strangely serene state
devoid of anthill traffic
We sadly savor our taxi time
sorting passports and tickets for departure

Then magic

A final lover's kiss from our
Italian city
No subtle peck on the cheek,
but breathless forceful impact
Passionate
and unapologetic.

The full moon,
suspended stately low over the ruins,
comes into view
Illuminating the curved walls of the colosseum
lending amber parchment light
to ancient stone
not yet overrun by tourist herds

trudging after guides.
Luminescent arches
frame phantom gladiators,
a brief but glorious farewell
ensuring our memory is seared.

Lunar light
brings the full weight of this place
into focus
We feast and gorge on her beauty
We are overcome
by Rome
Her majesty and splendor
secretly shared with us
on this deserted Sunday morning

Second Place

The Cancer Dance

By Lisa Romer Math

Who knew that you could learn from the darkest regions of your soul,
where fear is replaced with feelings of no control.
A place where each second feels like its own zone,
winding through cavernous thoughts of the unknown.
I've reached those depths and breathed in the shallow air,
surviving the descent from the mountain of despair.
I've done the Cancer Dance while partnered with my fears,
all the while learning that I can laugh along with my tears.
Not knowing the routine, just going with my body's flow,
finding that unpredictability makes an interesting partner to behold.
Instead of the word no, I let the word "can"
guide me into believing that there's plenty left to plan.
I can fight this battle with dignity and grace,
and I can trust my inner voice, giving me the strength for this race.
I feel invincible, indestructible, elevated and free.
For cancer has renewed me and allowed me to be.

Third Place

To Have and To Hold On

By Andrew L. Smiley

One tense weekday morning
amid our typical frantic rushing
for punctual time-clock punching,
after scanning kitchen cabinets in panic
I exclaim "I can't find my coffee cup!"

With no hesitation or pause in motion she
offers
"Here, take mine" while she swivels
outward.

It's touch and go when we
barely brush fingers as she extends,
hands over her favorite travel mug,
entrusts it to my careful clasp.

As sensation of her slight touch lingers
in an instant of apprehension I suspect
we may have enough hope
to hold on a little longer.

Another weekend evening
when I come home late again
exhausted from the struggle
inside she's already asleep,
but the back porch light

my wife bothered to remember
to turn, flip, and leave on

pushes a haloed glow against night,
keeps that dusky wolf from our door,
emanates an epiphany, then in

a moment of comprehension I detect,

grasp, house key in hand, illumined;
a switch clicks in my mind,
my heart's tumblers turn
and I am confident, almost certain

we have enough faith and love
to hold on to forever.

Honorable Mention

Shimmering Morning Dew

By Alba Otero

A shimmering morning dew, is embodying
Valleys and gardens in a freshly poetry
month,
Butterflies and birds bursting the silenced
dawn,
Awakens bliss in nature and my dormant
thoughts.

Morning strollers sighing by delighted
feelings,
Rejoice with the wind cherishing their
appearances.
My soul perceives the silent feast and a
piercing breeze
Could not disrupt the shimmering morning
dew.



Crawling Memories

By CP Bialois/Ed White

Of all the times Nathan thought about what would kill him, the idea of zombie cockroaches never crossed his mind. The stupidity of the idea would've made him laugh had he not watched his best friend of twelve years being eaten by a thousand of the little bastards.

They swarmed over him until all Nathan could see was a shifting mass of brown and black bugs. He wanted to help, but between the sight and hearing his friend's screams of agony it was all he could do to close the door between them and stuff towels in the opening between the door and floor.

With nothing else to do, Nathan huddled on the corner next to the toilet with his eyes locked on the door.

The constant scratching and chewing sounds from the other side became a white noise that burrowed into his being, igniting a primitive fear that had largely been forgotten. He knew they would break through as each crunch and scratch against the fiberboard door reached him. How could something like this happen?

The more he tried to understand it, the more his thoughts went to the stories of cockroaches being the sole survivors of a nuclear war. Was it for that reason he and his friends attempted what they did? For the challenge of killing nature's perfect survivalist or for the money they'd make on the open market? As much as he tried to tell himself it was for the challenge, he knew better. There was no better way of making millions than finding a way to exterminate the little bastards.

Since he was a small child and woke to find a handful of them in his bed, it was his lifelong goal to rid the world of cockroaches. As far as he could tell, they served no

purpose. Forget what the scientists and others claimed. They never experienced the prickly feeling of bugs crawling on their face or worse. He clenched the sides of the toilet at the memory of one crawling up his leg and onto his...

Nathan shook his head in the hope the image would fade. As a result, he was brought out of his memories and back to the new horror he and his friends had created. Now, a cockroach that was torn in half could continue to live and feed, and all because of their new pesticide.

He squeezed his eyes shut as tears ran down his face. Thanks to him and his friends, the world would end not in a ball of fire, but in the bellies of a detestable bug!

