

THE PORTAL

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES BY MEMBERS OF
THE WRITER'S CLUB

BI-WEEKLY MEETINGS AT SR/BROWARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

“FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE”

Courtesy of:



South Regional-BC Library

South Regional/Broward College Library 7300 Pines Boulevard, Pembroke Pines, Florida 33024
Contact us at: 954201-8297

LOST DIGNITY



By Edward White/CP Bialois

Few things in this world are promised to us, fewer still are offered out of kindness. The one thing most men don't want to accept when it's either offered or promised is death. Knowing the world has more than enough ways to kill those living on its surface defies all logic for one to voluntarily give their life away. Thoughts along those lines were the reason Whitefoot found himself in the insufferably tight confines of his jail cell. From his current habitation, he could hear the banging of hammers and the rhythmic grinding of saws of his death being constructed not more than twenty feet from his window.

The unnerving properties of those hideous sounds were a torture unlike anything men had experienced since the dawn of time. Each nail, each cut of the saw brought his death another step closer. It was during that time Whitefoot confided in me to tell his story. My name is Henry Crockett. I'm currently writing for the local paper in Deadwood, South Dakota, a truly depressing place to find oneself. My apologies for getting off the subject, the reason for my being here is another story, or as much as a Harvard graduate working for the local paper in a hellhole such as this could find. Anyway, I digress. As I stated before, I'm working for the local paper and have been assigned to cover the hanging of the Scourge of the Deadwood Plains.

I sat in a most uncomfortable chair for the better part of the last two days trying to get the young Sioux to trust me enough to tell me about himself. As stated above... giving one's life over voluntarily doesn't come naturally to anyone, much less an Indian. I must admit that when I first received the news about what I must take part in I was nervous. Everywhere I looked the papers told stories about the Scourge of the Deadwood Plains and the bloodthirsty methodology of his attacks. No one was safe from his tyranny so I'm sure you can imagine what I was feeling just sitting

within arms reach of him in the small jail in Deadwood.

I came into this with the steadfast belief that the sentence handed down wasn't nearly harsh enough, but as I sat there and he slowly took me into his confidence, I must admit I had the poor soul pegged incorrectly. Now don't get me wrong, I'm sure he could kill me as easy as I write this... but would he? Well I'll let you be the judge of his character and motives. As I said, he was convicted by a court for over thirty murders, all white settlers in the former Lakota land just west of here. The Lakota are... were, a formidable tribe of the Sioux nation and covered much of the Dakotas, but after many bloody years they were relocated to reservations just as the other savages on the land.

He began to tell me of stories about what it was like before my people, the white man, came and spoiled the land. Hordes of buffalo moved across the land in huge herds more closely resembling waves in the river than beasts. I must admit hearing that made me wish to see those beasts, but when I asked him where they were, he spread his hands and claimed they were with the Great Spirit. I asked if he was referring to God Almighty, but he only stared at me before responding, "If that is what you believe."

At first, his attitude infuriated me, I hadn't been lectured in such a way since I was a boy at Lansor Academy, and then it hadn't been a lecture in the truest sense of the word. Still, feeling responsible for my dollar a week salary I remained where I was and listened to his story. Anyway, I should let you get on with his story so I shant try to interrupt you again. My apologies.

Life on the reservations was hard, much worse than it had ever been on the lands of his fathers. Instead of being given the honor of walking with his fathers, he would be doomed to wander the afterlife searching for the land that was unlawfully taken from them. It was because of his fear that Whitefoot and his people were resigned to their fate. Unable to fight against the white man and their lighting sticks (rifles, as I was later told) his people were herded much the same as they herded the bison when on the hunt. The only outcome they saw was to be hunted and killed by the white skinned devils.

The reservation was founded during the summer months giving Whitefoot's people no opportunity to hunt and prepare for the difficult winter that descended on the plains each year. They were assured the United States Government would take care of them by supplying food, blankets, and other necessities they may need. The United States military was

given the task of fulfilling the government's promise to the native peoples. At first that was taken as an honorable token since the chiefs had always made medicine with the Generals, although not always for the better. The Lakota were a defeated people and they would honor their portion of the treaty and relegate themselves as a captive was expected to.

The first weeks of winter set in and they were as harsh as any in memory. Whitefoot's mother died from exposure and starvation, as did many others, but the blankets and other provisions had yet to arrive. When they did come, two months after winter began; they were accompanied by a wagon full of beef and cornmeal. While late, the reservation looked to the white soldiers as their saviors, for one never treated their prisoners horribly. Thus, the Lakota took the blankets and food with a quiet pride and dignity that would've failed a lesser people in those terrible moments.

Once taken inside, the barrels of cornmeal and beef were opened to be shared among the starving and freezing people. The stench of the rancid meat struck them all like a fist to the stomach, but some were desperate enough to eat the rotten meat, maggots and all. The cornmeal wasn't any better as it was infested with worms and was as uneatable as the meat. Even the blankets provided little comfort, as they were thin and with holes that couldn't keep the cold air out. Worse still they were made of cloth, not animal hide so the people couldn't even eat them to stay alive.

Furious, Whitefoot left the reservation with three others to trade for food at the nearest trading post. Halfway to the post they crossed the path of the same army detachment that delivered their "supplies". The commanding officer, a young lieutenant, told them to return to the reservation. He would overlook the fact that they had violated their treaty with the United States government by leaving it. Whitefoot didn't refuse, but he asked for food for his people. The Lieutenant laughed and called him and his people animals.

Whitefoot was furious that his people would be showed so little respect, but before he could utter a word a shot rang out and one of those with him fell dead. In an instant, the other soldiers raised their weapons and fired on the three remaining Sioux. In their haste to get away Whitefoot lost another of his friends to the white man's bullets. Without weapons of their own, Whitefoot and his remaining companion hid under the thick snow until the soldiers gave up looking for them. Frozen and terrified, Whitefoot and his friends returned to the reservation to find it on fire.

Only a handful of his people escaped the massacre by running away. They began to return when Whitefoot arrived and it was from them that he learned the soldiers had returned to punish them for their uprising. Not seeing his wife and daughter among the survivors Whitefoot ran to where his teepee stood. To his delight, it remained untouched and hope swelled inside of him as he burst through the small opening.

It was there that he stopped and remained silent for a good while. I tried several times to get him to tell me more, but instead of answering he settled into the hard bed in the jail cell and turned away from me. Even without hearing him tell me, I knew something awful had happened to them. Intent on learning more I told him I'd return in the morning to continue with our discussion. He didn't acknowledge me in the slightest, but I figured where would he go?

Outside the jail, I thought it best to ask around about him, to see if anyone else knew what had happened. I was intent on earning that dollar, I may not have needed it, but the principle was the same. The sheriff, his deputy, and even the US Marshall all told me the same thing... that the people on his reservation attacked the soldiers when they delivered the food and supplies. The reservation was wiped out, but it was done in self defense. Well, let me tell you that story made no sense to me so I nodded and continued on my way.

The next morning I found Whitefoot sitting on the bed when I entered. When he saw me, he smiled bigger than I've ever seen a man smile before. He claimed he saw his wife and daughter in a dream and they told him to tell me the rest of his tale. So, thinking justice for the man was coming at an alarming rate, I took my seat next to him and let him continue. His voice broke when he first began, and once I relate what he told me I'm sure you'll understand.

When Whitefoot entered the teepee, both his wife and daughter were there. His daughter was not yet a year old, but her skull was smashed in by a soldier's boot heel. His wife was cut open from her privates to her mouth by an officer's saber; both were left where they died. Sick and distraught, Whitefoot vowed vengeance on the white man for what he'd done to his people and family. Taking the few remaining survivors, they armed themselves with what bows and knives there were and left the reservation.

It was here where my blood ran cold, at the telling of the beginning of Whitefoot's bloody vengeance against those that murdered his people and I couldn't find it in my heart to

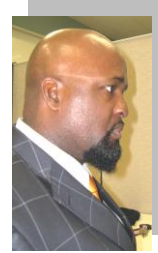
blame him. He told me the tale with tears in his eyes, but they weren't shed for his people, he cried for them already. The new tears were for the white settlers and soldiers he'd killed in response to what had happened. The Sioux way of life was the same as for the other tribes we've encountered. It depended on balance between themselves and nature, if attacked they would defend themselves. That was what Whitefoot had done, defended himself and his people, but it was something he'd never wanted to do. I could tell by the sorrow in his eyes when he told me about the people his band had killed that he was a gentle soul. He could've lived a long and happy life if the government would've honored their treaties with the Indians; or best yet, if he and his people would've been left alone in their home. It wasn't until then that I understood why he'd been sentenced to hang. It wasn't because he broke the law; it was because we had broken it and passed the blame onto his people.

I remained with him for the remainder of the day and early the next morning my story was printed. The construction of the gallows was completed in the morning so he'd face his sentence the following day at noon. By then his story would be in the paper and others would know the travesty of what had happened here.

The next day the people of Deadwood had a copy of the paper, though I doubt most of them could read it. Those that could, turned a venomous eye towards me on more than one occasion. I ignored them, as is the proper way in my family's circles. When Whitefoot was led out of the jail and towards the gallows, the people jeered and threw stones and various other items at him, but he never wavered. He continued to carry himself with a dignity and grace that I've seen few able to do. In a way, I thought it fitting that he refused the black hood and his eyes sought me out. He found me, towards the front of the crowd, and smiled.

When the Hangman pulled the lever, most in the front turned away, but I couldn't. In one motion, I felt that something inside of all of us died with Whitefoot. Thus ends my report of the Scourge of the Deadwood Plains.

THE HUNTED



By Etheridge Lovett
E. G. Lovett



On the Thursday evening of February 12, 1852, a proud hunter named Joe Calhoun, journeyed through the biting cold winter elements from Texas to South Dakota to hunt big game. Joe heard about the large herds of buffalo, roaming freely throughout the Black Hills of South Dakota. Joe also heard about the legendary White Buffalo that wittingly protects other buffalos from hunters venturing out into the Black Hills. This legend prompted Joe to visit South Dakota to see for himself, such an interesting creature. If the buffalo existed, Joe planned to bring down the great beast single-handedly.

Riding upon his favorite horse, Caroline; Joe trekked across the snow-laden plains to the small bustling hunting and gold miner's town near the Black Hills of South Dakota known as Deadwood.

After entering the town, Joe left his horse at the town's holding stable to be cared for overnight. Joe entered the Red Rooster Saloon to relax and unwind from his long journey. The moment Joe entered the saloon; you could hear the distinct jingling sound of the fine silver spurs he wore upon his tough, well-crafted cowboy boots. A sudden blast of frigid air, mingled with large snowflakes, followed Joe as he pushed his way through the swing doors of the saloon. Piano sounds, laughter, and loud conversations permeated the popular saloon.

Several people fixed their eyes upon the tall, handsome young hunter approaching the bar, wearing some of his hunting gear. Two ammunition belts, laden with shotgun rounds, were strapped across his chest. Two .44 Caliber Smith and Wesson single action revolvers were neatly placed inside holsters attached to his belt. He also wore a long coat made of tough buffalo hide, with another thin gray coat barely seen underneath it. On the side of his belt, Joe wore a well-crafted Cheyenne Indian hunting knife. He wore his long blonde hair platted down his back. The only hair upon Joe's stern face was the long mustache he wore, curled up at each end. The mustache was so thick that you could barely see Joe's top lip. Joe's sea-blue eyes scanned

the room of high-spirited visitors who were all gambling, drinking, and frolicking about with the sensually attractive saloon girls. Those who noticed Joe entering the saloon began to lean to one side, whispering to each other.

