

# The Portal

A cool collection of short stories and poems



## The Canal By DiVitto Kelly

Bob Kraznowski had a peculiar fishing habit. Every Saturday night after the wife was asleep, he'd walk out in the back yard; step out onto the aged L-shaped wooden dock jutting out twelve feet off the sea wall, nurse a can of Vernors Ginger Ale, and fish.

The tools of the trade (and the bait), were always the same. He salvaged what was left of a broken coal black Garcia brand rod, sawing it just below the third eye. The reel was a decent model Zebco 808 spincast, kicked up a notch with twenty-five pound test line that snaked around in the nosed-cone housing. For bait, Kraznowski preferred shish kebabs two hearty strips of hickory smoke-cured bacon on the three-inch barbed hook and cast it out into the muddied canal

water. No shiners, shrimp, or lures need apply.

A month ago, Kraznowski landed a four-foot sand shark, before that, a yard wide sting ray. What the retired Hewlett Packard employee really savored about night fishing was the unpredictability and eeriness. You never quite knew what lurked out there in the water, or what you might catch. His wife Kathy was convinced her husband was way too much into fish, except when it came to the dinner plate. Catching 'em was fine; eating them was a different story.

It was nearing two AM. The seasoned citizen nodded off on the dock while lounging in his aluminum framed beach chair. The green and white nylon material sometimes made his back itch, but overall, it served its purpose. The stout pole rested on the inside of his left leg with his index finger twirled the line. Get a bite and he'd feel it, straightaway. Kraznowski just celebrated turning the primetime age of sixty. The greenhorn retiree promised his wife of thirty-one years he was finally going to get in shape. He'd already given up fried food; ones with flavor as he so eloquently put it. His side of the family had a history of bad tickers; time was not on his side.

Suddenly the line tightened. His hands, enduring bouts of carpal tunnel syndrome from decades of computer programming, clutched at the rattling pole. His right index finger managed to get intertwined around the clear blue monofilament fishing line. The force pulled so hard it immediately cut off circulation.

"Ow, son of a bitch," yelled Kraznowski, who stood up in a half

slumbered fog. The fishing line angled tight in the water like frozen rope. He pressed the adjustable, spring-loaded drag so the line wouldn't snap like dried spaghetti. This felt bigger than the sand shark. In all the excitement, he accidentally kicked over the battery operated lantern right into the water.

"Double son of a bitch." At least he still had the pair of Tiki torches burning at each end of the dock.

He tightened the drag and started reeling it in. Stay calm, he reminded himself. Following the line, he could tell the fish was heading for deeper water. Kraznowski played with the fish for almost two hours, not wanting to stress the Zebco. Both arms were already strained and sore. His last confrontation with exercise consisted of hauling cases of Zephyrhills water and racks of pork ribs from the neighborhood Costco. Damn, he could use one of those tantalizing foot long hotdogs right about now. And with extra ketchup and onions. Screw healthy eating.

From the trail of moonlight leading to the dock, Kraznowski managed to catch a glimpse of the surfacing fish. It had the color of sandpaper but quickly dipped under the mocha waters. "Closer fish, closer," begged Kraznowski, feeling like he was experiencing the sequel to Old Man and the Sea.

He often joked that in Scrabble, you could secure a hundred points using his last name with the triple word score. But he preferred, Bob. He liked his first name, and everything that went with it. He even had a powder blue t-shirt sporting the words, In Bob We Trust, silk-screened in bold black letters. It was his lucky fishing shirt

that he teamed up with old khaki shorts. He liked being Bob.

He inched closer to the end of the dock. Bob could tell the fish was exhausted. That made two of them. The shark surfaced again, displaying the dorsal fin. It was rounded and two-thirds down its back. Bob knew a little bit about sharks. It was probably a nurse, fairly harmless unless you decided to shove your mitt down its gullet.

The Tikis flickered high in the night breeze. He and the Missus lived less than a mile from the Gulf of Mexico. Their subdivision made up of four canals, all with dead ends. Each spilled into a larger body of mangrove surrounded water. Nothing too big could get in or out. Usually.

The canals were fairly narrow, no more than fifty feet wide at the most. Bob guesstimated the water topped off less than ten feet deep. Each canal length displayed a dozen homes on each side. It was a close knit community; just far enough off the beaten path from tourists and home grown white trash.

The whole damn fish surfaced like a submarine. Bob was dead on accurate. A nurse shark, possibly seven feet long. It was the biggest thing he'd ever hooked. He savored these moments like fine, microbrewery beer. Outside, alone at night. The mystery. The adrenaline rush. The suspense. The . . .

A flash of water exploded right in front of him. The two hundred pound man staggered backwards right into his chair, crumpling the whole lightweight frame.

Drenched and disoriented, Bob finally managed to make it to his

feet. The shortened fishing pole was still lodged in his crooked fingers. He looked down at the reel and started winding. It was still there. The fish emerged from the bloodied water now shaded like reddened bricks.

“What the hell?”

Bob stared at the still twitching nurse shark, abrasively shredded in half in stunned amazement. His legs got all rubbery. He wavered on the rickety dock with a horrific sensation like he might fall in. Bob shuffled over and clutched one of the wood posts, absorbing the most amazing moment of his non storied fishing career now mirroring The Old Man and Sea. The only thing missing was that Cuban kid.

He gazed out at the water wondering what the hell could have done that. A bigger shark? It was the only logical explanation. He glanced back down at the half eaten major award only to be astonished beyond belief.

It appeared. All mouth and teeth, bulbous and menacing. Just below the surface, the creature lunged at what was left of the dead shark, engulfing it in one bite. Bob caught a glimmer of its eye, bold and round, with a black pupil the size of a tennis ball. It jerked the fishing pole right out of his hand. It was gone.

Bob found it difficult to take in a sizable breath. He paused for a moment then leaned down to retrieve his fishing cap off the ‘past its prime’ dock when the whole structure started to shudder. Both Tiki torches fell from their holders and toppled into the water with a hiss. He vice gripped the post again until his hands turned white. He heard the wood cracking. The

rusted bolts connecting the dock to the seawall loosened. Kraznowski dropped on all fours and started crawling for safety. He gleaned down into the water through the slats of wood and saw the shape. Its mammoth body appeared smooth and the color of granite.

Whack! The dock started pulling away from the seawall. He stumbled to get up and leaped for safety. He barely managed to clutch the ledge as the whole dock structure teetered in the night water. His legs dangled against the wall of barnacles and other hardened sea life. His felt his shoes getting waterlogged. The creature was there.