Nathan's sobs hid the fact the towel he pushed under the door was pushed aside enough to let some of the carnivorous bugs into the bathroom. It wasn't until the first one bit into his leg that Nathan started screaming, but by then the swarm had

pushed the towel aside and converged on him.

As strange as it sounded, he couldn't help but think waking up with a few of them crawling on him all those years before wasn't so bad.

A Visit to an Alien World

By Alice Kashuba

The boat speeds out to the reef under the hot Florida summer sun. Ahead the blue water gives no indication of what lies beneath its surface. Anchoring we don scuba gear and slip into the sea. The cool water refreshes me. A flash and I experience a welcoming embrace into my first home. In this water world I can remain motionless in one spot as if by magic. In spite of the heavy gear I feel weightless and descend slowly to the sandy floor.

A goby, a tiny fish with big eyes, peers out of the doorway at a hole in the ground. He's amazed at the sight of me, a huge creature dressed in black.

"Who are you? Don't get too close", he telepaths as he slips back into his house.

Nearby a hermit crab scuttles off carrying his house, an abandoned snail shell he has appropriated. An octopus, the color of sand waves his arms as if to ward me off with a magical spell. He rockets backwards where he changes color blending with a rock. He is invisible. A flounder scared by the activity covers himself with a blanket of sand, also disappearing into the floor. I am the invading alien.

Nearby the rocky reef bustles with activity like a busy city where people hurry to various destinations. Elkhorn corals spread their spiky fingers. They reach up pointing to light rays filtering down through the water. Blue angel fish fly by, followed by fluttering butterfly fish. A parrot fish with strong jaws chomps on hard coral. As he swims away the rock erupts. Waving arms of colorful corals like tiny flowers that pop up from the grass after a hard Florida rain. A grouper visits a spa, where tiny blue neon fish clean off parasites

and bits of dirt. Then he lumbers off to his next destination. A surprised puffer fish inflates himself into a ball hoping to scare me off with his increased size. I laugh to myself. He really isn't very big. The reef sparkles with a myriad of fish as if a rainbow had fallen into the ocean and broken up into jewels of reflected light.

Along the bottom edge of the rock reef where it meets the sandy bottom underground apartments house hidden inhabitants. A gray green moray eel watches from his doorway waiting of an unwary fish. It will be snatched and drawn into the eel's dark cave for a delicious lunch.

My diving partner touches my arm and points to what looks like a tiny fishing rod with a worm attached. It appears to have grown out of the rock. Suddenly a mouth opens and catches a small fish swimming by. This strange creature known as anglerfish waves an antenna from the top of his head. It's his personal fishing rod. His rock like appearance makes him

invisible. I had always wanted to see one of those fish in action.

New life birthed from this population has moved to the suburbs. A rusty ship wreck half lying on its side has been overtaken. Fish, corals, sponges, algae, and crabs inhabit the area. A school of silvery fish swims above the wreck and we slip into the center of the crowd. We travel with them weaving back and forth. For a moment in time I am truly a fish.

Off in the distance a barracuda with a watchful eye and sharp teeth protruding from its lower jaw hangs motionless. He seems like the security guard of this alien world filled with so many unusual creatures.

All too soon our visit must come to an end. As air breathers we can spend only a short time under water. Slowly we ascend to the surface exhaling as we go. Leaving the weightlessness of the ocean and climbing aboard the boat I feel like I am being crushed by the weight of scuba gear and my

body is a burden. But memories of a relaxing, enjoyable dive remain.

Holidays, Families, Friends, Oh My!

By Barbara Jean Kaufman

I miss my family on Holidays!

Most of them died. I have friends, but, not the same.

WAIT A MINUTE! How can I miss such: Yelling! Bickering! Criticism!

Conversations like: You were supposed to bring this!

Why didn't I get that! I hate this gift!

Mom likes you better than me!

There was no REAL Dad!

Well at least the food was great!

We baked Slovakian sweet breads: Poppy Seed, Walnut, and Cheese. All rolled -up in swirled rings!

Delicious! Ah -Tradition!

I like "Real Trees". Not some plastic colored one!

The smell of pine cones: sweet, fresh.

Fir trees: rich green, moist to the touch.

Friends are nice. And I am grateful!

But, no matter how BAD the Holiday was. And, At times, I didn't want them.

I still MISSED my family. I Still MISS my family!