"Bartender, I'll have a bottle of Jim Beam whiskey," Joe requested, placing his wide-brim, black hat upon the counter.

"A bottle of Jim Beam whiskey coming right up," said the bartender, preparing the drink.

"Pardon me for asking, but where are you headed, Mister?" asked one plump gambler sitting at a table near Joe.

Taking a quick gulp of his whiskey, Joe answered, "I heard that there's a menace up in the Black Hills, killing off most of the hunters around here. I thought I'd come here and offer my services to get rid of him. You see, I take the death of any hunter personal."

"Well, I hope you brought the U.S. Calvary with you. That menace you spoke of up in the Black Hills is like the devil in white buffalo hide. One witness said that the White Buffalo stands eight feet tall, weighing around one and a half tons. Some men believe it's a spirit," the plump man said with a slight chuckle.

"If the White Buffalo breathes, it bleeds. If it bleeds, it can roll over and die. It's just another beast of the field to be tamed, maimed or killed. Besides, I don't believe in spirits. That's hogwash... I only believe in my rifles," Joe said, taking another drink from his bottle of whiskey.

The plump man stood, walking over, shaking Joe's hand, saying, "Mister, you're my kind of man. My name's Nick Mosley. I'm the Mayor of Deadwood."

"I'm Joe Calhoun, a buffalo hunter from Dallas Texas."

"Joe, I want you to meet my gambling buddies," said Mayor Mosley, as he and Joe walked over to his table.

"Listen up everyone; I'd like you to meet my good friend, Joe Calhoun, visiting us all the way from Dallas Texas. He's a buffalo hunter. He traveled many miles to come here and rid the Black Hills of the White Buffalo," Mayor Mosley informed.

Everyone in the saloon went silent for a minute, gazing upon the young hunter after hearing the mayor's words. Some onlookers whispered to each other. Concerned about the young hunter, one old

Cheyenne Indian tracker, with a head full of snow white, long hair, stood; approaching Joe. The Indian grabbed Joe firmly by the shoulders, looking deep into his eyes, saying, "Listen to me, Mister, if you go up into the Black Hills to hunt buffalo, you will surely regret it. As long as you and other hunters continue to hunt the buffalo in the Black Hills, the White Buffalo will continue to attack. Whatever you do, stay away from the Black Hills. Go back where you came from and you won't be harmed."

Assuming that the old Indian tracker simply wanted the elusive White Buffalo to live so that he, and his people, could maintain their fear over the small town, Joe became outraged. Joe pulled out one of his Smith and Wesson revolvers, turned the weapon over, striking the Indian across his mouth with the butt of the weapon, knocking the Indian to the ground. Everyone in the saloon was shocked at Joe's explosive reaction. Several cowboys laughed at the dazed Indian sprawled out on the floor. Gathering himself, the old Indian sat up, wiping the blood from his split lip with his hand. He stared at the blood upon his fingers; then gazed up at Joe with a frown. The Indian pointed at Joe's face, saying, "Remember, I warned you not to go up into the Black Hills."

"Some of you boys get this fool Indian out of here before he gets himself killed!" Mayor Mosley shouted. Several local cowboys grabbed the Indian by his shoulders, dragging him outside in the freezing cold. They went back inside the saloon, laughing about the incident. Joe twirled his revolver around upon his finger a few times for show; then shoved it back down into his holster. He walked over to the bar to finish his whiskey.

"Well, if you need any extra supplies for your hunt just let me know before you leave. I promise you, hunting the White Buffalo won't be a Sunday picnic," Mayor Mosley said.

"Thanks, but no thanks, mayor. I'll be just fine. These are all the supplies I'll ever need," Joe said, patting his hand upon his Smith and Wesson revolvers. "These metal saviors haven't let me down yet."

Everyone laughed at Joe's arrogant response.

"Can you use a little extra attention tonight courageous cowboy?" asked one attractive saloon girl, approaching Joe. Her eyes were sea blue, like those of the young hunter. Her blonde, curly hair shone like fine gold. Her body showed no flaws. Her sweet smelling perfume filled Joe's nostrils as she drew closer. Joe eyed the voluptuous woman from her head to her feet; then he answered,

"Sure. I could use your kind of attention any night."

"Come up to room seven when you're ready, cowboy, and let me show you a good time," the woman offered. She smiled, walking up the winding stairwell. Joe consumed the final gulp of his whiskey, leaving the empty bottle on the table. He placed a one dollar bill beside the bottle then followed the woman up the stairs to her bedroom. The mayor smiled, watching the young hunter disappear in the shadows upstairs.

The Next Day

Despite the biting cold, the morning sun peeked through an opening in the white-laced curtains, striking the closed eyelids of the young hunter. Feeling the warm sunshine, Joe's eyes blinked several times. He awakened, sitting up in bed. Rubbing the back of his neck, he glanced over, noticing the saloon girl sprawled out, nude in bed beside him. Joe smiled. He reached over, grabbing his pants from a nearby table, reaching into the pocket of his pants to get his wallet. Joe left three dollars on the table for the saloon girl's sexual services; then he went over to a large tin pail of ice cold water, wiping himself off. He pulled out his straight razor and shaved. He dried himself off and put on his shirt, ammunition belts, weapons, coat, and boots. Flipping his fancy hat upon his head, Joe glanced back at the young woman still asleep in bed. He tipped his hat, quietly exiting the room. Joe casually exited the saloon, walking towards the holding stables.

"Good morning, Mr. Calhoun. I guess you're ready for your horse, Caroline," one old stable hand said.

"You're absolutely correct. I have a long day of hunting ahead of me. I need to get a head start before the weather turns," Joe said.

"Caroline rested pretty well last night. She slept like a newborn filly. I also changed her horse shoes to make the hunting journey easy on her. I took good care of your saddle gear as well," the stable hand said.

Joe checked over his horse; then he checked over his saddle gear to make sure that everything was there.

"You got a pretty nice set of weapons there fella," the stable hand said.

Joe half smiled, grabbing one of his rifles from his saddle bag, saying, "This here is a .50 Caliber Sharps Buffalo Rifle. Most hunters call it 'Old Reliable.' My other rifle is a .44 Caliber Winchester rifle with a 24 inch

barrel. Then there's my two .44 Caliber Smith and Wesson, single action revolvers. To top it off, I have a genuine Cheyenne hunting knife that I stole off a dead Indian."

"I see you're ready to kill a lot of buffalo today," the stable hand said.

"Not a lot of buffalo, one buffalo in particular. I'm traveling up into the Black Hills to bring down the great White Buffalo, putting an end to a local legend. If I have enough sunshine and rounds left, I'll probably kill a few extra buffalos for sport," Joe bragged, glancing off at the Black Hills in the distance.

"I certainly wish you all the luck on God's green earth, Mister. When I was a young man, I went up into the Black Hills with a close friend of mine to hunt buffalo. We saw the legendary White Buffalo with our own natural eyes. The creature stands taller than a man and seemed twice the weight of an average buffalo. Me, and my friend barely escaped with our lives when the creature attacked us. My heart darn near jumped out my chest. I have never been up there since. So far, no hunter has been able to stop the great White Buffalo. Indian legend says that the white buffalo's a spirit. A spirit's not something you can shoot and kill with a bullet," the old stable hand said with a concerned look upon his face.

Gazing into the eyes of the old man, then up at the ban of cirrus clouds in the frozen blue sky above, Joe smiled, answering, "I really don't believe in spirits, old man, but I'll leave you with a bit of sound advice, stay out of the Indian camps listening to their empty legends and foolish tales." Joe climbed upon his horse.

"I hear you talking, Mister, but I know better. My old eyes have seen much, and my old ears have heard much. Spending time on this Earth makes you very wise, if you live long enough to pay attention. I have a bad feeling about you going up into the Black Hills, Mister," the stable hand said.

"I hear you, old man," Joe said, handing the man two dollars.

"Thanks, Mister; I sure appreciate it," the old man said.

Joe reached into his pocket, pulling out a small lump of snuff, placing it between his bottom teeth and his gums. He tipped his hat to the old man, spitting off to one side of his horse. With a slight kick of his fancy boots, Joe rode away from the stables down the main street of the small town.

"You take good care of yourself, Mr. Calhoun!" Mayor Mosley yelled, standing at the doorway of his office.

"I'll be just fine, mayor!" Joe shouted back.

The mayor half smiled, muttering under his breath, "You damn arrogant fool."

Joe's horse galloped down the snow-covered road in the middle of the small town as he neared the town's edge.

"Take care of yourself; Mr. Joe Calhoun!" shouted the saloon girl, waving from a second floor window.

"I'll bring you back something real nice, honey!" Joe vowed.

"I'll be waiting, Joe," the woman shouted back, her girlfriends standing behind her, giggling.

Other town members watched the young hunter riding past the city line, heading towards the Black Hills in the distance. Gentle gusts of frigid air blew across the snowy open plains as the lone hunter vanished from the view of the town's people. For an hour, Joe rode until he came upon the area the Indians called the Sacred Hunting Grounds.

"Whoa — Caroline!" Joe shouted, pulling on the rings of his horse. Caroline slowed to a mere trot; then she stopped. Joe climbed down from his horse; closely examining several fresh buffalo hoof prints pressed deep into the snow. The prints led off into a rocky, forested enclave, partially covered in snow.

"Come on, Caroline," Joe said, grabbing his horse by the rings, walking with her towards the narrow enclave. The frigid wind howled like weary ghosts, blowing through the Black Hills. Faintly drifting upon the cold breeze was the loud, deep and eerie roar of a lone buffalo, echoing throughout the Black Hills; then it stopped. Joe grabbed his favorite shotgun, Old Reliable, loading several rounds. His keen eyes scanned everything that twitched or moved, but not one buffalo was in sight. Only dead silence remained. Joe shoved his rifle down inside his saddlebag, following the buffalo hoof tracks pressed upon the ground throughout the snow-covered, wooded area.

"I know you're out here somewhere, I can feel it in my bones," whispered Joe, frowning. As he walked further over a small hill, Joe noticed in the center of the woods, a large clearing. In the middle of the clearing there stood a small herd of bison. In the

center of the herd of buffalo there stood the legendary White Buffalo.

"There you are. You're as good as dead," Joe whispered. He carefully removed his shotgun from his saddlebag. He tied his horse to a nearby tree, slowly lowering himself down into the cold, fresh-fallen snow aligning the crest of the hill.

"Take your last breath, legend of the Black Hills," Joe whispered to the White Buffalo. He aimed his shotgun at the head of the large beast, firing his rifle. The buffalos surrounding the White Buffalo ran around in a panic. The White Buffalo remained still, staring in Joe's direction. The creature blew several breaths of hot air from its nostrils and mouth, angered by the mere presence of the young hunter.

"Damn it. How did I miss?" Joe questioned. He glanced down to quickly reload his shotgun. When he raised the weapon for another round of shots, the White Buffalo was gone, so were the other buffalos. Only the voice of the White Buffalo was heard, roaring aloud throughout the brisk winter breeze.

Standing to his feet, Joe brushed the snow from his hands, chest, and stomach, untying his horse from the tree. He hopped upon his horse, riding down the hill into the clearing. He sat there, trying to make sense of the vanishing buffalo.

"I got all day and night, damn you. You can hide in the woods until Hell freezes over, but I'll find you, and bring you down!" Joe shouted, brandishing his shotgun high above his head. The sound of the buffalo's roaring voice suddenly went silent.