Bob panicked. “Come on, come on,” he begged his aging body. His bare legs were getting shredded against the razor sharp barnacles. He knew he was bleeding. His hands were slipping off the course cement.

He heard a splash not too far from the sinking dock. He tried to call out for help but his throat was harsh and dry as wheat thins. Nothing came out. He was trying. He peeked over to the two boat pylons, one that actually served a purpose when he had the Boston Whaler, a sixteen foot craft that came with the home sale.

It was coming. And he was going to die just like the nurse shark, bitten in half. Bitten in half just like that Herbie Robinson character Quint spoke about in his U.S.S. Indianapolis speech aboard the ill-fated Orca. He was next.

“No. I’m not going to die. Not tonight,” he screamed. “I am fucking Bob, and I’m not gonna get eaten.”

He managed to pull himself up past the seawall and kept climbing

on all fours until he hit grass and shrubs. His legs were tattered and painted red. He swallowed hard then sat up on his knees trying to catch his breath. Wasn't fishing supposed to be the ultimate relaxing pastime for retirees? He stood up and lurched over to the shed. He snagged the flashlight placed on the three-tier plastic shelving on the left and headed back toward the seawall. He stood six feet behind in the prickly Florida grass, not wanting to push his luck. What the hell is out there? He HAD to know.

He frantically panned the beam back and forth. Nothing, not a God damn thing. He retreated back to the shed and picked up the seldom used pitchfork. He'd bought it at a yard sale a decade ago at least; just another one of those great deals that served no purpose whatsoever. Bob struggled back down to the seawall, a little closer this time. Captain Ahab was armed and dangerous.

"Show yourself whatever the hell you are," he bellowed.

"Can you keep it down I'm trying to sleep," yelled his wife. All the windows in the house were opened, including the jalousies in their bedroom. The uncommonly cool summer evening was a rare blessing.

"I'm fishing for something big," replied Bob, craning his neck to answer his wife, Kathy, happily married for at least half of those thirty-one years.

"I'm sure you are," she answered, before returning to sleep.

"I'll be right in in a second."

Bob spotted churning water just past the end of the sagging dock.

He inched closer to the seawall, trying to follow the movement with the flashlight. "I should get my other fishing pole," he thought.

He turned his back only for a second when the creature rose from the water, taking off like a gilled rocket. It came straight down on Bob, who barely had a second to scream. It swallowed the man whole but not before having its innards impaled by the thick iron pitchfork. The great fish flopped over as blood gushed from its colossal kisser.

The next morning, Mrs. Kraznowski rolled over to the other side of the bed, expecting to brush up against her speed bump of a husband. It was almost seven AM. "Bob?"

She put on her night robe and strolled toward the kitchen. Probably making coffee, she guessed. Not there. She called out his name again. Kathy opened the sliding glass doors that led to their modest peanut shaped pool. The small ping pong ball sized fruit from the kumquat tree littered the cement patio. She hated that tree.

"Bob?" she called out again. "Don't tell me you're still . . ." Mrs. Kraznowski nearly fainted.

Sitting on top of giant goliath grouper stood Bob, proud as all hell. "Hi honey, how'd you sleep?"

"Uh . . ." Kathy uttered, mouth agape.

"Remember when you said I was into fish?"

"Uh . . . yeah," stammered Kathy.

"Well, let's just say I was . . . literally."



### Holier Than Thou By CP Bialois/Ed White

Maxwell Hurt pulled the knife from the back of his friend's neck, taking care to wipe the bloody blade on the dead man's shoulder. With a quick flick of his wrist the medium sized pocket knife disappeared into his left coat pocket. Smiling at the ease with which he ended their dispute, he turned on his heel and exited the room in a few strides. Once outside he closed the door then took off his dark brown driving gloves. Without any fingerprints the murder would be difficult to pin on him. Of course, in order for the police to do so they'd need an angle. Considering the language of their Pre-nup, he knew his wife would never admit to having an affair with Maxwell's lifelong friend if she suspected him. He was free and clear.

He breathed the night air in deep gulps as he made his way through the shadows cast by the trees littering his friend's property. His car was parked nearby in a local parking lot without cameras or other possible entanglements. The perfect crime; It was something many wanted to commit but even fewer succeeded in. Everything was falling into place just as he intended. Now to deal with his wife.

During their marriage, Maxwell experienced the best and worst of

times. The first was the day the most beautiful woman he ever saw agreed to be his wife. Over the years he never expected that feeling to be diminished even when they would have a child. Despite both of their best efforts a child seemed like a farfetched dream until two months previous. It was during a regular weekday morning when Maxwell answered the phone in his office. The receptionist was making a routine post procedure call to follow up on his wife's abortion. At first he was certain the receptionist called the wrong number but after confirming his wife's name and other items he hung up the phone feeling as though he'd taken a punch to the stomach. It took him hours before he was able to think clearly and by then he was certain about what had happened.

His lifelong friend was the doctor that performed the abortion on his wife and he couldn't shake the feeling something more was behind it. He knew he wasn't supposed to find out, the receptionist's reaction at his change in tone told him that. Still, he loved Francine more than anything in the world and refused to believe she'd do something like that to him. Before he left the office he felt as though he needed to know more before he could look her in the eye. For that he called the agent his company used to infiltrate other companies to learn their secrets. Compared to the security between corporate rivals finding the details of the affair and abortion was easy, taking no more than three days.

Until he received the official report from the man he paid an annual salary of over a million dollars Maxwell remained aloof from his wife. An action that scared her

but since he'd never shown the ability to be aggressive towards her she did her best to ignore it. Since that fateful day Maxwell meticulously planned what he'd do to repay both of them for the betrayal they bestowed on him.

Maxwell found her in her usual place, sitting alongside their enormous pool with a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other. It didn't matter what time of day it was, she'd find an excuse to sit by the pool to get drunk. He sent the servants home early to avoid any witnesses and after changing clothes and putting the ones splattered with blood into the fireplace he stepped through the double glass doors and into the cool night air.

If his wife sensed his presence she didn't acknowledge him. So caught up in her own fantasy world she constructed around her that he didn't matter. The thought infuriated him but he pushed the rage down. He needed to be as cold blooded and calculating here as he was with his childhood friend.