A Force to be Reckoned With
By Carole Ann Birkdoll

A hurricane has formed and is headed our way
The weatherman's details say it will be here in one day
The time is at hand to make last minute preps
We tick off each finger all of the steps
First on the list is extra water and food
Then round up some games to later lighten the mood

When the electricity goes off we will have a great need
For candles and flashlights will be useful indeed
The house has been shuttered and the patio is bare
Coconuts cut down so they won't become missiles in air
The ominous clouds become extensive and more
The crest of the waves come raging into shore

The wind is now proceeding to gather in the rain
These are the squalls that make up the hurricane
Included in this mass the tornadoes will spin
Taking houses and trees in its path and pulling them in
The direction Has been chosen the first part has begun
There is no possibility of seeing the setting sun

The wind howls all around and under the eaves
Tomorrow, the trees will be bare of their leaves
The time seems to drag on when I want it to go fast
I just want this hurricane to hurry on past
It's eerie outside now so deadly quiet and still
It's not pouring rain or the wind being shrill

A Force to be Reckoned With
By Carole Ann Birkdoll

The eye of the hurricane now hovers with no sound
Waiting to commence to the second go round
The first half was bad but the last half is worst
We are located on the backside and that is a curse
I'm trying real hard not to show fear
But in the back of my eyes I can feel tears

I peep out a hole that we left open to see
I hear a loud crash and I know it's a tree
There are other sounds and it is quite frightening
When I peep out again I see green lightening
I have never seen anything like that before
Then something hits and scratches the front door

Finally the wind ceases to be so excessively mean
We open the door to check out the scene
The yard is a mess but the house is in tack
The tree that has fallen will have to be wacked
As we get out the tools and put on our gloves
I say thank you God and look up above

There in the lingering clouds is a patch of blue
Then, after a bit the sun comes shining through
So very thankful that the hurricane has passed
In my lifetime one hurricane is enough to last
But as long as you live where hurricanes exist
You have to prepare and pray that you are missed

Rock Scissors, and Papers

By Carole A Hearn

I started off with a plain simple kidnapping scheme. One that would net enough money to get me into a business I only ever dreamed about. The girl's parents could easily afford to pay out 50,000 for her safe return. They gave more than that away to charities. I considered myself one of those charities and laughed to myself about thinking that way.

So I plotted as to how I was going to snag her away from that rich health spa. It had to be a simple plan. One that was quick, without having much ado. I knew she would be there for a couple of weeks, so I had a little time to figure out my plan. First, I needed to go and see where it was located and then decide on my next step. I had seen her picture before in a newspaper article, but that was when she was much younger. Now she was older, but there had been a description of her mentioned in a more up-to-date article, describing her as a pretty,

petite, twenty-five-year-old redhead. It couldn't be that hard to pick her out since there weren't but a couple of redheads in that place.

I had already checked the place out by hiding in a group of trees, watching people with binoculars to see how many red-hair twenty-five-year-olds there were around the expensive spa. I saw only two. One looked like my victim-to-be, the other looked older and was wearing a hat, so I dismissed her. After my thoughts were clear as to my plan, I proceeded to the health spa. This was going to be a one man, job because if I got caught, I didn't want to involve anyone else.

I walked in and asked for her room, stating that I was a close friend of hers. I was told that she might be in the solarium if not in her room. I went to her room first. The door was open, and sure enough, there she was, looking out the window. I startled her when I asked if she could direct me to the laundry room that I couldn't seem to find anyone to help

me. She said, yes and walked with me down the hall to an area that seemed to be the designated laundry room. I was lucky no one was in there; otherwise I would have had to figure out another plan and come back another day. She asked if I was there to pick up the sheets and towels, and I said, yes. There was a large bin on coasters, and I thought, *This is great!*. Just what I was counting on to get her out of here and into the van that I had rented.

All I needed was the back door to be clear so I could get out without being noticed. I took a quick glance at the door, and there was no lock on it. It was the kind of door that you push down a bar, go out, and then it locks after it closes. Luck was with me, and so far there had been no problems. Little did I know that I would soon have a big problem with one feisty little redhead and she would be a handful.

She turned to walk back out the door we had just come in through, and I quickly grabbed her from behind and

said, "Wait, I have something else to ask you about." I pulled a piece of cloth cut from a strip of a sheet out of my jacket pocket and put it around her mouth and quickly tied it in place. I took her so completely by surprise that before she could react, I had her arms pulled together and tied also. She tried kicking me, but I easily picked her up and sat her on the floor, grabbing first one foot and then the other to tie them together. I proceeded to pick her up and put her into the bin and covered her with some sheets. She was making sounds with her mouth, but not loud enough for anyone to hear her.

Then, knowing I only had a very limited time to get her to the van and off to where we were going, I hurried out the door. I carefully put her in the van and pushed the bin back to the door, trying to look in all directions, making sure I wasn't seen. Luck was still with me, and it was off to the warehouse. We made it, and I got her inside.

I had her hands and feet tied with sheets so that they

wouldn't hurt her wrists and ankles. After all, I wasn't a mean person, and I didn't plan on hurting her even if I didn't get the money. I would just tell her I was sorry and then let her go. Of course, I would have to flee to some deserted island so that I would never be found. I had planned to just go to another state and start anew. Somewhere not close by. Sometimes things don't go as planned.

I had put the piece of sheet around her mouth but wasn't planning to leave it there, only until I had a chance to tell her what I was doing and let her know that I wasn't going to beat her up, rape her, or do anything bad to her. Of course, she wouldn't believe me, but I felt the need to tell her anyway.