Joe laughed aloud, his face pointing towards the cool sky above. As he continued to laugh, a thunderous pounding sound was heard all around him. When Joe looked off to his right, he saw the incredibly large, White Buffalo, charging towards him with great speed. Before Joe could aim his rifle at the creature, the White Buffalo struck Joe's horse with a thunderous impact, knocking Joe Calhoun high into the air. Joe landed in the snow several yards away from his bleeding, dying horse, Caroline. The White Buffalo charged onward up the hill, vanishing beneath the tall trees in the distance.

"Hang on, Caroline!" Joe yelled. He crawled over to his horse, weeping beside her. The horse, kicked several times, trying to get up, but it couldn't. The wounds the White Buffalo inflicted; slowly dragged Caroline into the shadowy realms of death. With her eyes stretched wide, Caroline panted several times. She drew her last breath, releasing her spirit into the freezing winds of the Black Hills.

"Damn you!" Joe shouted from the pit of his stomach. He hopped to his feet, pulling out his two revolvers. Joe began shooting in every direction, firing at everything that moved. Tears streamed down Joe's stern face as he unleashed a hail of bullets across the horizon. Streams of blazing gunfire jumped from Joe's powerful twin revolvers as he wept for his loving horse, Caroline. He fired his weapons until he only heard the clicking sound of the hammer of each gun, striking, but finding no more bullets to ignite. With his revolvers still in hand, Joe fell forward upon his knees before Caroline. Joe wept bitterly over her death. As Joe wept, he heard the loud trampling sound of buffalo hooves coming from the narrow path of the snow-covered forest area. Joe stood, looking in the direction where the sound came from. He saw a large herd of buffalos charging towards him.

Filled with a burst of rage over the death of his horse, Joe pulled out Old Reliable, firing upon the buffalos, bringing them down, one by one. Even the young buffalos fell under the blast of Joe's powerful rifle.

"You killed my horse, now I'll kill buffalos by the hundreds!" Joe shouted. He reloaded his weapon and continued firing. Between shots, Joe heard a loud, distinct buffalo's roar, filled with rage, ringing out behind him. When Joe spun his rifle about, that was all the time he needed to fire one blazing shot right into the forehead of the great White Buffalo approaching. Blood spurted from the buffalo's large head, but the creature kept charging, striking Joe with a bone-crushing blow, knocking Joe Calhoun unconscious. When Joe regained consciousness, he was laying flat upon his back with pain streaking throughout his body. As Joe lifted his head, he looked directly into the large, cold black eyes of the White Buffalo, staring back at him. The huge creature was laying motionless across Joe's legs in death.

"Damn you!" Joe shouted when he realized that the dead buffalo had fallen, pinning him to the ground with its incredible weight, crushing both of his legs. Trembling from the intense pain and cold weather, Joe reached into his coat pocket, pulling out a bottle of whiskey. He took several quick gulps of the whiskey; hoping that the strong drink would somehow dull the pain, but the excruciating pain continued. Joe feared that death was closing in on him. Laying flat upon his back, Joe watched the pristine white snowflakes trickled down from the blue skies like angels descending from heaven. The dead silence seemed almost surreal to the young hunter. He looked off to one side and noticed Old Reliable lying in the snow, broken apart by

the impact of the White Buffalo. Joe lost consciousness once more.

"Joe Calhoun, wake up!" a familiar voice beckoned.

When Joe opened his eyes he saw the old Indian he attacked inside the saloon standing over him. Beside the Indian he saw a black horse and a wooden carrying platform the Indian made from dried tree branches and leather strips. The carrying platform was neatly attached to the saddle on the Indian's horse.

"Where's the White Buffalo?" Joe asked.

"I didn't see a White Buffalo. I only found you laying out here in the snow with your legs busted up something good," the Indian said.

A confused look formed upon Joe's half-frozen face.

"Drink this, it will help keep you alert until I get you back to town," the Indian said, holding the back of Joe's head, administering an old Indian medicine that he'd made from natural herbs. The bitter taste of the medicine caused Joe to frown.

"I warned you not to come out here, but you didn't listen to me, young hunter from Texas. Now look at the terrible shape you're in," the Indian reminded, carefully dragging Joe's broken body upon the platform. Joe gritted his teeth in pain. The Indian placed Joe snugly into the platform, covering him with several hand-woven, wool blankets. The Indian climbed upon his horse, riding slowly out of the Black Hills, in route to the town of Deadwood. When they made it to town, people watched as the horse dragged the platform, with the brave hunter nestled inside, towards the town's doctor's office.

"Everyone, get back!" shouted the doctor, pushing his way through the crowd towards Joe. The doctor pulled back the blankets and saw Joe's busted legs.

"My goodness, what happened to him?" the doctor asked the Indian.

"He tussled with the great White Buffalo and lost," the Indian said.

"Un-strap him and bring him inside my office—quick!" the doctor shouted.

The old Indian carefully untied Joe from the carrying platform. Several men helped place Joe inside the doctor's office.

Grabbing the doctor by his shirt, Joe asked, "Doc, will I ever walk again?"

"You'll be lucky if you remain alive after getting busted up like this," the doctor answered.

Joe rested as tears seeped from the side of his weary, reddened eyes.

"Don't worry, Mister, I'll do everything I can to save you, you damn fool," the doctor said, working frantically on Joe.

"Thanks, doc," Joe replied. He turned his head to one side, looking out of the window at the small crowd of people gathered outside the doctor's office. Standing in the crowd of onlookers, Joe's eyes fell upon the old Indian who saved him. The Indian drew closer to the window of the doctor's office with his hands pressed against the glass. He peered through the window at Joe with a blank stare upon his face. At that very moment, the snowstorm began once more. A strong gust of wind blew past the old Indian, causing his snow white hair to blow upward, twirling about in the winter breeze. Underneath the Indian's long hair, Joe noticed the shotgun round hole in the center of the Indian's forehead. At that very moment, Joe Calhoun fully understood why the Indian tried to prevent him from hunting buffalo up in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Joe quickly learned that the Indian, and the White Buffalo, are one.

ESCAPE



By Jamie White

Amelia Clarks hurried through the woods, trying to make as little noise as possible as she zeroed in on her destination. It was getting late and the fading sun created shadows that set her nerves on edge. She was terrified that each one would be either a hungry animal or one of the men she'd just escaped from. After an hour of traversing through the wooded area, taking care to stay low and behind trees, her legs began to protest the strain. She wanted more than anything to stop awhile and rest, but she didn't dare. Not yet, anyway. She didn't want to chance them catching up with her.

She snuck away from the men while they prepared for their daily hunt and feared she'd already been discovered missing. Once she was, she knew they'd come for her. She peeked around a tree stump, her eyes wide and alert. Nothing. She continued on, taking refuge behind a bush. As much as she wanted to keep going, she was afraid she wouldn't be able to. Her cooking skills and the ability to sew quilts had always been valued more than athletic ability. Athletics were unladylike and a waste of valuable time where she came from, so she'd never done anything more strenuous than cleaning her cabin and helping tend to the animals. This was something else entirely.

As the fading sun dimmed further, her fear grew. What if she came across a Black Bear or some other beast? She didn't have anything to defend herself with and the little food she'd been able to steal before she left was nearly gone. What if she got lost? She started to wonder if escaping had been such a good idea. *Calm yourself, Amelia. Panicking won't help matters.* She repeated it several times, hoping that the repetition would help her believe that was true. Truth be told, Amelia was a bit high-strung. Her family believed it was a miracle she'd managed to land a husband.

Ezra was the son of Asa Clarks, one of the wealthiest land owners in their small Texas town. His father was Mayor and a great number of the businesses there were owned by his brothers. Ezra worked closely with his father in the Mayor's office, as he was the only one Asa felt had the smarts to take over for him in the future. He'd appointed trusted relatives to keep an eye on his investments, the sons merely figureheads to keep up appearances.

Her family was the most influential in the community. It was part of what had attracted Ezra to her, and she to him. From an early age the importance of a good match had been pressed upon her and she was happy to have caught the eye of one of the most eligible men in town. Now, all she wanted was to sit and rest. A warm meal and a bed sounded like the closest thing to Heaven at that point.

After walking for what she estimated to be another twenty minutes, she couldn't take it anymore. She'd have to stop for a while and risk being caught. She approached a bush, praying no surprises awaited her as she slipped between the branches. Luckily for her, it was empty and she sat down, pulling some bread from the pocket of her skirts. She bit into the bread, practically inhaling the bite in her mouth. Nothing had ever tasted so good in her life. Who would've thought that a girl accustomed to the best of everything would be so satisfied by a stale piece of bread? The

thought almost made her laugh, but she bit her lip to keep a sound from escaping. She reminded herself she had to be more careful, she didn't want to do anything that might draw attention to herself in case they were out there, closing in on her.

She stuck the rest of the bread back into her pocket and pulled out the canteen she'd swiped, drinking carefully in order to conserve what little liquid was left. Feeling a little more alert after eating, she considered continuing on, but with the thought came a cramp in her leg as if her body was saying, "don't even entertain such a foolish notion". She decided to stay put for a while longer before venturing out of her hiding place.

Sitting alone, hidden in the growing darkness, her mind began to wander. She wondered what might happen if she was discovered and brought back. What wrath might they unleash on her? She shuddered at the thought. No, there was no two ways about it; she had to succeed in her escape. The anger they'd surely feel over a woman attempting to make a fool of them would be great.

Once the cramp in her legs had subsided, she began to emerge from her hiding spot, but the darkness that greeted her gave her pause. Should she attempt to continue through the woods now, with no light to guide her way? She knew she could find her way back in the daylight, but the night was a whole other prospect. What if she took a wrong turn and ended up back where she started, or worse, lost with no food or hope of rescue? On the other hand, staying here might allow them to catch up with her and she'd be just as bad off. Her inner debate finally ended when she decided to stay put and get some sleep so she'd be fresh in the morning. She laid down as best she could and fell into a fitful sleep, filled with nightmares of being eaten by wildlife or captured.

When the first rays of sunlight shone into her hiding spot, she peeked through the leaves of the bush, listening for any noises that might indicate human feet closing in on her. Satisfied she was alone; she emerged and continued on her way just as cautiously as she had yesterday. She took few breaks, stopping only to sip some water or take a couple of bites of the bread in her pockets that was almost gone. She hoped she reached her destination soon. If she didn't, she wouldn't have to worry about being captured.

Amelia came across a stream and paused a moment, memories of her childhood invading her mind. Her mother had taken her to one just like it many times to wash clothing, or take a rare bath. She used to love bath days. They were the only times as a child she'd

gotten to do anything active like her brothers. She'd sneak a short swim in when her mother wasn't looking. She smiled; thinking of how scandalized she'd be to find out her daughter did something so foolish and wasteful of time. Shaking her head to snap her out of her thoughts, she glanced around to make sure she hadn't been spotted. *That was foolish*, she chastised herself. How could you get caught up in such things at a time like this? No, she had to keep focused.

She hurried back to the trail she'd been following and walked with renewed purpose. As she glanced around for signs of being followed, she realized she was closing in on her goal. The rock formations looked exactly like the ones she'd seen before. It wouldn't be long now!

The knowledge of knowing she was almost home free gave her a burst of energy as she picked up her pace. She knew she it was reckless, making so much noise, but she didn't care. She couldn't bear the thought of being stuck sleeping in the woods alone again, every noise filling her heart with terror. No, another night like that was simply unacceptable!

Amelia heard a noise up ahead. Judging by the sound, she figured it couldn't be more than a couple hundred feet in front of her. She hurried to a nearby tree and hid behind the large trunk, wrinkling her nose at the bug that crawled in front of her. She'd always hated things like that. They were disgusting creatures she couldn't see why the Lord had seen fit to put on this earth. As she waited, she thought she heard a man's voice, but she couldn't make out any words. She couldn't even tell if the voice spoke English or some strange tongue that would be nothing more than gibberish to her ears.