Maxwell strode over and took his usual seat next to her and stretched out. The lights from the house reflected off the water in the pool in an odd way, or so he thought. Lounging there, he closed his eyes and breathed deep the smell of the ocean. Their Cape Cod home was built three years earlier on one of the highest points they could find to overlook the ocean. Being so close to a body of water made having a pool seem stupid to him but considering he was worth several hundred million dollars what was one indulgence? It wasn't like their house in Venice, Italy. To buy the home they wanted there cost as much as buying a small country.

It took several minutes for his wife to say something. By then he was beginning to think she fell asleep. "You look pleased with yourself."

*Always the saucy flirt.* Maxwell smiled but didn't laugh at his private joke. "And why shouldn't I? I have everything I could ever want." He opened his eyes to look over at her but by then she'd already shaken her head and leaned back with her eyes closed. *Just wait,* he told himself, *you'll get yours.*

He laughed at the image of the look on her face when she'd find out about her lover. With no reason to remain by the pool Maxwell swung his feet onto the ground and stood. He wasn't tired but it was time to go to bed, he needed to keep up appearances. Behind him Francine shook her head yet again. She'd allow his eccentric phase, as long as he kept the money coming in why wouldn't she?

The knock on the door the following morning came just as Maxwell expected. The police officers came to inform them of what happened and asked them a series of questions. They were the same kind they always asked on TV shows or in the movies and both he and Francine answered them as honestly as possible. Well, almost honestly.

Maxwell lied through his teeth when he talked about what a good man his friend had been. He even went so far as to promise to call the papers to offer a reward, a promise he kept later in the afternoon while his wife remained in their room crying. Everything was going as he expected with one exception. Why tell her what he did? True, it'd be a source of immense gratification to

see the look on her face when she realized if she tried to call the police she'd be a step closer to admitting she committed adultery. Doing so would violate their Prenuptial agreement and cost her his money she so loved. No, he'd keep the secret to himself, if for no other reason than to hold out hope to her like a carrot to a race horse. When it got near enough he'd pull it away, simple as that.

Over the course of the next six months Maxwell did as he planned on the day after he committed his crime. Over time people forgot about the murder and moved on with their lives. Everyone except for his wife, that is. He didn't think she knew he did it but he was certain she suspected him. To that end he did everything in his power to discredit her in the eyes of everyone around them.

Francine's drinking quadrupled after the first couple of months resulting in a handful of drunk driving tickets. Each time Maxwell paid the fine and did everything he could to appear to be the supportive husband. Behind the scenes he belittled her and even blamed her for his friend's death by whatever means he could think of. Those he timed for when they were alone, there wasn't any reason to do it in front of the help. The last thing he needed was a maid to tell the police what she heard but he did let them hear some, just enough of their arguments so the staff would say he did everything he could to help his wife.

When Francine began using cocaine it proved to be an even better tool that he took full advantage of. Numerous times he put her into rehab clinics, even working with the doctors to help

treat her. When she was released he did everything to help her but he'd leave an old photo book out with pictures of their dead friend "by accident" and claim she dug them out.

Maxwell had won everything he wanted by punishing those that had dared to betray him. He enjoyed watching his wife self-destruct before his eyes. No one would believe her even if she did admit to her adultery. He was above and beyond reproach leaving only one final matter to deal with.

Over the last week or so he decided she had learned her lesson so he worked to help her clean herself up one final time. This time she looked like she was going to succeed and for the first time in months he was happy for her. Over the previous months her mind went through so many peaks and valleys he was certain she would question everything he'd said to her over the previous months to push her over the edge. It was either that or spend the rest of her life on the street or in a clinic. He was certain her mind wasn't too far gone to avoid either of those options.

"Max? Can we talk?" She stopped a couple of feet from where Maxwell sat.

"About?" Sitting there looking over the beautiful view below him Maxwell didn't expect her to come so close to him, it was something she avoided over the last few months.

Francine Hurt dropped into the chair off to the side of where he was sitting and fidgeted with her one hand but kept the other at her side a partially behind her. A month earlier he would've fought the urge to laugh at her being so pathetic,

now he viewed her as a broken horse he now had to retrain.

"I miss Robbie."

He nodded, "So do I. He was a good friend."

She sat there, swaying side to side as if she was on a boat. "Why did he have to die?"

He shrugged, "Why do any of us? I wish I could change what happened."

"Do... do you mean it?" Her voice was meek; this was something they talked about when she was drinking and on drugs. Now that she was coherent he wanted to rebuild her the right way.

He nodded, "Sure I do. We grew up together." Something about her demeanor gave him pause. "Why do you ask?"

She didn't answer at first but after a minute she looked at him. "I just... I thought you might've killed him."

Fear and laughter tried to force their way to the forefront but he pushed them back. It wasn't that he didn't expect her to say that at some point, he just didn't think she would do it clean. "Me? Why would I do such a thing?" He tried to sound surprised instead of angry like others would've expected him at such an accusation. He was trying to help her, after all.

When she didn't answer he felt a tingle at the base of his neck. It was a warning he used to get when the person across from him at the negotiating table was trying to pull something. For the first time he noticed she only had one hand where he could see it. His face screwed into a mask of confusion. "What's gotten into you?" He

watched her, more worried than curious.

Her calm demeanor disappeared as she began shrieking, “You took him from me!” She raised her hands above her head revealing a pair of scissors she’d been hiding from him.

Maxwell rolled off the side of his chair away from her. “Francine... honey... put that down.” He tried to remain calm but his racing heart refused to slow down. *How’d she find out?*

“Why did you take him away from me? I never would’ve left you!” She remained where she was, holding the scissors above her head as if to strike.

This was the first time she ever threatened him with violence. Despite the fact she wasn’t moving towards him he realized she truly believed he did. For the first time he was scared as he looked into the craziness of her eyes.

He wiped sweat from around his mouth, “How dare... you...” Maxwell’s voice trailed off as pain erupted throughout his chest causing him to fall, hitting the stone floor with a sickening thud.