She looked around at where she was and motioned by moving her head to take off the mouth covering. I quickly told her my plan and that she was safe, then I proceeded to untie the strip around her mouth. The first thing out of her mouth was laughter. I was kind of nervous about

what kind of reaction she would have, but I never expected it to be laughter. I asked her, "What's so funny?" Her reply was, "You've got the wrong person."

"Yeah right," I said. She tried to convince me that she wasn't Silvia Albrighten. I didn't believe her of course. Doesn't the kidnapped person always say that you've got the wrong person?

She definitely fit the description, especially the pretty part, but the mouth on her wasn't so pretty. She was quite a bossy little thing. She told me in no uncertain terms that I was to untie her and let her go, that she had to be at work or she would lose her job. She said she worked at the spa so I best do as she said. When I told her no, that she wasn't going anywhere just yet, she started calling me names. She called me a disgusting, ugly rat. Well, I might not be the most handsome dude around, but the ladies never seem to find fault with my looks. Even my me-maw always bragged about her most handsome

grandson. Of course, I was the only grandson she had.

Silvia fussed and fumed and realized this wasn't getting her anywhere, so she decided to try the being-nice tactic. She told me that her name was Zelda Shatz, and then it was my turn to laugh big time. That made her mad, and with both hands she grabbed the rock on my desk that I used for a paperweight and tossed it at my head. It missed my ear as it whizzed by. I stopped laughing.

I told her to calm down, that I was going to go fix us a sandwich and get something to drink and would be right back. I tied one of her legs to the chair so that she couldn't get up to move about. Then I tied one arm to the chair arm and cut the tie between her two hands so she would be able to eat. She didn't fight me, but she watched me closely. I left her at my desk while I went to grab a few items to make a couple of sandwiches. I should have known better.

When I stuck my head around the corner, she had

my scissors in hand and was cutting up every piece of paper she could get her hands on. I walked back into the room and startled her, and she dropped the scissors. Good thing too, because she probably would have used them on me. I looked at the paper mess and asked why she had cut up all my invoices. She had devilment in her eyes and a smile on her face and said, "I got bored while I was waiting for my sandwich."

"Well now," I said, "I think I will just give your sandwich to Elmer." She had a look of surprise on her face and asked, "Who's Elmer?" Without answering her, I went back to the table to finish putting away the food items and reached for the sodas. I thought I'd take a few minutes and let her worry about who Elmer was. I went to the back of the warehouse and opened the back door and let Elmer in. Everyone who knew me thought I was insane for naming my dog Elmer. He was a mongrel with shaggy brown hair and funny-looking black eyebrows. He wasn't an

exceptionally big dog, but he was a very smart dog. She had no idea how friendly he was, so I told her that he was a mean guard dog that watched over things to keep criminals out. I had played a game with Elmer and told him to guard his ball while I played keep-away with him. He knew the word *guard* so well that when he ran in and headed toward Zelda, I immediately said, "Guard," and he sat and looked at her. She looked a bit frightened but tried not to show it. I gave her the sandwich and soda and then sat across from her and ate mine. I told her my plan of getting the kidnap money for her, but I didn't tell her where I was going or what I was doing with the money. Some things had to be kept secret. She informed me that I wouldn't get any money because she wasn't Silvia. Then started laughing again. He didn't know that when Zelda got nervous she automatically laughed, and she was nervous about what was going on in this guy's head.

Elmer's ears stood up as he listened to her giggles. I

could tell that he wouldn't hold out long before he gave up the game and went over to sniff her and check her out. I picked up the paper plates we used and headed back to the room where I kept a refrigerator, a toaster oven, and a coffee pot. This was my home away from home, so to speak. My adopted parents were no longer living, and I hated living in the house where we all shared so much together. Maybe someday it wouldn't feel so heart-breaking to move back and stay there.

When I went back out, she was feeding Elmer the last couple bites of her sandwich. When I looked at him he just dropped his head in shame for fraternizing with the enemy. But I couldn't be mad at him. Even when he was a pup and had chewed up one of my house shoes, I couldn't be mad at him. I looked at him and then at her and said, "I can't believe you are trying to get my dog to befriend you, like that's going to help you get anywhere."

"It just might," she said. "I might talk him into guarding

you while I escape." Then it was my turn to have a deep down belly laugh. "Not likely," I said.

She was thinking to herself that her kidnapper must be around her age or maybe a slight bit older in years but not by much. He wasn't ugly, even though she had called him some ugly names including a disgusting rat, but truth to tell, he was rather handsome. She asked him if he would let her go if she could prove to him that she wasn't Silvia. He looked as though he was giving it some thought and then said, "How are you going to do that?"

"Write this number down then call it. My roommate should be home by now and when she picks up, you ask for me, Zelda."

"How's that going to prove you are her?" I asked.

"Well, how would I know the number if I wasn't Zelda, you moron?"

"You could be Silvia's friend and know the number," I said.

"Not hardly. She's a bit of a snob, and I'm below her class of friends," she said.