As the man got closer, she heard a second voice speaking and the words began to get clearer. They were definitely not speaking English. It was one of those strange languages the dark-skinned men her husband referred to as savages used. She tensed in her hiding spot as the men finally approached. She quietly moved around the tree as they passed by to avoid being seen. As soon as they'd passed the tree, she snuck a look at them. *It's them*, she thought, recognizing their dress.

Her heart raced as she positioned herself back behind the tree. She took a deep breath to calm herself, closing her eyes trying to summon her courage. She cautiously stepped out from behind the tree, calling out to the men. "Excuse me!"

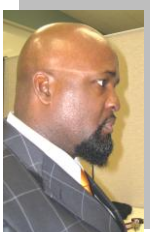
The two Indians turned around, watching her suspiciously before approaching her, weapons drawn. "What you want?" the

taller one asked in broken English they had no doubt picked up in many dealings with her people. She wondered if they recognized her.

“I’m looking for safe harbor. I cannot return to my people, especially my husband and his family. I wish to live and travel among your people, if you’ll allow it.” She’d been miserable the last few years at home. Her husband was a hard man who was quick to raise a fist should she disagree with him. Being captured by a local Indian tribe a few weeks before had been a blessing in disguise.

At first, she’d been terrified. Her husband and the other men in the town had filled her head with stories about the horrors of the Savages. When they’d taken her, she’d been terrified of being scalped or experiencing some other terrible crime. She was surprised to see how well they treated her and the others they captured. She’d been allowed to bath as often as she wanted and was allowed many more freedoms her own husband had denied her. She wasn’t bound by the high expectations of being a member of such an important family either, something that had begun wearing on her in recent years. She had taken a huge risk by sneaking away to return to the tribe she’d been “rescued” from. If they didn’t take her in, she’d have nowhere to go. Going home wasn’t an option, not after she’d run away. She practically fell over in relief when the two men nodded after conferring with each other briefly.

HEART OF THE BUFFALO SOLDIER



By **Emergence G. Lovett**
E. G. Lovett

My name’s Sergeant George Jordan of the Army’s 9th Cavalry Regiment. I’m proudly known as a Buffalo Soldier, a name branded us by the Native Americans we bravely fought. Some say the name was given when they saw our black skin and wooly hair, resemblance of the great buffalo. Others believe it was due to the fierceness of our fight like that of the buffalo. Whatever the reason, the name stuck, and me, and my men accepted it like a bride accepting her groom. Although I

was born a slave in rural Tennessee, I was determined to make something of my life, and I did. At the age of 19 I enlisted in the 38th Infantry based in Nashville. I loved being a soldier so much that in January 1870, as a corporal, I re-enlisted in the 9th Cavalry to serve as a proud Buffalo soldier. On the date of May 13, 1880, I was marching a detachment of twenty-five Buffalo soldiers from K Troop of the 9th Cavalry with a wagon train filled with needed supplies and other goods through the New Mexico territory. We knew the territory was hostile, but determination drove us onward across the hot and arid landscape. My orders from Congress were to protect Fort Tularosa from potential attacks, escort provisions, establish a supply depot and protect local settlers with our lives, if we had to... and that, we did. Although we had traveled far, my men were strong and resilient, ready for any unexpected altercation.

While trekking hard through the valley; a messenger on horseback from the abandoned Tularosa Army outpost nearby approached us as if the devil himself was chasing him. Sweat beaded from his face like water on the side of a cold glass of whisky. The frightened man sprung from his horse, racing towards me, spilling out his message that the Apache Indians under the leadership of a wily Apache leader name Victorio – “*The Triumphant One*”, was about to attack Fort Tularosa and the white settlers living near it. The frantic messenger, his green eyes staring straight into mine, begged us if we could press on in order to save the women and children from suffering a horrible fate of the Apache’s blade. I can tell by the look on his face that he’d experienced firsthand what the Apaches were capable of doing to those they despised. I also knew that the settlers were in great danger. I knew that we had marched right into the middle of an ongoing dispute between Congress and the Native Americans being forced off their native lands and forced to live on reservations. Although I understood the reasoning behind the anger of the Native Americans, and I do sympathize with them, I had sworn to support the interests of the US and Congress.

While sitting high upon my horse, I turned to my men, explaining to them that in order to save the settlers and the fort; this would mean a grueling forced march through the night without an ounce of rest in order to reach Fort Tularosa before the Apaches

attacked. Each of my men didn’t hesitate one bit. They all agreed to push hard in order to save those in need of our help. We ate a quick meal and bathed our feet for temporary comfort then we headed out for Fort Tularosa. We marched through the remainder of the evening’s daylight right through the darkness of night. We continued on right into early morning, finally reaching Tularosa. At that very moment, my greatest fear was that we were too late. There’s no worse sight on earth than to see women and children sprawled out, scalped and butchered like common cattle.



It was deathly silent when we’d arrived. I deployed my men and entered the town prepared for an upfront fight with the Apache, but was relieved to find the place

was safe and the settlers were all huddled inside as if waiting on us to arrive. I permitted my troops a short moment of rest; later directing them to repair the stockade and fortify an old corral just outside the fort. Our work during the day made Fort Tularosa stronger, ready for any battle. My men also



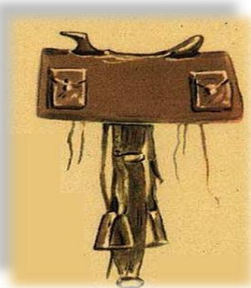
cleaned their weapons, making them ready to defend the settlers. I ordered several of them to establish perimeter defenses and set up guard posts. We were dug in like an Alabama tick, ready for battle. When evening came, I was speaking to several of the settlers about their living conditions when all hell broke loose. Victorio’s Apaches; covered in war paint with weapons in hand, came across the distant hills like a bad storm. A volley of arrows were flying all around us; wedging into the wooden poles reinforcing the great fortress. All but the teamsters and two soldiers fled into the fort as it was secured. My brave soldiers secured the settlers inside the fort then loaded their Trapdoor Springfield rifles and unleashed a heavy hail of rifle fire under my direction to repel the Apache assaults. Several Apaches scaled the walls of the fort, running towards me with their faces painted up and death burning in their reddened eyes. I charged towards them, firing upon one, and plunging the sharp end of my saber into another. The

sound of their final yells of life, and their tomahawks dropping to the wooden floor of the perimeter wall's walkway, could never be erased from my memory. Although I have a lot of respect for the Apaches who fought courageously that day, it was clear that they were no match to me and my men, despite being outnumbered four to one. While firing alongside my men, I stopped for one split second and witnessed my men as they followed their training. As one would fire their weapon, another would drop down and re-load his weapon and prepare to fire. They repeated this routine until the Apaches got the message that the Buffalo Soldiers were not budging. Fear or retreat had no place within our hearts. We were determined to live up to our soldier's creed, to fight to the death. We fired so many shots that a thin layer of white smoke filled Fort Tularosa as the smell of gunpowder filled my nostrils. Due to the heavy hail of blazing rifle fire unleashed upon the Apache warriors from my men, the Apaches changed their plans and turned away from the fort and shifted their attention to the separated teamsters and soldiers who were outside the gates, protecting the mules and cattle in the corral. Calling upon my own training as a leader, I anticipated the Apache's move by sending ten troopers from my outfit to reinforce the corral. My men successfully drove off the Apaches under their blazing rifle fire. I watched my men scurry along the side of the corral, firing with no fear or retreat. I was proud of what I saw...as proud as a sergeant could ever be. The fight that me, and my men, unleashed upon the Apache that day left only the dust kicked up from the hooves of the Apache's horses, and their dead behind. We were so well-trained and prepared for battle that there was not a single casualty from either the settlers or the Buffalo Soldiers. When it was all over, the women and children, some of them still crying from all the mayhem; all hugged and gathered around us, thanking us for being there to save them. What they didn't know about the Buffalo soldier is that this is what we signed up and swore to do. I'll never forget a young boy walking up to me with sea blue eyes, his head full of blonde curly locks of hair, staring at me, then looked at his dad, asking, "Papa... when did black men become soldiers?"

The boy's father grabbed him; placing his trembling hands over his son's mouth, replying, "Hush up that foolish talk, son... These are great men of valor... They are *Buffalo Soldiers*; mighty fine men who deserve the highest gratitude, honor and respect." The man took one step back and saluted me and my men as a tear trickled from his wife's eyes. I felt that they both knew that if we hadn't arrived, their lives would've ended at the edge of the Apache's blade. Feeling that their words and actions were genuine, I returned the salute to the man and his family... So did my men with

a quick snap. Every settler standing around us looked upon us and saluted and praised us as if we were gods. I guess on that day, in that brief moment in time, we were.

MOCHILA



By Rick Weber

I heard the doorbell and got up from my chair in the parlor to answer it. The house keeper was out grocery shopping and I was home alone. I had just moved into my son's house after my wife died and was still getting used to things. My son, Bill, and his wife, Ann, both told me that I was getting too old to be on our ranch alone outside of Sacramento. They told me that there was plenty of room for me in their big Victorian house in the part of San Francisco called Pacific Heights. Bill and Ann had the place built after their old house burned down in the 1906 earthquake. Their four kids, my grandchildren were now all grown up and on their own.

The doorbell kept ringing and ringing. This was a new fangled device, which Ann had to have when they built their new house and has gotten on my nerves ever since I moved in with them. Finally, I made it to the door and saw a Western Union delivery boy who had a telegram for Bill. I tipped the young man a nickel and placed the telegram on the table in the foyer where the mail went. I figured Bill would open it when he got home from his banking job at Wells Fargo.

I made it back to my overstuffed chair in the parlor and sat down. Seeing the Western Union boy made me think of my own, if you want to call it, misspent youth. It also reminded me of all the times my grandchildren begged me to write down my exploits. I figured now was the time so I have gone over to the writing table on the other side of the room and I am putting down my story. The house is quiet and I have a chance to concentrate. Chances are if you are reading this, you are some kin to me whom I never met, a descendent if you will. I made up some rules when I wrote this, but we can get to that later.

About my younger years, I remember reading that poster outside the hotel in Carson

City. "WANTED: YOUNG, SKINNY and WIRY FELLOWS not over eighteen. Must be expert riders willing to risk death daily... Orphans preferred. Wages \$25.00 per week... Apply Pony Express Stables..." The poster also said something about getting from Saint Joseph to California in ten days or less. I was an orphan. \$25.00 a week was a lot more than I was making as a ranch hand. I made my way to the stables and put in for the job. I was fourteen and just over a hundred pounds soaking wet. I was told I was the type of person they were looking for. I knew that. I had no ties.

I came out to what was the western part of the Utah Territory from Ohio with my father about a couple of years earlier. My father had visions of striking it rich in the Comstock Lode like the folks did at Sutter's mill a decade earlier. My mother died in childbirth along with my little brother when I was ten. My father was never quite right after that. When the news of the silver strike made it back east, my father decided it was time for us to go out there and stake our claim. There was just the two of us. I was a smart kid and had just finished the eighth grade a year early. It was now my time to go out and work. I wanted to be a carpenter just like my father. I liked helping him on his jobs when I was not in school, but the move out west changed that.

When we got to what would be later known as Nevada, most of the paying claims had been staked out already, but we found work in the mines. This did not last long. My father was killed when a mine shaft caved in and his body along with some others were trapped in the shaft and never recovered. It was good in a way because I couldn't afford to bury him properly. I lost any desire I had to work in the mines. I wanted to be outside. I wanted to be free. I worked on a ranch for a while and learned how to ride horses and rope cattle real well. On a trip with the ranch foreman to Carson City to look at some new horses, I saw the poster and knew that it was the job for me.