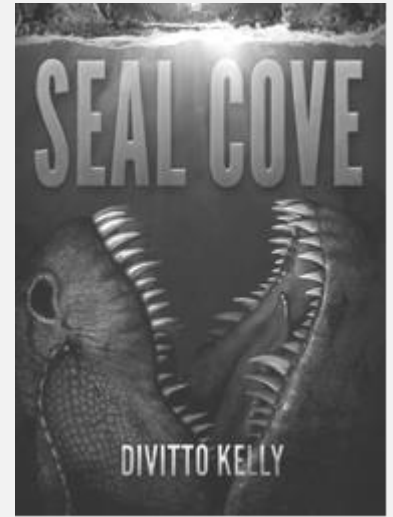
Seeing her husband convulsing on the floor, Francine forgot her anger and burst into laughter. Her tormentor for the last six months was dying and she couldn’t stop laughing. In her twisted mind she wanted to see him die, to see her freedom come to her with the last of his breath. She moved around the chair to better see him but tripped over the leg sending herself sprawling onto the floor next to him.

When she landed a sharp stab of pain pierced her chest. She didn’t have any idea what had happened

but she somehow knew she was about to die. She tried to crawl towards the phone to call for help but she was only able to pull herself a couple of inches before darkness overtook her. Her final thoughts before she died were, this wasn’t fair.

Their bodies were discovered by the maid an hour later when she came back from running errands. After she called the police she told them how patient and loving Maxwell was to his wife, and how she threw it back in his face time and again. Predictably, the police investigation was brief but thorough. Both were labeled an accident as Maxwell suffered a massive heart attack and his wife tripped trying to reach the phone. The detectives thought it ironic how she managed to impale herself in the heart with the scissors. The tragedy the family suffered through the past year was finally at an end. It was a shame the tabloids wouldn’t let them rest in peace as conspiracy theories bounced around the internet.

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### Excerpt from DiVitto Kelly’s Horror novel, Seal Cove

#### Chapter Two

In Chedabucto Bay, just around the corner from the town of Canso, a young couple strolling along on the grainy park beach discovered something bigger than a breadbox just behind a group of large barrier rocks. The husband, an L.L. Bean catalog model clone, hurdled a washed up log like a gymnast, when he suddenly confronted the object, its nose almost bonking him square in the groin.

A seventeen-foot great white shark lay dead on the rocky shore, nearly bitten in half. A handful of front row teeth were missing. Fresh scars ran along its slate-gray body. The man landed on his rump and simply gazed upon the magnificent beast. “It’s a . . .” The wife, trailing behind, finally noticed and screamed.

“Shark,” uttered his wife. “Holy shit!” She hardly ever cursed, but the moment seemed appropriate.

“Yeah, a shark -- a really, really, big shark.” After catching his breath, the man got up from the

damp beach surface and sat down on one of the large rocks. He stared at the shark's mouth. "Wow, this is incredible." He started rummaging through his backpack for the park brochure and pulled out his cell phone. "Someone needs know about this." He contacted the park officer, who then relayed the message to a nearby constable.

Fifteen minutes later, a police car rolled up into the gravel parking lot leading to the rock-strewn beach. A constable got out, tall and wide as a phone booth. He sidestepped the numerous puddles as he walked up to the railing. He peered down, not expecting much.

"You folks called about a . . ." The couple stood side by side near the shark's conical snout, dwarfed by the immense girth of the deceased shark, albeit, two massive chunks of flesh removed.

Canso Police Constable, Rob Bourne, stumbled for words, taken aback at the lifeless beast, the black eyes still radiating fear and respect. He stepped down the gray recycled plastic steps and paced the length of the fish. "Mother of God."

"You can say that again," said the woman.

"Something this big normally don't take shit from anything in the ocean, you know what I mean, eh? Pardon my French Canadian, ma'am." He put his hand on his chin, staring at the gaping wounds. "Just stunning."

The wife found her nerve and started snapping away pictures with her cell phone, getting a few 'up close and personal' ones of the grimacing mouth. The couple, visiting from Rhode Island, had seen smaller sharks at the Mystic Aquarium located in Mystic,

Connecticut, but this was like finding the T-Rex of sharks.

A handful of seagulls squawked as they hovered above the massive fish. "This is how you discovered it?" asked the constable, feeling in awe as he placed his index finger on one of the serrated triangular shaped teeth, almost three inches in length.

"Uh, yeah," replied the man. "We didn't know great white sharks lived up here in Canada."

"Well, they usually live in the oceans, eh," the constable said with a hint of humor. "Seriously though, we've spotted a couple of great whites in the bay, mostly near the harbor seal rookery just past our cute boxy lighthouse."

Bourne was a former professional hockey player and class-A goon for the Winnipeg Jets, a defenseman who had an incredible knack for pummeling opponents. For the last fourteen years, he'd been a seasoned man of the law, too many injuries finally catching up with him. His main beat, other than past opposing hockey players, was the parks and public beaches rounding out the Canso coastline. It was a hazard-free gig that paid fairly well. "By the way, thank you both for . . . I'm sorry, got a call."

The constable reached for his portable radio on his service belt. "This is Constable Bourne. Where? I know where that is, near the boat landing. Give me about twenty-five minutes and I'll check it out. A couple of people just found Jaws up here at Jensen's Beach."

The constable's frowning wrinkles in his face perked up. "No, don't touch anything. Contact the conservation office and ask for Christopher Swain to meet me

there. He'll talk your ear off, but he knows his stuff. Give me a call when he arrives. Thanks."

"What was that about?" asked the woman, a vibrant red backpack slung over her athletic shoulders.

"Fellow employee. Said about five kilometers down the coast, two dead seals were found. That's five in the last week. There's a guy in Seal Cove who's supposed to be some kind of an expert. He's been notified too," he replied, his weathered face revealing more than simple puzzlement.

"Culprit musta been pretty big and nasty." The constable paused, unnerved, staring at the lifeless fish as oncoming waves brushed up against its crescent shaped tail.

"Have you ever seen anything like this before?" asked the husband, a semi novice when it came to anything animals, but a big fan of nature programs. "Those are some serious wounds. What could've done something like that? Uh, Constable?"

Bourne didn't reply. He stood there studying the great fish, still amazed at seeing something so big and ferocious, now dead. "I'm sorry, folks. I was putting on the ole thinking cap. My first instinct is a killer whale – the only thing in these waters that could kill a great white. But to me, the bite wounds would be totally different," he replied. "I'm no expert, but I know orcas have rounded teeth. The bite marks would've been more blunt. These are more slashing – pointed. It'd take a hell of a creature to do this."

"Maybe it was another great white," said the woman. Both men nodded in approval.

The young man stepped over a couple of barnacle-encrusted debris and squatted down next to one of

the gaping wounds. “Do you know what this stuff is?” The man pointed with a waterlogged branch just behind the shark’s right outstretched pectoral fin. “See it?”