"So what reason do I give that I'm calling?" I asked her.

"Just say that you are calling to let me know that you will be late picking me up for our date, ok?"

"Alright I'll call, but this better not be a trick you're trying to pull, " I said.

I hesitated, giving some thought to this new idea. If I had the wrong girl, what would be the consequences? Making a real jackass out of myself was only a small thing compared to going to jail, and all for nothing. Was it too late to bundle her up and take her back and dump her? I could blindfold her and she wouldn't know where I had brought her to. Now I was really starting to be convinced that I did have the wrong girl without making the call. Also, if I called, they could trace the call back to me. Maybe that was her plan. No, I wasn't going to call, but I was going to do some serious thinking about the situation. I really hadn't

planned very well at all now that I thought on it.

She was petting Elmer with her one free hand, and then she finally looked over and said, "I have to use the bathroom. You do have one here right?" I thought how I was going to let her go without untying her. This I never thought about beforehand either. Maybe I could get her to promise not to try to escape. Who was I kidding? That would be a big laugh on me. Ha Ha.

"Ok," I said, "I will untie your feet from the chair but tie them together so you can't run." She looked at me like I was a real nincompoop, but I ignored her. I had to go check the bathroom to see if there was anything in there that she could use as a weapon, like the wooden handle of a plunger to smack me upside my head when she came out of the door. She was little but she was mighty, especially when she threw the rock at me. If it had hit me, I would have gone down like Goliath did when little David hit him with the rock.

She waddled over to the bathroom and went in. I waited for her to come out, but she didn't come out, so I called out to her. No reply. I called out again, and she mumbled something that sounded like she was cursing at me. So I told her I was coming in.

She yelled out, "No, don't come in my zipper is stuck and my jeans aren't fastened."

"Well, come out and I'll fix it for you," I said.

"No, that's too embarrassing," was her reply.

"Well, you can't stay in there all night."

"Just give me a couple more minutes."

I waited a couple more minutes and opened the door. There she sat on the floor working away at the knots I had tied on her ankles. I'm such a loser when it comes to women. They tell me all sorts of things, and I always buy into it and believe them. I started to laugh at

her and myself, and at first she looked angry, but then she started to laugh too.

"Well you can't blame a girl for trying," she said.

"No, I guess you sure can't," I said.

I picked her up and sat her on the chair. I took the scissors and cut the sheets that were binding her ankles.

She looked at me and said, "So does this mean you believe I'm not Silvia and that I'm free to go?"

"Well not free to walk out just yet, but I'm calling the kidnapping a failure if that's what you're asking." I wanted to know where I stood with her before I took her back or to wherever she wanted to go. So I decided to ask her.

"Well, Zelda, do you intend to sic the police on me. I know I deserve it, but I did treat you with as much care as I could considering the circumstances, and I did feed you lunch. I even let you pet my dog Elmer." Then I smiled at her, like that would make

a big difference. She actually smiled back at me.

"I didn't really think you were the kidnapping type," she said. No, I'm not going to call the police because the story is so bizarre, they probably wouldn't believe me anyway."

She told me that I owed her for the time that I had kept her from her job but that she would settle for a nice Italian dinner that coming Saturday night. I never saw that one coming, but agreed quickly on that, and she wrote down her address. I already had her phone number from earlier. I loaded up Elmer, and we took her back to the health spa. We talked about the business that I wanted to start, and she listened closely. I found myself revealing pretty much my life history to her. She was a good listener and easy to talk to.

I went back to the warehouse and thought again how stupid I had been to tell her so much about myself when she had told me very little about herself. *What a dunce I am.*

Will I ever learn? I redid the invoices she had wacked up with the scissors. I put my special rock back on my desk and found a paper on the floor that she had doodled on while I was making sandwiches. I turned it over and saw that she had drawn a likeness of me in that very short time. What talent she had. *Hmm, the better to give a detective my features if she drew them,* I thought. Well, I did what I did, and now it was up to her to call the shots. I wasn't in control anymore, if I ever was. The cops didn't come that day or the next or the day after that, so I was feeling a little bit better.

Saturday evening came and I showered and dressed in casual gray slacks and a black shirt. I knew the restaurant she had suggested and dress accordingly. I went to pick her up but was in a bit of a daze when I looked at the mansion that I found at her address. *Oh, I thought she works here probably too as a maid or something.* She never did say what kind of work she actually did at the health spa. She walked out

the front door, and I got out and opened the car door for her. She was dressed in a long flowery skirt with a silky green blouse that matched the color in her skirt and her eyes. If I thought she was pretty before, now I was thinking she was absolutely gorgeous.

Did I make another mistake in letting her convince me that she wasn't Silvia? I turned to her and before I could say anything, she started to laugh. Now she was making me feel like the village idiot. She looked at me and stopped laughing and with a sweet smile said, "No, I am not Silvia," and then she paused, took a deep breath and said in a small voice, "My name is Zelda Shatz, and yes, I know it is a silly-sounding name, but I was named after my great grandmother."

