

## [The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

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### "Our Stories"

We have decided to devote a portion of our magazine to non-fiction. These are stories of things that have happened serendipitously, being in the right place at the right time or just heartfelt musings, thoughts, and feelings on life. Join us in our non-fiction section. These stories speak to anyone and everyone and are told by anyone and everyone who has a story to tell.



"San Diego Harbor" by C. Michelle Olson; <http://www.cmichelleolson.com/Home.html>

## Delicious Memories

by Beth McKim

Occasionally, on summer or early evening weekend walks, I wonder where all the children on these quiet streets have gone. I know they exist because of the signs in yards advertising the schools they attend or the various organized sports they play. And sometimes they come to my front door, along with their parents, selling raffle tickets or coupon books to support their chosen activities.

With the missing children observation, I begin to remember longingly my childhood in a Birmingham neighborhood many years ago.

“Red rover, red rover send Susie right over,” sang our kid voices, as we locked arms tightly to try to keep a friend, charging with all her might, from breaking through our barriers.

Chalk marks on the sidewalk meant it was time for still another game of hopscotch. “Mother, may I?” was one that made us laugh and sometimes stomp our feet with hands on heads when we had to move backward rather than forward if we forgot to ask the famous question. “Simon says” was another exercise in listening for the magic words or risk losing a turn.

The click of mallets onto hard croquet balls brought hours of fun as we attempted to hit the balls through metal brackets. The front yard of our house made a perfect kickball field and we used trees, rocks, and sometimes sweaters as makeshift bases. After a successful kick, advancing to one base was fun, but a home run caused instant elation and team pride. And sometimes we just heaved the ball at each other, calling it dodge ball, our screams and laughter echoing down the block.

Long neighborhood exploratory walks meant cutting through front and back yards, since many houses had no fences. The ones that did exist were chain link and we often tore our pants when we climbed over them. Later, we added bike rides, without helmets, up and down the hills and surrounding streets.

Since we were outside all day in the summer or on warm weekends, losing track of time was easy, but food smells from the open windows were better than clocks. The distinct aroma of frying bacon and eggs from Mrs. French’s house made us wonder what our own mothers were cooking for breakfast. We couldn’t miss the fragrance of homemade biscuits and cream gravy floating out from Mrs. Griffin’s kitchen or the fresh Georgia peaches on the Wilsons’ back porch.

Lunchtime scents were not noteworthy because peanut butter and banana or cream cheese and olive sandwiches on white bread couldn’t be detected from a distance. However, the accompanying Campbell’s mushroom or vegetable soups sang out to us if we got close enough to windows.

Late afternoon fragrances sometimes stopped our games, particularly if they came from one of our own homes. Chocolate cakes, pecan pies, or Toll House cookies sent us scurrying inside to see how long it would take for them to cool and if there were a bowl to lick.

Early evening was bittersweet because we knew our fun day was coming to a close. But the unmistakable aroma of fried chicken or meat loaf, butter laden mashed potatoes, string beans or turnip greens with bacon, and fresh baked corn bread or rolls hearkened us home faster than our mother's voices shouting, "Kids, you have five minutes to get inside or supper will be cold."

I miss the aromas of fresh, homemade foods. Because of busy schedules and modern diet information, fast foods, salads, and low fat cooking have replaced them. And even if the smells were still around, we wouldn't know it because open windows are hard to find. Heat and fear keep families inside, wooden and concrete fences divide yards, and neighbors have often never met.

Several family members, including my husband, commented on how yummy our house smelled when they walked in last week for a get-together. A homemade chicken enchilada casserole was in the oven and I had just finished baking a batch of chocolate chip cookies. I wished then that I had open windows and my young children playing outside, waiting for the delicious fragrances that would beckon them home.

Bio- Beth McKim lives in Houston with her husband Buddy and their Labradoodle, Lucy. In addition to writing, she enjoys acting, training medical students, studying Spanish, traveling (including a recent trip to Cuba), practicing Yoga and spending time with her young grandchildren.