The constable sidestepped the soggy terrain and hunched over, inspecting the bite mark more closely. “Never seen that before. Here, let me see that.” He borrowed the stick and poked at the highlighter green streak of goop. “Do you mind taking a few pictures of this?” The woman obliged, pulling out her iPhone, housed in a light blue plastic case imprinted with smiling pink whales.

The constable handed the couple his card. “Please send those to my email address as soon as you . . .” The woman was already thumbing away.

“Done,” said the spunky health geek, eager to assist. The constable lumbered back to his car, retrieving a roll of yellow and black plastic tape, and four, meter-long wooden stakes. The constable returned, planting them around the shark in a rectangular display, and then roped it off. He thanked the couple before trekking back to his car. Bourne took in a deep breath before venturing down the coast where the dead seals were discovered.

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### **The Anacreontic Song By Rick Weber**

I come to you from the past. My name is not as distinguished as those of my peers, so I have to let you know it. My name is, or should I say, was William Beanes. A couple of hundred years ago I practiced medicine in Maryland outside of Washington. Those were difficult times. The British invaded our country, and we were at war with them, again. I remember the first war when I tended to troops from the battles of Lexington, Concord, Valley Forge, and Long Island. This conflict was just as ugly.

I was already an old man when the second war started. I ended up being coerced by the circumstances to allow a British general by the name of Robert Ross and a British admiral, George Cockburn, to use my home as their headquarters in Upper Marlboro for a couple days before they set out to invade Washington and Alexandria. Since I didn’t give them a hard time when they came into town, hell there wasn’t anyone one around except for me and a few others, Ross got the idea that I supported the British and their cause. Nothing could have been farther from the truth, but my Scottish accent may have contributed to this illusion even though I was born in Maryland.

They outnumbered us which didn’t give me much choice. I had to cooperate, even though it went against my grain. I certainly didn’t know beforehand that they wanted to burn our Capitol and every other public building in Washington.

On the way back to their ships anchored in the Chesapeake Bay, the British again passed through our town. This time some of their troops deserted and pillaged several farms. Robert Bowie, one of our local land holders and former Governor of Maryland, had enough of their behavior. Bowie asked me and a few other men to help him take care of the matter. All of them knew the British forced me into quartering them on my farm, and I wanted to set the record straight. News of the destruction in Washington made it to us. We arrested a handful of the deserters and took them to the Prince Georges County Jail. One escaped, ran right back to General Ross, and told him what we did. Some deserter he was!

Ross was infuriated and thought I betrayed him and Cockburn. He put out the word to have Bowie, myself, and our other cohorts arrested. The next day British troops came to our homes and brought us into custody. Shortly thereafter, they let Bowie and the others go, but Ross and Cockburn took me back to their ship, the HMS Tonnant. Despite all of the fighting going on around us, Brigadier General William H. Winder, commander of the Ninth Military District and appointed by President James Madison, sent a protest to the British about my detention to no avail. My friends secured an attorney, who went to President Madison for permission to

approach my captors about releasing me. The president agreed and sent John Stuart Skinner, the region's Prisoner Exchange Agent, with him on a truce flag vessel.

My attorney and Skinner made it to the HMS Tonnant anchored in the Chesapeake Bay and began a week of negotiations to secure my freedom. It was only after Skinner produced letters from wounded British soldiers about the level of care I had given them that they acceded to my release, but things were not over yet.

The Battle of Baltimore was at its height during the bargaining talks. The British, afraid we knew too much about their troop strengths and plans, did not let us go. Combat continued, and snipers shot Ross while he led his troops at North Point. He died en route back to the ship. I would have tended to Ross had he made it onboard alive. After all, I was a doctor, first.

My lawyer, Skinner, and I watched the bombardment of the city guessing at its outcome. We figured by morning we would know. At daybreak we looked out at the fort and saw huge flag with fifteen stars and fifteen stripes flying above it. This battle had been won, but not by those who came from afar to provoke it. We were released. My attorney took the time to make note of the events in a work he called, "The Defence of Baltimore," which he published a week later in "The Patriot."

He crafted his piece so that it could be sung to the rhythm of "To Anacreon in Heaven," the official song of a gentlemen's club in London. When you put it all together, it sounded pretty catchy.

The song became popular and took on a name change, from "The Defence of Baltimore" to "The Star Spangled Banner." In Baltimore and the rest of Maryland, September 12<sup>th</sup> is a holiday called "Defenders' Day" when all of this is remembered.

All of it, except for my part.



**The Coyote  
By Jamie White**

Sunlight shone in through the window, lighting up Suzanna Hawk's face as she slowly woke up. She stretched her arms out, a yawn escaping her lips. It had been a long night with a lot of travel. She was part of a traveling circus making its way through the west. As she looked outside the window of her small train car, she noticed the other members of her troupe busily preparing for the night's show. They had finally arrived in Abilene, Kansas, the next stop on their tour. She loved traveling with the show. Although her act never changed, she still never knew exactly what her day was going to be like from one day to the next. There were always new places to explore and people to meet. Even the best planned acts would have last minute changes that made it fun for her to sit in the audience and watch,

no matter how many times she'd seen the performers. She'd been with the show for almost six years now. She had left her home on the Sioux reservation when she was only sixteen years old to join the show and she'd never looked back. She loved everything about it; the travel, the applause, the people.

Suzanna dressed and headed outside to help with the daily chores. There were tents to set up, animals to tend and rehearsals. Her act in particular needed to be carefully planned out. She was known as the Woman Who Can't Be Killed. The visiting crowd was told she had a spirit guide that protected her from being harmed, even when she was shot several times. Firing the gun was the job of her husband, Alan Strongbow. He was very meticulous about his job. He always checked the blanks closely before putting them in his breast pocket the day of the performance. The gun was always loaded with the blanks after another check just before he went on stage to make sure no real bullets could get in by mistake.

"Morning," Suzanna said, walking up to her husband and kissing him on the cheek.

"Morning. I was afraid you were gonna sleep the day away. There's much work to get done before the show tonight."

"I know. I'm sorry about that.... I don't know what got into me. I was so tired after the show last night I could hardly keep my eyes open. What should I do first?"

"Elisabeth could use some help getting the horses fed and groomed. Why don't you start with that? She's the first act anyway."