After a pause, I finally said... "So you work here too?"

"No," she said, "I kind of told you a fib." That didn't come as a surprise to me.

"This is my home, and I was visiting at the spa the day you kidnapped me. I was visiting Silvia. She's my cousin." Well, I didn't see that one coming either. I guess I really looked confused and not with the program--her program, that is. I didn't know what to say at this point.

"Let's go to the restaurant, and I'll explain it all to you," she said, and so we went to the restaurant. She explained a great deal of things that I had not even one clue about. Who would have thought that things would have turned out so good for me instead of me sitting in a jail cell? I know my parents would have been greatly disappointed in me if that had happened.

Epilogue

I never called her Zelda. I nicknamed her Zel. She had no problem with me calling her that, and she fell in love with Elmer. She laughed at me a lot, but that was fine because I loved her laughter. It turns out Zelda was not only pretty, but she was very

smart and she did have a temper, sort of, but I got around that. We dated, got to really know each other, and then married. She helped me to get my business going, and later we agreed that we needed a couple of kids to make us a family. A boy and a girl to be exact. We ended up with just that.

The years passed by, and one day we were showing our kids the rock, scissors, and paper game. It brought back our memories of the kidnapping, and we both laughed together. That was a story well left untold until one day in our old age, and then we might tell our son and daughter about how we met.

The Missing Letter

By Carole A Hearn

It was the dawning of a clear spring morning in Circleville, Indiana. The golden sun surrounded by the red and orange spectrum was radiantly shining. Soon the sun would be high enough to shine through the budding

IBIS

By Alice Kashuba

Warm January breeze
Wafts across the deck
of the Moonlight Diner
at the edge of the pond.

White Ibis gather to
satisfy their thirst
after partaking of
diner's refuse bin.

Oak Lake Park, benches
invite resting places.
I look across the lake
time to doze and dream.

Under tall shade trees
White Ibis flock rest
on one foot, heads tucked,
nap in noon time heat.

Palm Ave and Taft Street
early morning light
the sky erupts in a cloud
white wings tipped with black.

Ibis spread out to surrounding
fields, lawns, parks, glades.
Beaks like tiny back hoes
release beetles, bugs, worms.

Outside my front window
white adults, brown juveniles
feast on abundance exposed
from rain softened ground.

Ibis, symbol of Thoth
Egyptian God of wisdom,
knowledge, writing
inspire my craft.

dogwood trees and make the lake glimmer with sparkles. There was a light breeze that blew across the lake which caused little ripples on the water. Sometimes just sitting and looking out over the lake could be mesmerizing. The birds were declaring that they were awake, hungry, and ready to start their day. It was peaceful here in the country back off the main roads. Time exhibited itself in a languorous sort of way. Everything had its own time and place of being. Nothing was hurried, not even the flowers to bloom.

Dallas didn't have to rush to get showered, dressed, have breakfast, and be off to work these days. No more of that with good riddance. Now it was time to enjoy his early retirement. At the age of forty five, he still had all his teeth, a full head of hair and a spring in his step. He had fifteen good years of marriage, but had never had any children. His wife Peggy had died five years earlier from cancer and he had been a lost soul for a long time after. He had decided

to keep his computer on hand to do menial things, like write a letter or keep the checkbook in balance and to send a few emails to keep in touch with family and friends. His long time buddy who he had known since school days had been someone who had helped him through his grieving period. Thomas was married, had three children ranging in ages from a boy fifteen, a girl twelve and another boy nine. The kids called him Uncle Dallas. It was Thomas who had talked him into buying his home out in the country area. He was not so sure that his wife would have like this homestead as she had been a city girl.

Today was the day to send out a few notes of invitation for the annual Barbeque. It was just going to be a few friends and some of his family. Not a zealous affair but a chance to visit and share some old stories of one kind or another. He only wished that his wife could be there by his side, but he did not dwell on that thought. Reality had long ago probed

his mind and he had finally faced it once and for all. She was gone from his life and it was time to move on. Dallas made his invitations on the computer with the date and time. He had decided spring time was better than summer so it wouldn't be so hot for the activities outside. He then proceeded to print them out on some printed paper and when they were done, he folded and placed them in the already addressed envelopes. He put on the stamps and placed them in a folder to be dropped off at the local post office. He had plenty of time to go and saw no need to rush out that day, so left them on his desk.