Three men, William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, and William Waddell, formed The Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company, which made the promise to get the mail to California in ten days or less from St. Joseph, Missouri. They based this on using a series of riders going at full gallop to relay stations ten miles apart where the rider changed horses only taking the "Mochila," which held the mail with him on the next leg of the run. After riding seventy-five to a hundred miles, the rider would hand the Mochila off to the next rider who would ride the next seventy five miles or so to the next home station where another rider would take over. This ritual would continue until the

Mochila reached Sacramento it's next to final stop.

I was sent out along the trail in Nevada to help finish building the relay stations. When everything was set up, I was assigned to the Buckland's Station. On April 3, 1860, the first westbound Pony Express mail was sent from St. Joe and the mail made it to its ultimate destination of San Francisco on April 14th. I don't know what day it was on that first relay, but I got the Mochila from Deadeye Dick at the Buckland's Station and rode like hell west. It was near dark when I started. That didn't matter. It was a non-stop relay, twenty-four hours a day. We had to take an oath to the company that as Pony Express Messengers we would not curse, get drunk, gamble, or abuse animals. To those of us that rode we only had one code, "The mail must get through." I was glad that I help build the relay stations because I knew that I wouldn't get lost.

It was April and the weather was not too bad, but going through the mountains at night was another matter. At first the going was easy but as nightfall set in, the way became darker. A full moon helped light the way. I kept the horse at a steady gait and pushed on. I was able to get to Miller's Station on schedule. On the way in I blew my bugle to let the station master know to get my next horse ready. I hopped off the first horse and on to the second one without even thanking the tender who had the horse ready for me. I made it to Spafford Hall's Station in Dayton for my next horse. Again, I blew the bugle to let them know I was coming and the horse was ready for me just like it was when at Miller's Station. The changes were becoming rote. I spoke not a word to anyone and jumped on to the fresh steed and pushed on galloping through the darkness with the speed of a lightning bolt. I was on my way now to Carson City. In front of the hotel where the relay station was located, I found my next horse waiting and I moved swiftly after jumping off the last horse to continue the next leg of the trip to the Van Sickles' Station for my final horse change. It was almost daybreak when I rode into Friday's Station. I was so tired from riding all night that I don't remember who I handed off the Mochila to. All I remember was falling onto a cot at the station and sleeping until almost nightfall.

When the Pony Express first started, it was once a week, but later it became twice a week. The company wanted us to wear red shirts with blue pants when we rode, but that fell quickly by the wayside. For one thing riding at all hours of the day through mountains and deserts was hard enough without becoming a target for warriors with whom we had no gripe. I just wore the Pony

Express Messenger badge pinned on my shirt, covered by my coat.

In May, some men on their way to Pyramid Lake to fight the Indians absconded with horses from the Buckland's Station. A few days later, the survivors made their way back. That's when Fort Churchill was built and became our new station. To be honest, the entire time I rode that route, I never encountered a hostile Indian, or for that matter, anyone who was looking for a fight.

People heard about the Pony Express or the Pony, as we called it, and stories went around about how brave and daring we were. Much of this came about long after the Pony ceased to exist. I don't how the other riders felt about it, but I was more scared than brave, more by the bad weather encountered on the rides than by the thoughts of Indians waiting to ambush me. Later, when I was a lot older and had both a family and ranch to tend to, I heard some stories, which I knew to be pure poppycock. I guess we could thank Buffalo Bill Cody for most of this. As the recruitment poster laid it out, we were not more than kids, but we had to grow up quick.

For those who don't know, the Pony Express didn't last all that long. I remember being in that first relay in 1860 as I told you already and I also remember being around in October of 1861 when the company folded. That's when the transcontinental telegraph line was finished and the need for our service ended. America had a civil war on its hands. From what I've been told during that short time, we kept California, the only state west of Missouri, connected to the east and to the Union. I didn't know much about the Civil War when it was going on, but learned a lot about it later after it was long over. When I rode for the Pony, the Civil War was only getting started and my only interest was keeping food in my belly.

Twenty-five dollars a week was a lot of money for anyone at that time, especially for young men our ages. Getting paid started out all right but as time went on, the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company became slow to pay us our wages. The company was floundering almost from the beginning, but we kept the mail going through. Heck, I was young, single, and didn't need much except a roof over my head, which the company did provide even when we didn't get paid. To be clear about this the accommodations were less than Spartan and the food was terrible to say the least. I made some good friends during that time, but when we went our separate ways after the company folded, none of us stayed in touch with each other. We all moved on and started new lives.

Over the years, a lot of people asked me about the Mochila. Most thought it was a knapsack, which the riders wore because Mochila in Spanish means a backpack. It was actually a leather cover with four "cantinas" where the mail was stored. It was placed over the saddle on the horse's back, a type of saddle bag. The cantinas were padlocked and only the station masters in Sacramento and St. Joe had the keys to them. This kept the mail secure en route. Weight was an issue because the more you put on the horse the harder it had to work. Everything was designed to be light weight, even the saddle, which was made by Israel Landis. The Mochila, the saddle, and the rest of the tack came only to about thirteen pounds. This is also why they only sought "young, skinny, wiry fellows" for the job.

My grandchildren, when they were young, always wanted to hear stories about the Pony Express. They wanted to know how many shoot outs I got into with the Indians, and on more than one occasion asked if I ever killed any of them. They were always disappointed when I told them I never killed anyone, but were very interested when I told them about the hardships I had riding on the Central Overland Route, especially the time when I had to get off my horse and lead him down a five mile stretch through the foot hills outside of Carson City during a blinding snow storm. I got a good case of frostbite on both of my feet, but the mail did get through. I did not tell them that some of my friends were not as lucky as me and did have some scrapes with the Indians.

We didn't have the firepower or resources with us to hold off any Indian attack. The company expected that we could outride the Indians on our horses to get us past any attack. As far as guns, I heard stories about riders carrying a rifle and two pistols on their rides. I never saw anyone do that. I carried a model 1851 .36 caliber Navy Colt revolver with an extra loaded cylinder, but never had an occasion to use it. I did carry a knife in a sheath at my side, but that was more of a tool used most often to get me and my horse untangled from brush along the way. I did hear a few stories from my friends about outrunning the Indians. They were glad we had fast horses and that the Indians only had bows and arrows.

I don't mean to downplay the dangers or the things that happened when the Pony was operating. In May and June of 1860, the Paiute Indian tribe started a war in Nevada. This was when the men I told you about before took horses from the Buckland Station to fight the Indians at Pyramid Lake. The Pony Express was a target of some of the Indian attacks. Seven stations were raided and sixteen

employees had been killed. It was during this time that Pony Bob Haslam made his famous ride. He set out east from Friday's Station en route to Buckland's Station. When he got there, he found his relief rider to be too scared to do his duty so Bob continued on to Smith's Creek Station where after only nine hours of rest he took the westbound leg back to Buckland's. At the Cold Springs' swing station, he found out that the station manager had been killed and the horses run off by the Indians. He continued on and got chased by the Indians who shot arrows at him. One went through his jaw and took out three of his teeth, but he still continued on even though he was wounded. He made it to the Buckland's Station, a 380 mile round trip, the longest ride in the history of the Pony Express. I had been at Friday's Station on a run at the time and was not there when Pony Bob came in. After that, for a short while, service was suspended until the war with the Paiutes was resolved. All of this having been said, these were the exceptions not the routine things we had to contend with; which were bad weather and boredom from being in the saddle for over ten hours at a crack.

With the Indians somewhat under control, we got back to doing our runs between the stations in the Nevada Territory. I've been asked many times why we did it besides for the money. To be honest, it gave me a sense of purpose. We were doing something important. One of the first things carried out west by the Pony Express was a copy of President Lincoln's inauguration address. People paid five dollars per half ounce to send their mail by Pony Express when it started out. To me, if someone was willing to pay that kind of money to get a letter to someone on the other side of the country quickly, it was important enough for me to get that job done. I was told more than once that we were heroes, but I didn't feel like one. I was just doing a job to the best of my ability. However, the life lessons I learned as a rider have helped me out ever since.

Sometimes, I get some practical questions about how things were set up in the Pony Express. Everyone knows that we rode like hell in all kinds of weather and had only a couple of minutes to change horses at the swing stations before riding like mad to the next station. Among the questions I get are about the riders, the horses, and the stations. During the entire time the Pony operated; over 180 men were riders, no women. At any given time 80 riders were in active service of the company. About 160 stations existed. Most were swing stations where riders changed horses. Others, about 50, were home stations where riders would pass on the Mochila to the next rider and where room and board were provided between runs. Although Sacramento

was the western terminus of the Pony Express, the mail actually was carried on to San Francisco by steamboat. Mr. Majors, one of the company founders, got GOOD 400 horses for use in the Pony Express, from "California Horses" to mustangs. The only requirement was that they had to be fast. The horses each averaged ten miles an hour on their respective legs of the run. I would swear on my old Bible, if I ever found it, that they were the fastest horses I ever rode.

There is no written history that I know of for the C.O.C. & P.P. Express. Most of it is by what you call oral history and I call folklore, not really reliable stuff. What I told you so far is one hundred percent gospel truth. We weren't around long enough to make any real history. There weren't a whole lot of people living out west at the time. The biggest town west of St. Louis was San Francisco and St. Joe was then the end of the line for the railroad. The distance between Missouri and California was what everyone called "wide open spaces".

Because of the problems with the Indians around the time of Pony Bob's big ride, Buckland's Station was closed with the building of Fort Churchill nearby. I was moved to Friday's Station near the border with California and was there until we stopped riding. My normal run took me was from Friday's Station to Sportsman's Hall in California, but I did take an occasional run to Fort Churchill. It was still some rough riding into California, but I did not have to worry about the Indians like I did when I first started out at Buckland's Station.

The runs to Sportsman's Hall were rough during that winter of 1860 to 1861 and I'm glad that it was the only winter I had to ride for the Pony. There was a lot of snow that winter and I already mentioned the blinding snowstorm where I had to lead my horse just outside of Carson City on my way back from one of my occasional runs from Fort Churchill. I don't know which was worse, the mountains or the snow. The way down through the mountains was treacherous and I could not see where I was going. That's when I got off the horse and led him down the trail. When I got to Friday's Station two hours behind schedule, the station manager asked me what took so long even though the snow was coming down in buckets around us. I just handed off the Mochila to the next rider and went into the station building to get warm and look at the frostbite on my feet.

It all seemed like a flash because I don't remember how fast that time went. Maybe, it was because of I spent most of it in the saddle riding as fast as the wind. It was not too bad when the service was once a week, but after it went to twice a week, it was tougher.

Two rides a week may not sound like much to the average person but when each one is over seventy-five miles long, and you're pushing a horse ten miles an hour over some treacherous terrain, that's a lot. My back and my butt still ache when I think about it. I was always eager to go when I grabbed the Mochila from the rider I was relieving, but by the time I was halfway to the next home station, I was beat. It always seemed that the last twenty miles were the toughest. Keeping the horse at a steady gait was always hardest after I left my last swing station on the trip. On those final legs the only things I could think about were getting something to eat and getting some sleep.

I also get asked a lot about what I did with the money I made from the Pony Express. The truth is that it started out all right, but as the company's money problems grew, C.O.C. & P.P. Express then became known as Clean Out of Cash and Pay Poor Express. I was too young to spend my pay on whiskey and women in the cat houses, but smart enough to know I needed a nest egg. I put some money aside when times were good, which got me through those times when I didn't get paid. I was able to get some runs to Sacramento when Sportsman's Hall was short on riders. On one of those occasions I opened up an account at a local bank, which kept me from wasting my money or loaning it to some of my friends. Safe to say, I had something to fall back on when the Pony Express folded. I also found a place to set down my roots in California.