Suzanna nodded and walked off

to help the horseback rider prepare the animals. For hours, the troupe tended the animals and made last minute preparations to make sure all the tents were ready for the locals before squeezing in a little rehearsal time. Finally, it was time for the show. Suzanna watched the acts from the stands as she always did before joining her husband backstage. As she stepped up to the curtain, sneaking a peak at the audience, she felt the usual rush of adrenaline that hit her right before a performance. It was one thing to sit in the audience and take in the show. It was another thing entirely to look at them from the stage. It made the crowd seem much larger than it really was.

“And now.... The moment you’ve been waiting for. Please give a warm welcome to Miss Suzanna Hawk, the woman who can’t be killed!” The audience exploded into applause with her husband’s grand introduction.

She stepped out onto the stage, bowing briefly before taking her place on the stage.

The lights dimmed and the audience fell into a deafening silence. Her husband stood several feet away from her, readying his weapon, taking aim at her chest. The gun was fired, all six rounds seemed to strike their target. Despite her swaying she never fell. With their act successfully over she and her husband bowed to the cheering crowd.

As with any other night they took a few moments to talk to some of the townspeople before cleaning up. They knew they were going to be there for another day, so there was no packing to do, at least. They finished their chores quickly and

before she knew it she and her husband were heading for their train car to get some sleep. Well... she was about to get some sleep anyway. Her husband was too worked up to sleep that night.

Night after night, they did their act and the townsfolk showered his wife with praise and admiration, barely giving credit to the gunman. He felt he should be getting as much adulation, if not more, than her. More pay, as well. Sure, he just fired a blank at her but all she did was pretend to fall back a little. As far as he was concerned they had equal jobs and he was tired of her getting more spoils. He even came up with the mysterious story for their act...all she had done was tell him about some legends among her people. Like many Indian tribes, her people believed in spirit guides and totems. He didn’t. As far as he was concerned, those stories were just make believe, silly superstitions that meant nothing. He laid awake for hours, filled with the resentment that had been building for weeks now. The few times he had brought it up to her (that night included) she had brushed his concerns off. After all, the money all went to the same place. She couldn’t understand why he was so worried about it. She didn’t understand that as the man, he was supposed to be the one with the status and the power. He didn’t know what to do about it, but he was tired of always having to play second fiddle. He also was a bit bored of the whole magical spirits nonsense. He knew better than to believe that stuff and was tired of listening to Suzanna and some of the others speak as though they were real. At least it brought the money in. It never ceased to amaze him what people were willing to spend money on.

The next morning, Suzanna was up and dressed early, ready to help with the daily chores. The early night had done wonders for her and she was full of energy that day. Alan was already out there, cleaning his pistol.

“Mornin’,” she said, wrapping her arms around him in a hug.

“Mornin’,” he replied in a cold tone, pulling back to continue his task.

“Are you alright?” she asked. He seemed a bit off this morning. She wondered if he was still stewing over their argument the night before. It was a familiar one and one she was tired of. She just didn’t know how to fix it. It wasn’t her fault if people wanted to talk to her more and give her a bigger piece of the profits.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he said. “Just got a lot to get done. Why don’t you head on over to the stable and get those horses ready again? They took to you real good yesterday.”

Suzanna nodded and walked over to the stables, still not sure that the trouble wasn’t over. She figured if she gave him some time to stew on his own, it would all blow over eventually.

Later that night, Alan stood behind the curtain, doing his usual pre-show routine. This time, however, He had an odd sense of dread about him. He wasn’t sure where it came from. Maybe he was still feeling a bit worked up from their argument the night before. Whatever the reason, he never wanted to walk onto that stage less than he did that night. Ever the showman, though, he put on the big smile and let the fake enthusiasm enter his voice.

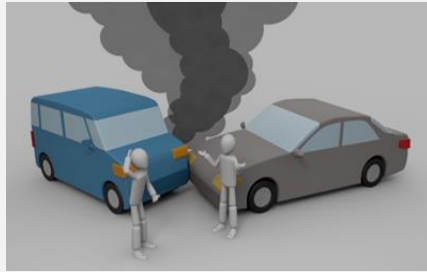
“Evenin’ folks!” he greeted the crowd. “It’s time again for the act you’ve been hearin’ about. Please give a warm welcome to Miss Suzanna Hawk...”

Suzanna walked out onto the stage and took her normal place. Alan turned to her, pistol in hand. Just as they did every night, the audience became deadly silent, their anticipation and nervousness filling the air. Alan pointed the gun at Suzanna, preparing to fire, anticipating her fake stumble. As he pulled the trigger, his eyes widened in surprise. Instead of Suzanna’s face, he saw a coyote staring back at him. Its eyes flashed and he saw a snarl form as Suzanna fell back. The imagine lasted only an instant and he shook it off. Must’ve been his imagination. He blinked, wondering what on earth could’ve cause him to see that..

As always, Suzanna straightened up, turning to the crowd with a wide smile on her face. To Alan’s surprise, she was holding a wooden bullet in her hand. The audience went wild, jumping to their feet and cheering loudly. Suzanna looked down at the wooden plug and back over at Alan, confusion crossing her features. How did she manage to catch it in her hand? Quickly composing herself, she turned to the audience to take her bow, a wide smile crossing her features that never quite reached her eyes. She had had the strangest feeling come over her. Like she’d been outside of her body looking in for a moment. Several feet away, Alan had a similar look on his face... although he seemed a little more spooked than she did. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the transparent figure of a coyote disappear behind

the curtain.

They never spoke of that night and Alan comments about phony spirits and magical mumbo jumbo came to an end. It was sort of an unspoken agreement between them, He wasn’t entirely sure what had happened that night under the big top, but he figured it was best not to take his chances.



### **Sarah's Honesty by Loraine Brown**

A crazy woman came barreling out of the building, screaming with a thunderous, booming voice. "Are you crazy or are you just stupid? Are you stupid that you didn't see a car parked here? Why are you even parking here anyway? What is wrong with you? I'm calling the police!"

Sarah just stared in disbelief, who was very soft spoken, calm and respectful. She has long black hair and big beautiful brown eyes. She was slender with light tanned skin.

This cannot be happening to me," said Sarah. "Why is she screaming at me?"

Sarah was scared. "I'm so sorry," apologizing. When the police arrived the crazy lady rushed over screaming.

"This crazy stupid woman hit my car -and it's a rental! What am I going to do?" She screamed at the top of her lungs. She threw her

hands up and looked at Sarah in disgust.