Days went by and Dallas went fishing in the small lake that was on the back of his property. He did some hitting of a few golf balls out on the open back field and went scouting around on his property with his dog named Bleu. Bleu was a white and brown no special breed dog who was Dallas's companion. He went everywhere Dallas went and even slept in his bedroom

with him. He had found Bleu sitting all by his self in a cardboard box with no one around. There was a sign that read, *Please give this puppy a good home. I can't afford to keep him. A homeless person. Thank you.*

There was a small stable where once housed two pet horses from the former owner, but Dallas didn't want anything he had to tend too. Bleu was enough for him to bathed once a week and to take out for walks. He just wanted to relax and enjoy his country home, besides he really had no knowledge of horses, taking care of them or riding them. He had thought that life might get a little boring after having such a busy schedule working as a stockbroker, but decided he could find a part time job doing something that might be of interest if he did get bored. One thing he knew for sure that was going to keep him busy for awhile, was going into the garage and giving it a good cleaning out. There were containers of things that belonged to

his wife and things that belonged to him that had to be sorted through. It had been sitting in a storage unit for a long while, then it had been moved to the garage and had been sitting in there, so it was time to clean it all out or at least most of it. When he had moved to the condo there had been no space to put all the containers. He remembered that there were skiing items that would never be used again so for sure they would be tossed out, but he couldn't even fathom what all his wife had put away.

He headed for the garage and started with the containers nearest the door. Inside the first container he found a decorated card box. He recognized the hand writing on the box that said, *Cards do not throw away until box has been examined.* Who knew how old they were. Upon his discovery of them, he remembered the invitations that he had written out but had not sent. Time had gotten away from him and now it was time to get them

off to the post office. Deciding that he best go into town and take care of that first, he left the box of cards sitting on the table in the garage.

When he came back the box was still sitting on the table where he had left it. He chuckled at himself saying out loud, "Well Dallas you didn't really think that box was going to disappear did you?" He really didn't want to go through a bunch of cards but he knew he had to, because there might be some pictures or something else in the box. His wife often laid things down and forgot where they were at, but most of the time she would find them later. He picked up a handful and quickly ran his eyes over them. Close to the top of the stack was an envelope addressed to him. Funny he thought, his wife had wrote him a letter, but had not given it to him. He opened it and after reading through it had to find a place to sit. He read it again and tears filled his eyes.

My Darling Dallas,

I hope you find this letter soon after I am gone. Gone out of your life, but I know still in your heart. I won't make this long, but I wanted to tell you that in my last days in the hospital, I had an extremely kind nurse whom I became friends with. As it turned out when she learned who I was married to, she recognized your name. She told me that she knew you back in high school. You met her in the hospital but when I introduced the two of you, you didn't recognize her. We had some nice talks and she told me that she had a crush on you back in her school days, but you were three years older and so you never paid any attention to her.

This made bells ring in my head that maybe you and she could become friends.

She was married but her husband died in a car crash. She has three children. One boy four, and two girls six and eight. She is thirty seven. So young to have to raise a family by herself. Please consider calling her. I wrote down her number and

it is enclosed in the envelope.

I asked her permission to give you her phone number. She would never think it right to call you. I asked her to be your friend and she said she would if you would like for her to be. If something more becomes of a friendship between you and her, it would make me most happy for you both. You would have a complete family then. Children that I could never give you and they could use a father figure in their lives too. I don't want you to be lonely are grieving over me being gone from your life. I will always love you and I know you will always love me.

Peg

Dallas wasn't sure how the letter came about being in the box with the cards but guessed it was put in with all the cards she had received at the hospital. He wasn't sure how he felt at this point. Was she capable of given him up to another woman so easily? No that couldn't be it. He knew she

loved him too much. She just wanted him to go on with his life with someone and not be lonely. But he had never thought that could ever be a possibility. Now as he thought about it, he was still young enough to marry again. He had just never met anyone he cared enough about to give that a thought before. He had been out on dinner dates with a few ladies but nothing ever developed in the serious romance department, well except one and she had ended up remarrying her ex-husband.

"Oh for goodness sake!" said Dallas, "I 'm too old to be thinking about this sort of thing," but his mind wondered on. This was five years later and the lady named Alana had probably met and married someone by now. He remembered Alana in the hospital. She had natural red hair and was petite

in size. He was eternally grateful for the kindness she had shown to his wife in those last days of her life. He thought on and realized

that after Peg had died there was no way he would have ever considered any other woman in his life, so maybe it was good that he had never found the letter back then. Maybe fate had a way of happening at certain times in your life like now.

He decided he would give her a call and see how the wind blew. The worst would be the phone number was no good anymore or she was married. So he picked up the phone while he was still feeling brave enough to do it and it rang to an answering machine. He left a polite message just in case she had a husband and a phone number. He wasn't real sure he had done the right thing but it was too late now. Later that evening after dinner he was having a cup of coffee and reading a mystery book when the phone rang. His first thought was that it was Alana calling. When he answered the phone it was his sister asking him what she could bring to the barbeque. He quickly told her a desert of some kind if she would like and made an excuse that he

was in the middle of something to get her off the phone. If Alana called him, he wanted the phone line to be open. The phone rang again and this time it was Thomas. He hurried him off the phone too and afterwards thought he was being quite silly. A few hours went by and he decided she wasn't going to call so he got up, called Bleu, and took him outside for his nightly walk before bed. He had no more than gotten outside the door when the phone rang again. He rushed back inside and grabbed up the phone, dropped it in his excitement and answered sort of out of breath. It was Alana and she explained that she had a later shift that day and hoped it wasn't too late to be calling. He told her no, that it was ok, that he was still up reading a book. They talked until midnight and they made plans to meet at a cafe for coffee where they furthered their friendship. He met her children who seem at ease with him and he invited them to the barbeque. He introduced them to his family and friends and everyone was

pleased to see that he had taken an interest in this family.