Another thing that comes up from time to time is the Bible. Besides us taking an oath not to gamble, curse, or abuse animals, Mr. Majors made sure that all of the riders had a small specially leather bound Bibles with "Presented by Russell, Majors & Waddell - 1858" imprinted in gold on the cover. I don't know about Mr. Russell or Mr. Waddell but Mr. Majors was a religious man. He had previously given out Bibles to all of the wagon crews in their freight companies before they founded the Pony Express. In addition to the things we promised not to do in our oath, Mr. Majors considered Sunday, the Sabbath, a day of rest and forbade us from riding on Sundays. Mr. Majors knew the freight business from the ground up. In fact, he helped drive the first wagons out west to supply the forts for the Army. He was a hands-on boss and was not afraid to get his hands dirty. His men respected him so when they rested on Sundays, he led them in prayer. To make sure that no one was left out, he had Bibles for everyone. This is why the date 1858 was on the cover. He even made sure he had an ample supply for future employees, including us, the riders.

As far as us riding on Sundays, I handled my fair share of runs on the Sabbath because our code was still, "The mail must get through." I don't know whatever happened to my Bible. The same I can say for the bugle. It was a long, long, time ago. I never missed the Bible because I never used it. No one ever got fired for carrying a Mochila on Sunday because the job demanded it. To clarify the results of our pledge to Mr. Majors, every one of us cursed. The hours we spent in the saddle would have pushed a saint to use profanity. Some of us gambled, but none of us abused our animals. The horses were our livelihood.

Our loyalty to getting our jobs done made us, the Pony Express riders, stand out. Only twice while the Pony Express was operating did the mail not go through. In the first case, the rider was being chased by the Indians. This was during the war with the Paiutes in May of 1860. The rider came into a station without the Mochila, which was lost in the pursuit and not recovered. The second time was in August of 1860 when a horse arrived at a station without a rider and the Mochila. The best guess was that for an unknown reason, the horse threw the rider and the Mochila off its back. Neither the rider nor the Mochila were ever found.

The end came as quickly as the beginning. In October of 1861 the transcontinental telegraph was completed. The country was finally connected from coast to coast and our services were no longer needed and it was then that the company announced the closure of the Pony Express. In November of 1861, the last Mochila arrived in San Francisco and with that the end of a very short era, which I was proud to be a part of. I later found out that the Pony Express actually lost a lot of money, over \$700,000 and was deemed by some to be a failed business venture. Others credit it with keeping California in the Union during the Civil War, which was then the attention of a divided nation. In 1869, the transcontinental railroad was completed bringing the mail from back east in a more efficient, regular manner than the Pony ever could have.

As for me, I got a job on a ranch in the Sacramento Valley after the Pony folded. The ranch owner saw that I was a good, reliable worker. I eventually became his foreman and had the privilege of marrying his daughter, Sadie, whom I deeply miss since she passed away a few years back. We sold the ranch last year and maybe it was for the best. The times changed. People changed. My children have their own lives and I am proud of them. I don't dwell on the past, but I do take stock of what I learned from it. I was an "expert" rider, but I don't recall much about risking death daily. I do remember those days

alone riding along the trail sitting on the Mochila in the saddle going as fast as conditions would allow. The hardships I endured at that time I found out to be a part of life. Had I not answered that notice looking for "young, skinny, wiry fellows", I never would have accomplished all that I had done. The Mochila for me was not just a saddle bag of mail. It carried me from being an orphan to being a successful responsible person. I learned that I had to come through.

My journey is over. Regarding my rules, I wrote this story and sealed it in an envelope with my specific instructions that it be opened AFTER my last will and testament was read as a postscript to my passing. This era is over save for the lessons of life passed on like the Mochila and this story, which you just read. If you ever get a chance to go by our family plot at Old City Cemetery in Sacramento, you will have no problem finding my grave because the epitaph on my headstone only has one word below my name and the date I died: MOCHILA.

THE KILLER WHO LOVES ME

"FROM THE BOOK, FOR THE LOVE OF THE KILL 2"

CHAPTER I



By Chau Van Truong

"Wake up, wake up." Trinity screamed in his ears. Jumping up and down, bouncing on the spring mattress of the bed, as if, it would be the last time she will ever see her dad.

Opening up his eyes, Cody Blanc smiled contentedly at the intensity and relentless playful flailing of his daughter.

"I'm up Sugarplum."

"You sure Daddy?"

Cody grabbed Trinity and held her up and tickled her. "Grrrrr, Daddy's definitely up."

It came as no surprise because every morning Trinity brought the same spirit and laughter every time the rooster crowed. A metaphor of words was being used because in the city, if one owns a rooster that crows when the sun rises, it would be usually accompanied

by a couple of police officers on one's doorsteps filling out a complaint report.

Trinity is his alarm clock, a reminder of waking up to another work day.

Exhaustively, Cody stretched out. Extending his arms over his head like a man stranded on an island waving out to a helicopter above for a rescue, he yawned.

A surge of pain blasted to the side of his right rib.

Another one launched around his stomach area.

The agony awakened Cody to reality. An obstacle in everybody's walking path, a big Caucasian teenager, a pedestrian amongst the community, moved him out of the way with a precise kick at his chest, inching him from the sidewalk.

Being on his hands and knees, Cody did not move out of the way fast enough. Within a tick-tock passing, another kick was launched into the side area of his stomach.

After the wind was robbed from him, Cody slammed downward, wheezing and gasping for oxygen. Bracing on his elbows while his knees scraped against the grain of the cemented surface of the sidewalk, he laid flat on his stomach and lifted his head up and glared at his assailant.

After the teenager bully realized no further damage could be done, he stepped over Cody's beaten body in search of a more combative prey.

With his body slumped and splayed across the cold sidewalk, a horrible smell invaded his nose. It smelled like rotten eggs, but he could not find the source of the odor. He reached down and grabbed a pinch of collar from his shirt that is not pockmarked with rips closer to his nose. Stained with dirt of different variety, visible and invisible, he took a deep inhalation and cringed. Churning in his nostril, the stench dissipated into the open ambiance of the soft breeze. With the discovery of the origination of the stench, Cody placed his hand over his mouth testing his breath. It too stank. He could not get away from the odor. The stench came from him.

It was impossible to escape from his shadow.

Navigating his eyes to the vista of his resting place, Cody recognized and appreciated the graciousness of the bookstore. They had spirit of goodwill and spare him a space so he could create a makeshift shelter for him to stay

the night. They did not drive him away like the rest of the other homeless people. Maybe, he came after business hours, and they were closed already.

Crawling over to his blanket, Cody folded and packed it into his tattered suitcase and lifted it onto his shopping cart. After pushing and parking the shopping cart next to the bus stop, he trudged over to the adjacent building.

Standing upright, Cody saw his reflection from the red background of the ad posting its latest sale on the window of the bakery. His reflection is of an old man, who looked years beyond his age. Malnourish, skinny, covered with a beard and facial hair, Cody did not recognize the mirrored man staring back at him. A starving bum who could not afford a loaf of bread that is on sale and now waiting to panhandle for some change from the next passerby. Praying for some pity change to be thrown down on the ground to him, because that was what these strangers usually do, so Cody waited and waited until lunch hour.

He plodded over to the fast food restaurants.

Every fast food restaurant had its routine schedule when they take out the trash. Cody knew all the times they emptied it out. He chose to stay near the fast food restaurants because of their strict guidelines of keeping their food fresh. It would be thrown out if it was overexposed or being in the warmer over the mandatory recommended time limit. Depending on what foods were discarded and how busy they were, Cody could pick out his next meal. Eating other people's leftover or get almost fresh food to savor his famished and malnourished body was a godsend.

A burger joint is the best place to troll for a meal because the burgers would be meticulously packaged in their franchise promotional wrappers, in colors of their logos. After digging through the trash bag, the packages of French-fries were damp and hard, with condiments of ketchup, and sometimes mustard covered sheens on them but Cody ate them.

After more digging Cody found two half-eaten burgers, a hamburger and a cheeseburger. The beef in the burger had soaked through the breads because of the liquidity content from the lettuce and tomatoes. The cheese from the cheeseburger made the bread even stickier and soggy.

Cody ate them both.

Hungry like a death row inmate holding out for his last meal, which makes it numero-uno, the leading contender to all meal Cody did not complain. He did not take anything for granted anymore. After fulfilling his hunger, he threw the trash bag back into the garbage dispenser.

Wheeling the shopping cart to Lincoln Park, Cody went to work. He prowled through trashcan searching for empty soda cans to sell to the supermarket.

Tonight was special. He needed extra.

Tonight Cody celebrated Trinity's twenty-first birthday by toasting her life at the best restaurant the city had to offer.

Critics raved this restaurant for its service, atmosphere, and its food. Quoted in numerous newspapers as the dining experience for the most exquisite of taste, it was within Cody's walking distance. He would eat gourmet at "La Tropicale."

But, before he feasted, he saw her.

Cody had seen this before; actually he had done the same thing in order to seduce a woman. But familiarity does not breed acceptance, especially when it pertains to your daughter. His crazed stare caught sight of this man, James Winslow, running his hand down the back of Trinity Scott. Slowly stroking her backside, he brought a tingling in her spine, and a seductive smile to her lips.

Cody observed Trinity making an involuntary and apprehensive twitch, which reminded him of past languor. Cody spied on Winslow as he guides Trinity out of the restaurant.

Cody growled angrily. "Trinity, tell that jerk to keep his hands off of you. You deserve better Sugarplum."

If there were any threats of violence, the sullen rage in the command drove Winslow to be predatory, to be apprehensive, and to be prepared. Scrutinizing over his shoulder, he glanced surreptitiously looking for the danger signs.

James Winslow expensively dressed in suit and matching tie, with big round eyes, brown hair perfectly parted back, and at six feet tall, was a giant of a man. He boldly stood his ground.

Standing by the back entrance, Cody contemplated his plan of attack.

With the black body dress clinging to her curves, Trinity stands by Winslow's side. Terrified, she nudged at him. "Stop acting like a child and let's go."

Her intention became more doggedness.

With his mind made up, Winslow bumped her out of the way.

In his rage, Cody savagely flung his entire body at Winslow, grinding his head into his stomach. Off balance, Cody's body collapsed, and the hand of the giant sneaked up behind his waist, lifting him from the ground and slamming him to the grassy pavement. Winslow's display of strength was sculpted in the gym three to five times a week. Still in his wrestler's stance, Winslow calmed his breathing. With his shirt ripped apart from Cody's grip, which Cody tightened around the fabric to weaken the impact of him being flipped over. The thread was no longer able to take the strain of the force as the buttons popped off of his shirt, and fell randomly down to his feet.

Winslow's tie hung loosely around his neck, swinging back and forth like a pendulum, and it sparsely covered him from being bare-chested.

Lying on the ground, writhing in agony Cody attempted to get up. Finally pushing himself from the pavement, he stared at the blood on Winslow's shirt. As his vision cleared and the pain dulled, Cody searched for the source of the blood. Damn, it was his, coming from his nose, and trickling downward.

The blood had apparently placed him on the losing end of this fight.

Planting his feet firmly on the ground, Cody balled up his fist and threw a flurry of punches.

Winslow easily eluded them, bobbing up and down, side-to-side.

Due to the fact Cody could not connect the punches to Winslow's face, outraged him further, and he thrust more disciplined concentrated shots, hooking up toward Winslow's body.