The police officer, tall and lean with broad shoulders about six feet tall, walked over to ask Sarah what happened. The woman was still screaming "She hit my car and she's not even supposed to be here, who is she anyway? What is she doing parking here? Oh my god!"

The crazy lady was short and chubby and had a squat neck. She had deathly-pale caramel skin and light brown hair that was in complete disarray. Her dark green eyes directed daggers at Sarah. The cop motioned her to calm down and tried to talk to Sarah again.

Sarah was so scared she started crying. "I'm sorry." Sarah tried to apologize to the lady.

"She doesn't even have insurance, oh my god!" barked the lady. The officer motioned for Sarah to walk away and asked for her license and insurance card. Sarah nervously retrieved the items. Sarah was intelligent, smart, and kind hearted. She was pre-med student, studying at the University of Miami. Her father was a family doctor, and she always admired his kindheartedness and the way he helped all kinds of people.

"Why don't you tell me what happen?" asked the officer. As Sarah tried to speak, the crazy woman started shouting again. The officer told her to be quiet.

By this time Sarah was shaking nervously and could hardly speak. "I'm so sorry." The young woman explained that when she pulled into the parking space and her SUV barely touched the bumper of the white BMW.

"She cannot drive! She shouldn't even be on the road

driving!" yelled the woman in a boisterous loud tone.

"So this car was parked?" The officer asked.

"Yes it was," replied Sarah. "I tried to park in the empty space next to it, but I accidentally hit the bumper."

The officer looked puzzled. "Was Ms. Johnson in the car at the time?" The police officer asked Sarah.

"No," said Sarah. "No one was in the car at the time."

Sarah explain that she didn't know who the car belonged to and that she was trying to find the owner of the car. She went and asked the security officer who told her that he didn't know who the car belongs to, but, that he would asked inside the offices.

The security officer asked everyone who was leaving the building if they owned a white BMW, but no one knew who's car it was. They searched for the car owner for an hour. Sarah was now late for her appointment, but insisted on doing the right thing. She was very honest, and cared a lot for people. She always tried to do the right thing. She was determined to find the owner of the car and let them know what had happened, and to pay for the damages.

"It shouldn't be a big deal," she thought. It was only small paint scratches on the bumper.

The police officer was completely shocked at Sarah's story. 'Wait a minute', he said.

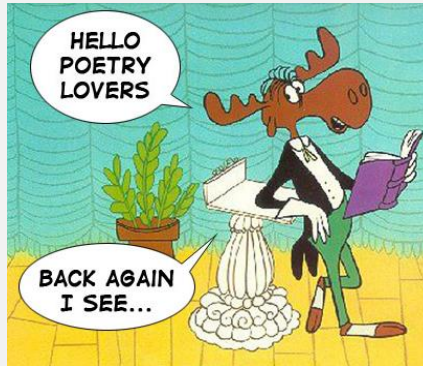
"You went and searched for the driver of this car, and this is her reaction to you"?

The officer couldn't believe that this crazy lady was yelling and screaming at Sarah, who was just trying to do the right thing. Sarah's

insurance would pay for the damages to Ms. Johnson's rental car.

Officer Meadows have been with the police department for over fifteen years and had never heard anything as bizarre as this story. She didn't have to go in search of the owner of the car. She could have just left the scene, because there was no one around at the time of the incident.

It's always a good thing to be honest, but sometimes, well let's just say, honesty is not always the best policy.



## **Portal Poetry Corner**

**Participants from this year's poetry contest!**

**\*First place  
The ADD Couple  
By Sheldon Frank**

The twenty-year-old French exchange student in a man's white shirt, tails spilling over her blue jeans, sits on the edge of my office couch and looks past the copy of Gauguin's "Magician" on the wall to watch the manatees jostling for a fresh-water handout in the canal outside.

She pours out a waterfall of words in this first meeting, smokes, re-crosses her legs, tells me, after a quick bathroom break, her name, Marie.

She's dressed this way since her father, a painter, left Mom and Marie, then twelve, to escape to the States with his model, leaving a shirt-filled armoire and an oak easel, both spotted from pastels and smoke.

She changes position before going on, leaning back into the couch. Mom helped her cope with the narrow streets and minds of Aix, outside Marseilles, with only one memento, a red and black Minnie Mouse watch

Dad bought her on their trip to Euro Disney. She pulls one cuff to show the watch, and Minnie, grinning and waving a white-gloved hand to me and Marie. In school, her blurts and backward letters, her daydream-stares outside, her restlessness, drew disdain from peers and teachers, who mocked her old shirts and called her "mal elevee," and lazy. Jumping up from the couch, she parts the curly black hair over her temple to reveal a scar, smoking

one more Gitane from the blue, Gypsy-dancer-marked pack. "Odd you let me smoke. He never did. He hit me on the head for that. When I brought friends, he'd watch us like a chaperone, never let us near the liquor or sit too close on the couch.

The day he left he slapped me for a grass stain. ‘Stop playing with boys, Marie, you’re too old; you’ll get in trouble. Tell *Maman* to clean your shirt, teach you some manners, and how to entertain indoors.’” She looks outside

at the manatee cub swimming on its mother’s belly. “I explored, outside with the boys, the ravines and shoreline, threw stones, learned to smoke, pick green olives, do wheelies. I never noticed scars on my jeans or shirt or skin—they’d heal. I grew obsessed to come here, find him, return the watch, and succeed. I studied U.S. English, wrote essays on Lafayette, Marie Antoinette’s affair with Ben Franklin, De Toqueville’s travels and the couch

American doctors use to cure nervousness. I tried to sit still, become a couch potato—but for my schoolbooks, not TV. To finish *lycee*, I quit activities outside, pulled black coffee all-nighters, got Mom to tutor. Can you help me?” Marie moved to a chair close to mine, sighed out a final puff of smoke, twisted with a squeak to face me—after checking her watch and tugging loose a thread from the Lacoste gator on her shirt.

While nodding “yes,” I recalled a boy, always playing outside—covered with playground dust or his chemistry set’s smoke—Mom said if he didn’t keep it tucked in, she’d sew lace on his shirt.

**\*Second Place:  
Arnie on Trumpet  
By Lydia Lockett**

I want to tell you about somebody special  
The kind of guy who’d make you smile  
Make you feel that you’re worthwhile.

His name is Arnie  
He used to baby sit me  
He’s do his homework on the kitchen table  
And before I’d go to bed  
Arnie read me an Aesop fable.