They played croquet, horseshoes, volley ball and ate a variety of food. When the day had ended Dallas ask Alana if he could see her and the kids more often. He told her that he wanted to be more than a friend, but he didn't want to rush her or the kids into accepting him if they were oppose to the idea. She quickly said of course and that she was ready for someone new to be in her and the kids' life. It was six months later when he had ask the kids what they thought about his marrying their mom. They were in agreement so he got a set of rings and proposed. Alana accepted and they were married. Before they got married though, Dallas showed Alana the missing letter. She read it with a bit of moisture in her eyes and said that Peggy had been a lovely lady to know. She told Dallas that Peggy's only regret in her marriage was that she was not able to give Dallas children. His reply was Peggy had been enough

to love and the fact that they never had children was never an issue for him.

They all settled in at Dallas's homestead and after checking out the lake, woods, and stable, the kids wanted to know could they have a horse. Well Dallas had to think on that awhile, but decided what he didn't know about horses he could learn, so he bought a horse and the kids named it Goldie. They loved Bleu, but Bleu was Dallas's buddy and they wanted a pet of their own.

Dallas had learned to love again and appreciate a family he never expected to have. He thought about Peg and wondered how she knew that he would need someone else to come along and be in his life and make him happy again. He spoke his thoughts and said, "Peggy you were right to say that you are gone out of my life, but you will always be here in my heart."

Listen!

By Sue T.

As different as we are
One from another
Life is the same, for all, in one way
It's full of decisions and choices
Influenced by outer voices
But...
Listen!
In the end
Who you are
Who you will be
What you will do
Where you will stay
Where you will go
Will depend, ultimately
On you.
Listen!
Will you stay on your safe shore?
Continuing to live, just as you are
Or...
Dare to go out, far and away
Riding life's waves
Determined to find
The other you's.
Will you stay the same?
Will you change?
Only you know
You are the one
Who's in control.
Listen!

Holiday Czechoslovakian Sweet Bread

By Barbara Jean Kaufman

When I was growing up in Connecticut with my mom, Aunt Marion, and my sister Diane.

I watched and learned how to bake, (from scratch), homemade holiday sweet breads. My mom originally came from the country called: Czechoslovakia. The country was then split into two countries, during the 1980's. Russia and other satellite Communist countries became independent. My mother's side of the family came from the Slovak Republic Country. The other side is called: The Czech Republic. The Czech Republic includes the beautiful city of Prague.

We had an all weekend ritual of making many kinds of sweet breads, during the Christmas and

Easter holidays. We started very early on Friday morning, usually a few days before the holiday

- day. I would see my mom, Aunt Marion and Diane mix huge bowls of flour, eggs, butter, yeast, sugar and milk, that would make raised dough. Everything was prepared for the rising of the dough, especially the warm yeast mixture and butter. Once the dough mixture was put into big, soft balls. We waited for about an hour or two for all to rise even more. Then, once each ball of dough rose half its original size, my maternal family would roll out the dough and create swirled like cinnamon rolls, but cut into portions like a big roll. Plus, they would have several types of delicious fillings that were spread on the flat rolled dough. I guess the flat rolled dough looked like a pizza. But, the fillings were made of: Sweet Poppy -Seeds, finely grinded walnuts, cream cheese and Lekvar aka: Prune Danish. My family and I began to spread each filling on the flat surface, very generously. Every bread had the golden raisins as well. For some reason they had to be golden and not the usual black raisins. I think it's because the beautifully

created swirled breads were so special, that they had to be just perfect and with the best ingredients possible.

The baked breads smelled like huge Arugula Jewish pastry. What a sight to behold. This ritual lasted about 2 days. The whole maternal family, including us kids went to our nearby Catholic Church, called St. Cyril's. This event is where the priests blessed our breads, eggs, and meats, for the holidays. It was one on my most memorable childhood events.



Authors!

- Gore Vidal (Oct. 3)**
- Anne Rice (Oct. 4)**
- Harold Pinter (Oct. 10)**
- E. E. Cummings (Oct. 14)**
- Friedrich Nietzsche (Oct. 15)**
- Oscar Wilde (Oct. 16)**
- Arthur Miller (Oct. 17)**
- Anne Tyler (Oct. 25)**
- Sylvia Plath (Oct. 27)**
- Ezra Pound (Oct. 30)**
- John Keats (Oct. 31)**

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 2017:**

Nov 7, Dec 5.

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 2017:**

Nov 21, Dec 19.

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.

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FEEDBACK CORNER

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