Clutching his rib, doubling over, Winslow let the saliva slip from his lips. He instinctively blocked the incoming punches with his free hand. He inched forward, caught Cody's leg with his own, and tripped him.

They both tumbled to the ground. With Winslow grappling to be on top and winning, he pinned Cody.

Cody had no movement, no choice, but to surrender.

Several employees and customers swarmed around to see the fight.

The police dispersed the crowd.

“Enough.”

“Okay, let’s get back to work. It’s over.”

Still writhing in agony and wheezing from the deflation of force inhalation and exhalation from his lungs, Cody moved with difficulty. His injuries had hindered a lot of range from him to execute a flexible arc of motions.

Cody felt the impact as another extra pair of hands forced him down harder into the pavement.

Winslow released Cody's shoulder.

“You got him.”

“We got him,” the male police officer answered while he wrenched Cody’s arms back. Subduing him and handcuffing him, he threw Cody in the back seat of the police car and hauled him off to jail.

greater harm that could come from a continued practice of stealing green beans.

You see, about the age of nine or ten, I was entirely influenced by my friend Winnie. It was easy to understand why. Winnie was taller than I was, broad-shouldered and looked like a potential soccer player; a cute one at that. She wore her blond hair in a page but her bangs were always longer than they should be, and wound up covering her eyes, which were little, green and shifty. I was the opposite - skinny, brown-complexioned with two braids and large brown eyes, I could easily walk in her shadow, without being seen. She always seemed to initiate the games we played, or came up with ideas that no one else would imagine possible and I, so in awe of her, followed with rarely an objection. Some of our friends teased us about being “a pair of endangered species”, headed for Noah’s Ark, since we were so different, and seemed to be inseparable.

Winnie lived with five other siblings and was third in birth order. Her mother, who died in child birth, was already deceased when I met the family. Her father, who was Mayor of our town hired a housekeeper to help the family, but most of the cooking fell to the oldest sister, who took responsibility for running the household.

It was acting on one of Winnie’s wild suggestions, that got us both in trouble. Winnie had been blessed (or cursed) with a love for green beans and felt that her older sister’s recipe was the best way to make them.

“My sister makes the best green beans you’ve ever eaten, I promise,” she said almost drooling, one day, “you have got to check them out. We’re having them for dinner tonight. She won’t miss a few if we have some.”

It never occurred to me that anyone would be willing to create a fuss about green beans that went missing, nor did I anticipate that taking a taste, as Winnie suggested would result in the entire disappearance of the green beans, due to Winnie’s lack of restraint.

Both of these events occurred, as Winnie could not stop herself from continuing to eat the green beans once she got started. Each time she returned with a handful, she would lick her fingers and exclaim,

“Hmmm! They’re soooooo good, you should have some more.”

I personally did not get hooked on them, since I was not willing, at that age, to make the concession that vegetables belonged at the top of the food chain, and were for my highest good. I recall at the time, being totally puzzled about the fact that green beans could ever taste “good”. I was completely fascinated with Winnie’s obsession however, and can still recall that it was impossible to get her to stop going back for more. She kept shoving those slender, slimy green things into her mouth one after the other, as if she hadn’t eaten in days. It made me certain that I would never ask her to

my house for dinner, if we were having green beans. This habit of hers would definitely compromise

my position with my Mother, who I always tried to convince that no children on this planet, that were of sound mind, ever enjoyed eating green beans, with any good results to show for it. Winnie could prove me wrong on both counts, since she not only ate them voraciously and as often as she could, but looked healthy and strong too.

Joan, Winnie’s oldest sister who had prepared the green beans, came home intending to finish dinner for the family, only to find that all that was left in the bowl were the drippings, that had accompanied the green beans. Since there were no animals around, she immediately sought out the younger siblings and their playmates for answers.

“Why would you choose green beans as a snack?” She bellowed, as she towered over us in such a loud voice, that her frame appeared to be twice her normal size.

“Winnie, why do you always eat the green beans before dinner? What is this obsession of yours and why can’t you ask for something, instead of upsetting my dinner plans?”

We were both shaking with fear, after apologizing, just thinking of what consequences Winnie’s actions would have for both of us. I, of course felt obligated to share some responsibility for the missing green beans, since I knew I would be seen as an accomplice, who did nothing to stop her.

Not sure how to appease for the anger Winnie’s indulgence had caused, left us in a quandary, since neither of us knew how to prepare green beans, nor were allowed near the stove. We weren’t even allowed to shop at the market by ourselves, so replacing them wasn’t even an option.

“What should we do?” I asked Winnie, my wizard, who was now totally out of ideas.

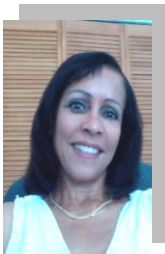
“Shhh, I’m thinking,” she replied. Her squinty little eyes taking on that glazed-over appearance, which so often happened, prior to a streak of brilliance moving in, followed by a new idea that took hold and changed her entire expression.

“Why don’t we bring her that box of fruitcake you said your Mom got for Christmas, and had no intention of eating. She absolutely loves fruitcake and it will make her forget the whole thing ever happened.”

The fruitcake Winnie referred to was stashed away in the bottom of our freezer, and probably would never be touched, since Mom had received it as a present but hated it, and was allowing some time before making up her mind that she was ready to dispose of it. We decided to put this new plan into action.

+++++

GREEN BEANS, ANYONE?



By Gemma Haynes

When I serve my family green beans, it reminds me of an incident that occurred when I was a kid, and was forced to learn what the petty theft of green beans and its repercussions could mean to my family.

“Always obey the Ten Commandments!” was instilled by my parents, at a very early age. Nothing that was a departure from that maxim was considered to be petty at the time, as they used a real life example to explain about the

The inevitable phone-call was made to our home between Winnie's father and mine and by the time I arrived, I could hear my parents discussing the green beans incident, and how they should deal with it.

"This is far too trivial for me to deal with," I heard my Dad say, as I crept in through the backdoor, "I couldn't keep a straight face and talk about this theft of green beans, if I wanted to. What's the big deal? Just buy them the largest portion of green beans almondine from the supermarket and solve 'world hunger'. Tell them you've taken care of things at our end."

"You're missing the point," my Mom insisted, "these small infractions could lead to more serious offenses, and before you know it, we have a shoplifter or white-collar criminal on our hands."

"Aren't you getting a little carried away?"

"Not when you think of all the families whose children were ignored when they were mischievous as kids and later grew into criminals, in spite of exhibiting some type of deviant behavior. It makes me wonder whether parental neglect was at the root of most of their problems."

No doubt my mother viewed this incident as a potential threat to our family's reputation in the community. The likelihood that my association with someone who could exert so much influence on me at such an early age, without me knowing when to draw the line, led her to think that I could run into much more serious trouble with the law. She even cited some cases of white-collar criminals she was familiar with, in families we knew, and how those people had turned to alcohol and drugs, when confronted with their problems. At the rate she was reciting these incidents, I didn't even want to cross her path, for fear I would somehow fall prey to a curse that would follow me for the rest of my life, and become a kleptomaniac or some vagrant who goes into garbage cans foraging for food. The entire rant made Winnie and myself sound like people who should be shunned for life.

Realizing, however that I couldn't stand in the hallway and not make my presence known for too long, I burst into the room with the widest grin and happiest greeting I

could deliver, in spite of my fear. They were so surprised, that for a moment they were taken off-guard and all conversation about the incident ceased. By the time they got back to discussing it, hours later, the momentum was lost and frankly, no one cared since I was merely an accomplice to the act. I received minimal admonishment, and a stern dismissal at best, but I knew there would be a second installment coming when they realized that the fruitcake was missing. With a little bit of luck that would not warrant severe

punishment, since no one wanted to eat it anyway.

Winnie was not so lucky. She was grounded, as this was not her first offense. Her craving for green beans, fortunately, proved to be temporary. As we grew older, she became a strong athlete and developed into a sprinter which may have been a result of her early craving for green beans. Happily, none of us pursued white-collar or any other type of criminal activity later in life. Today, whenever I prepare green beans for my family, I always smile, think of Winnie, and try to make them as delicious as I possibly can. Perhaps someone will develop an obsession like Winnie, for my delicious green beans and become a great athlete as well.



Destiny Chat Noire



Margo Mulumba

The pronouncement of the judge is etched in my brain. "You have been found guilty of first degree murder. And as such, it is the sentence of the court that you are to die by the administration of lethal injection, as prescribed by law of this state. May God, have mercy on your soul."

I can still hear the crowd's incoherent whispers in the background. They ogled me with strained necks as though I were a circus attraction, while two husky policemen forcibly escorted me out of the courtroom through the side chamber doors.

Here I am boxed in a 6 by 8 foot prison cell, with barely enough space to extend the length of my arms. This coffin-like container holds a miniscule circular sink with icy running water, a pint-size toilet and sleeping cot slightly larger than my 5' 4" frame. What inhumane conditions I'm being forced to endure. If that's not bad enough, the gas chamber is in full view of my cell. Being subjected to these insufferable conditions can

cause anyone to go insane but don't get me wrong, I'm on the edge. My mind is perfectly lucid. What I'm about to convey may seem to be irrational, but listen to the facts before you come to any conclusion. Yes, I am rather emotional, but you would feel the same way if you were in my place. These series of events have devastated me, caused me to lose my freedom and have changed my life forever because tomorrow I will die.

My heart is palpating. My body is quivering not just from the chill of the cell but because I am petrified, unworthy of my fate.

I won't expect nor beg anyone to believe this bizarre account. You may think me insane based on the court accounts and news press, but I'm in full control of all my faculties. It's beyond my comprehension why I feel so obliged to give insight to the series of domestic events and their associated consequences that have mortified, afflicted and ruined me for it won't change my outcome. Possibly a more logical and much less edgy person would explain my story in clinical terms, but I just need to bear my soul before I explode.

When I reflect back to my childhood, there is no indication why I should have ended up in this diabolical place. Yet, here I am. I was raised with high moral values and was known for my congenial personality though I was a bit introverted. My charitable nature was appreciated by the community elders yet the kids my age thought I was from a different planet since I gravitated more towards animals and spent all my leisure time with them. This was a quirk in my personality. My parents doted over me since I was their only child and always satiated all my needs.

During my teenage years, my peers mocked me for my idiosyncratic trait and adorned me as the neighborhood pet-sitter. This typical characteristic followed me into my adulthood. People who relate more to pets can understand my sentiment.

I married in my mid-forties to a man in his mid-fifties who had never married and was delighted he shared the same affection as I did towards animals. He owned a collie and I owned a terrier, two parakeets and an aquarium of tropical fish. This became our blended family since we didn't have any children.

During our second year of marriage, I came home with a black cat and named it Destiny. The cat became my prized pet and constant companion. When the collie or terrier attempted to approach me, Destiny would become very aggressive. The cat would erect its ears, constrict its pupils and arch its body in preparation for attack. This

possessiveness caused me to neglect my other pets because she would not let me near them.

My husband began to develop ambivalent feelings toward Destiny, which soon turned into total revulsion. This caused him to stay away from home, days at the time.

This event caused a rift between me and my husband. I became very ornery and began to have constant altercations with my spouse. My friends refused to visit because Destiny would run out to the gate to growl and hiss at them, then would hit her forepaw on the ground in a sinister manner.

My pets observed the gradual change in my temperament and began to retreat from me. I did not like my metamorphosis. Alcohol became my crutch.

In my intoxicated state, I was oblivious, at times, of my actions. One morning when I slept off my drunken stupor, I reached for the cat and she fled, for the first time from me, in terror. I was incensed. That creature had no right to treat me like an enemy. After all, I was the sole person who fed it.