He used to make big smoked meat sandwiches  
You know, from those pouches  
And then we’d laugh  
And watch TV on one of the couches

He was like no other  
I considered him my older brother  
The good kind  
He helped me ease my mind, just by being there  
A break from solitaire  
With someone fun  
Who really, really cared

He and his brother used have band practice in our basement  
Those were the times in my childhood I was most contented  
Sweet soul music and funk  
Arnie on trumpet, Oogie on drums  
They would play and sing and groove  
And then some  
And you know they always made everyone feel welcome

They played a lot of new stuff, and old school  
And old, old school

Schooled us on Wilson Pickett –  
“Mustang Sally”  
“Try a Little Tenderness” – Otis Redding

When Arnie played James Brown  
He would *blow*, not just fool around  
Next day me on the playground, I’m goin’;  
“Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud,  
“Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud!”

Kid come up to me and say;  
“Lydia you’re not black”  
And I gave the winning argument;  
“I am too! I’ll say it louder,  
I am too black, and I’m prouder,  
Hunh!”

Arnie was kind, but he played a mean trumpet  
Loved classical music best  
He could pass any music test with flying colours.  
You know, he never thought of himself  
He always thought and he did for others.

Arnie wanted to play in a symphony  
But that just wasn’t meant to be  
You see, he suffered from asthma  
He had to change his path now  
To a life not making a sound  
Working in a library, no music around, stress abound

No longer able to express or do what he did best  
It was hard to fake it or try to lie  
Too much for a real guy  
And sadly one day... Arnie... just... died.

Now in Heaven, way up in the sky  
Arnie’s got his angel wings and man, he’s *flyin’!*

Billie Holiday took him aside and  
sweetly sang;  
"G-d Bless This Child"

Arnie's in G-d's orchestra on first  
trumpet

Louis and Miles, well, they had to  
move aside

But they didn't mind. They said;  
"Couldn't happen to a nicer guy!"

Arnie's always got everybody on  
his side

And everybody who knows  
Arnie's thinkin';

"These guys ain't heard nothin'  
yet, sure enough

"Cause Arnie's only been here 46  
months

He's still warmin' up!"

Arnie's with Mozart, Beethoven,  
Marvin, Barry, Elvis, Jackie Wilson,

Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, Curtis  
Mayfield, Lou Rawls and Luther

Vandross goin'; "He's my kind of  
guy."

Now the two Gibb brothers have a  
third for harmony

Rick James said, "I used to think  
nice guys were weak.

I was wrong, man. Arnie, you a  
new kind of super freak!"

And week after week they be  
jamming like there's no tomorrow

Holding no memory of any  
sorrow.

Bob Marley said,  
"Arnie, now that you're here,  
Heaven is a better place."

When you all get to Heaven  
Remember to look for Arnie  
Sure enough, he'll put a smile on  
your face.

**Third Place:  
Tent Sale at Tate's  
By Donna Ragland-Greene**

I enter the hot humid hive in a  
groggy state, my slumbery Sunday  
meets the face slap of an art  
avalanche.

The large tent buzzes with the hum  
of excited fans, collectors searching  
for hidden treasure, the excitement  
of the hunt, the missing comic in a  
coveted set.

June eighty eight,  
Number six,  
First printing,  
Second edition.

The garish gaudy comic covers  
jolt my senses,  
wake me with exaggerated energy,  
faces of ecstasy and pain.  
Even the most tragic fate is  
illustrated with style and splendor.  
Grey pulpy paper breathing  
with fantastic stories and heroes.  
No technicolor needed.

If only real life splashed across the  
pages of time with such charisma,  
such exquisite dark drama.

3 AM  
Night creatures creep outside while  
minds of the fevered are free to  
roam.  
At a weathered wooden desk,  
spartan surroundings,  
a barely there chair,  
an artist sits pen in hand,  
creating wondrous worlds.

People existing on strange  
planets,  
earth on acid,  
reality flipped inside out,  
upside in.  
The universe imagined by DaVinci  
and Dali with a twist of Wells and  
Crumb.  
Places never existing or perhaps  
remembered by a special breed,  
those lucky souls with no filter to

weed out the fantastic, those  
delirious dwellers of the minds rare  
space reached by very few  
travelers.

The Shangra-La of the artist and  
writer, exotic worlds not advertised  
in glossy catalogs, visas and  
stamps acquired on journeys no  
airplane flight or cruise can reach,  
no passport required.

Breathless, we share the ride.

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**\*The Writer's Group meetings  
are held the second Monday of  
every month in the second floor  
conference room from  
6:00 – 7:30pm.**

**Upcoming dates 2015:**

**July 13, Aug 10, Sept 14,  
Oct 12, Nov 9, and Dec 14.**

From picture books to novels, stop  
by and discuss your ideas. Submit  
your short story or poem to be  
published in the monthly Portal to  
Michael DiVitto Kelly at  
**[mkelly@broward.org](mailto:mkelly@broward.org)**.

All communications with the  
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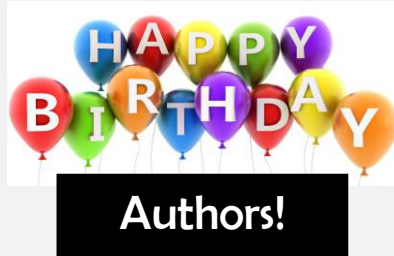
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### **FEEDBACK CORNER**

We want to hear from you! Let us know what you think of our stories. Feel free to email Michael Kelly, head of the writer's group at [mkelly@broward.org](mailto:mkelly@broward.org) or call (954) 201-8870.



**Franz Kafka: July 3:** Author of *The Metamorphoses* and namesake to the term “Kafkaesque”, which means having a nightmarishly complex or bizzare quality

**Hunter S. Thompson: July 18:** Thompson is almost as famous for being the author of *The Rum Diaries* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as he is for his love of guns and contmpt for authority..

**Ernest Hemingway: July 21:** Nobel laureate and exceptionally manly author Ernest Hemmingway wrote such classics as *Old Man and The Sea*, *Farewell to Arms*, and *The Sun Also Rises*.

**Alexandre Dumas: July 24:** French author Alexander Dumas wrote many famous novels, notably *The Count of Monte Crisco* and *The Three Musketeers*.

**Aldous Huxley: July 26:** In addition to being an advocate of pacifism and psychadelics, he wrote works such as *Brave New World* and *The Doors of Perception*.

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