In my sober state, I realized that I must have done some despicable act against Destiny. I know that I had obscene interludes with my husband. And at the same time, I know my joy of life, my pets, was slowly disintegrating from me. Without purpose of life, what's left? I was a happy person for forty-four years, what changed? I graveled with these questions and searched for the answers.

Life was becoming a living nightmare. I was being cruelly tormented. Agony had become my closest friend. I could understand my husband's actions toward me. We were in constant battle, no kindness, no admiration left between us. But Destiny had no right to inflict such horrendous pain on me. I had done her no wrong. I defended her against all her enemies. She didn't have a friend in the world when she met me. I lost my soul for her. Her cunning behavior towards me was unacceptable. Why was she torturing me? She would die without me. Who would want such a fiendish cat around them? Not the neighbors, no one.

But it was my disease that had infected me. The intoxicating drink was controlling all my actions. It was overtaking every organism in my body and now it was penetrating in the depths of my soul. Couldn't I be forgiving of one small despicable act?

One night while in a drunken stupor, sprawled out on the couch, a stealth weighty figure blanketed my entire body. It was

Destiny poised in a predatory stance ready for combat. She lunged at me, her prey, as I armored my face with my hands. Destiny grappled and stabbed me with her two long front canine teeth and hooked her sharp claws into my left arm. Horrified I picked up a bottle half-empty with wine and swung it against the cat's head.

Destiny and I now had developed distrust towards each other. At this point, we began playing a game of cat and mouse.

The cat avoided me, but with my peripheral vision, I could see her pacing the house eyeing me in a most unnatural manner. The only sign of normalcy was when Destiny entered the kitchen to eat food I provided her so she could thrive. My kindness should have had a positive effect on her, should it not? One bad act and one good act balances the scale, doesn't it? Think about it, have you ever committed a mischievous act, just to test the waters, to see how far you can go? Which of you have broken the law just for the thrill of proving how cunning you can be without being caught? The cat should have known that I was just testing my limits and now I was making amends to create the peace between us and for that reason, her malevolent feelings toward me should dissipate in just a matter of time. In the final analysis, she had done me wrong too, and I had forgiven her, didn't I? Well, if she didn't forgive me, be damn to her. It's her loss. Well, I still had my husband. Who else did Destiny have? She had no one, only me. We both knew it. But as time passed, Destiny proved to be a more resilient warrior. She was an unyielding opponent.

Resigned with a heavy heart, I began to treat Destiny with kindness and little by little, I lured her into my favor. I knew that I had won when she pointed her ears toward me in friendly interest and opened her eyes widely to let me know that she was attentive to hear my words of encouragement.

At that point, I began to let down my barriers since my relationship with the cat became more amiable. Yes, I became convinced that all atrocities done against Destiny had been forgiven. I was in good favor again and life could resume as normal.

At this point, I began to hate the cat as her fondness toward me increased. It followed my footsteps with relentless persistence. This unnatural act agitated me.

The cat was a demon, killing me with kindness. I could not grasp its suffocating behavior and after much soul searching I realized that damn cat was my downfall.

This unease was not just of a physical nature but also controlled my psyche. The cat's uncanny twisted nature was just a prelude to entrap me into thinking all was forgiven. I knew in my heart the cat was out to get me.

And now, as I sit here in my cell reflecting on my actions toward my cat and the pain I inflicted upon my husband, I am mortified. Yet, what is done cannot be undone and has led me to my untimely demise.

I want to tell my husband one last time that I'm sorry that I allowed that evil cat to sever our relationship. The cat played with all my emotions. My husband warned me on more than one occasion on the destructive metamorphic character emerging within me once I brought that black cat home. I rebuffed my husband and demeaned him for his attempt to compel me from the cat.

In the meantime, I hurt myself. My reprehensible alignment with the cat is the omen that brought me to where I am today.

I know that the most courageous step that I can make at this point is not to look back. My brain tells me don't look back. You can't change the past. My present is my own doing. And though my goal was to kill Destiny, it was my own husband I killed in my drunken state. And as my cell door opens, I hope when I pass through those gates I'll see my husband on the other side.

A NUMBER EIGHT



By Narda Mc Carthy

It was noon; comfortable in their friendship and with deaf ears to the news eternal murmur of war and tragedy, Emilia, Amaris and Monica, were finishing their lunch spiced with a lively conversation before returning to their desks.

"I know that much has been said and written about my country, but believe me I am so happy that monster of deceit is dying, or... maybe he's already dead," said Emilia.

"My aunt died without seeing her favorite son, they did a number eight on him," said Amaris.

"A number eight?"

"Yeah, he was out and a man showed up at his carpentry shop with a package, gave it to my aunt and said to tell my uncle that Moncho had brought it. When my uncle came back and got the message, he yelled enraged that he had nothing to do with that lousy vermin, he had not even finished the last word when the secret police showed up looking for arms, which, of course, they found in Moncho's package. My uncle was taken to jail for crimes against the state and despite his mother's pleas, was not released. My aunt aged rapidly and died ten years later. When he was old and sick, he was deemed harmless and was released, but not before seeing Moncho again who was sent to the same prison. His chums had done a number eight on him!"

"Aah, retribution!" said Monica pensively.

"Time to go back to work," said Amaris getting up. The other two followed in silence, their thoughts in a faraway island, where the young, caressed by a soft breeze under gently swaying palm trees, don't remember the tears and pain shed by the ones that were before them.

POETRY CORNER



BY LANGSTON HUGHES

DREAMS

Hold fast to dreams
 For if dreams die
 Life is a broken-winged bird
 That cannot fly.
 Hold fast to dreams
 For when dreams go
 Life is a barren field
 Frozen with snow.

DREAM VARIATIONS

To fling my arms wide
 In some place of the sun,
 To whirl and to dance
 Till the white day is done.
 Then rest at cool evening
 Beneath a tall tree
 While night comes on gently,

Dark like me-
 That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide
 In the face of the sun,
 Dance! Whirl! Whirl!
 Till the quick day is done.
 Rest at pale evening...
 A tall, slim tree...
 Night coming tenderly
 Black like me.



I AM IN NEED OF MUSIC



By Elizabeth Bishop

I am in need of music that would flow
 Over my fretful, feeling fingertips,
 Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,
 With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.
 Oh, for the healing swaying, old and low,
 Of some song sung to rest the tired dead,
 A song to fall like water on my head,
 And over quivering limbs, dream flushed to
 glow!

There is a magic made by melody:
 A spell of rest, and quiet breath, and cool
 Heart, that sinks through fading colors deep
 To the subaqueous stillness of the sea,
 And floats forever in a moon-green pool,
 Held in the arms of rhythm and of sleep.



PSALM THREE



By Mahmoud Darwish

On the day when my words
 were earth...
 I was a friend to stalks of wheat.

On the day when my words
 were wrath
 I was a friend to chains.

On the day when my words
 were stones

I was a friend to streams.

On the day when my words
 were a rebellion
 I was a friend to earthquakes.

On the day when my words
 were bitter apples
 I was a friend to the optimist.

But when my words became
 honey...
 flies covered
 my lips!...



The Poetic Works of

By Matsuo Basho



A BALL OF SNOW

you make the fire
 and I'll show you something wonderful:
 a big ball of snow!

A COLD RAIN STARTING

A cold rain starting
 And no hat --
 So?

A STRANGE FLOWER

a strange flower
 for birds and butterflies
 the autumn sky



BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS



By Emiliano D. Moreno

I strolled down the Boulevard of Broken
 Dreams
 Many here feel down in this dark side of Tinsel
 Town
 And those that have been crowned often
 unwilling
 Return to have their sorrows drowned

From the poor girl who dove to her end
 From those lofty letters; to her who roamed
 The night in black; and let us not forget
 That platinum-haired beauty that was not
 unkind,
 Yet felt left behind

These are the shadows from the Boulevard of
 Broken Dreams,
 Where on Hollywood and Vine, one still can
 help, but feel
 So utterly divine and many a new star does
 shine, and that
 Is certainly no crime

Some will enter and some will not, for those
 Who despair there indeed may be repair by
 Taking a stroll down the Boulevard of Broken
 Dreams, where at times it is the night that
 screams,
 And the young wear blue jeans just like James
 Dean's

For Brittany, Marilyn, and Corey, can tell quite
 a story,
 But they are far from us now, no longer on the
 Boulevard,
 But resting in all their glory.



“LOVE, FOR WHAT IT’S WORTH”



By Whitney E. Lovett

Love, for what it’s worth
 Bending and tight roping the circle of a time
 and space continuum

Love for anything
 Can love exist in the vacuum of space?

It’s one in the morning somewhere.
 A heroin addict watches herself inside the
 mirror of a hotel bathroom
 Hair sets stiff along sunken cheeks like a blond
 wooden frame
 She turns on the shower and steps in
 Steam and hot water consume her

Love, for what it’s worth,
 Bending and tight roping the circle of time

Love for something, anything
 Carries on, moving past the speed of sound
 and light
 Motions forward through crystals formed at
 absolute zero
 It’s two in the afternoon somewhere
 A little boy is walk-hopping down the tall steps
 of his school bus
 He clings tightly to one strap of his Spiderman
 backpack
 His other small brown fist clenches a matching
 Spiderman lunchbox
 He jumps off the last step
 Beaming like summer
 He is proudly missing two teeth.

Love, for all it’s worth,
 Cart wheeling off the sun in solar flares,
 Sewing silver in the rings of Saturn
 Peeling it off clouds like dried glue off
 fingertips,
 glass blowing, shaping beauty with flames
 It’s eleven in the evening somewhere.
 A man, 44, married fifteen years sits at his desk
 He peers past the pornography on his
 computer screen and into the spectacular night
 sky outside a corner office window
 Everything feels, smells and tastes like the
 burning red tiredness in his eyes
 He rubs his temples
 There is no peace
 The images must become rawer every day for
 his madness
 How does one feed a black hole?
 How does one satiate the abyss?

Love, for what it’s worth,
 Bending and twisting around the circle of time
 Bouncing between the wrinkles of human
 minds
 Love for something, anything.
 The Human Element
 Watched pots must boil indeed
 Life is burning
 I’ve front row seats
 And I live like a cancer
 Don’t we all
 Screaming independence
 Yet thriving on God
 I’m caught at his ankles
 My face in the sand
 Firey shame, my twisted dance
 It’ll be okay
 Should hell transpire
 I’ll cling to the hands
 Unafraid of fire



**IF YOU ENJOYED THIS ISSUE
 OF THE PORTAL THEN
 WRITE US AND TELL US**

**ABOUT IT. LET US KNOW
 WHAT POEM OR STORY YOU
 ENJOYED. EMAIL US AT:**

srbcwritersclub@yahoo.com



The PORTAL pamphlet was designed, produced, and edited solely by the instructor and students of the South Regional/Broward College Writer’s Club for non profit. The opinions expressed are those of the members of the Writer’s Club, and does not necessarily represent those of the staff, administrators, or trustees of the Broward County Libraries Division. Copyright 2012 - All communications with the editors and all inquiries concerning this publication should be addressed to: **Editors of the Portal Pamphlet, South Regional/Broward College Library 7300 Pines Blvd. Pembroke Pines, FL. 33024.** Telephone: 954-201-8297. All copyrights revert back to the original artist and authors after publication. **The PORTAL pamphlet is not to be duplicated or used for commercial purposes.**

srbcwritersclub@yahoo.com

srbcwritersclub@yahoo.com

Courtesy of:



FRIENDS
 of
 the
 PORTAL
 South Regional - Broward College Library

South Regional-BC Library