In addition to *The Write Place At the Write Time*, Beth's works have appeared in publications such as *Della Donna*, *Cell2Soul*, *Front Porch Review*, *Mayo Review*, *Airplane Reading* and the *Birmingham Arts Journal*.

### A Fortunate Accident

by Robert Iulo

I knew that inevitably the dreaded letter would arrive, and it did. The salutation was a cheerful "Greetings," with a subway token Scotch taped just above it. It was telling me to report to the 39 Whitehall Street induction center, the same address Arlo Guthrie sang about in "Alice's Restaurant," and the token was to make sure I arrived. I was drafted. I could have joined the reserves or gone to college and gotten a deferment but I didn't. It was 1968 and I was nineteen. Maybe I had a death wish.

After a perfunctory physical and an Army psychiatrist asking us if we were junkies or homosexuals, they sent us to Penn Station to catch a train going to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. After a few days of “processing,” getting lots of inoculations, uniforms and equipment, I went still deeper into the South to Fort Gordon, Georgia for basic training. The Paris Peace Talks were just beginning then and we all hoped the Viet Nam War would be settled in the next few days and we’d all be sent home. That didn’t happen. It took the better part of a year for both sides just to decide on the shape of the table they would have the talks around.

Except for Miami, this was the first time I’d ever really been in the South. The pace was different. You didn’t just go into a store and say “Marlboro.” You were expected to say, “Good morning. How are you? Can I have a pack of Marlboro please,” and maybe a little small-talk after that before you got your cigarettes.

After all of the stories I heard about Army food it wasn’t as bad as I had expected. It was just bland. During my first Army breakfast I couldn’t find any bagels or Danish and thought it odd that they were serving mashed potatoes with eggs. I discovered it was actually grits – a part of breakfast that was common outside of the northeast. Some Southerners at my table told me to add butter, salt and pepper and enjoy it. I acquired a taste for it and still look forward to having grits and eggs when I’m out of New York.

I learned a lot in those next eight weeks. I, who was spared the necessity of housework by my mother and sisters, learned to make a bed, wax a floor and scrub burnt, greasy pans. I learned to crawl through mud under barbed wire, how many push-ups I could do, how long I could go without sleep and also, how to shoot a rifle.

I turned out to be a pretty good shot and actually enjoyed the rifle range until a sergeant gave me some subtle advice.

“Son, you’re a fine shot. Keep that up and there’ll be a sniper tree with your name on it waitin’ for you in Nam.”

He was just a few years older than I was but having just gotten back from Viet Nam felt much older, old enough to call me “son.”

I learned to mow grass too. Having grown up in Manhattan, it was the first time I'd ever touched a lawn mower and didn't know there was a front and back to it. It doesn't mow if you push it backwards.

That same sergeant seeing me doing this said, "Where you from, son?"

When I told him New York he said, "Why, I'd rather have a sister in a whore house than be from New York."

That first eight weeks of training dragged on but finally ended. The next eight would be "Advanced Training" where I would be taught a military specialty. It could have been something like how to drive a tank or shoot a canon but thanks to some carefully answered questions on aptitude tests I was sent to Clerk School. It was there I learned to type and drill. Every day was a mix of typing in an air conditioned classroom and drilling in the hot sun. Eyes right, left face, dress right dress, forward march; there was a command for every move we made and if we didn't do it the way the drill sergeant wanted us to, we did it again.

After eight weeks of this it was over and we all got our orders for the next phase of our Army careers. As we opened the envelopes we compared and discussed where we were being sent. After two or three weeks leave most of the guys had to report to West Coast embarkation stations and their next stop would be Viet Nam. I got a brief reprieve. It was decided that after a three week leave I would get another four weeks of "Medical Records Specialist" training in Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

It wasn't much of a reprieve but it was still appreciated. I knew where I would be in a short time but I didn't let that stop me from enjoying my three weeks back home. Aside from spending time with my family, I caught up on the movies I'd been missing, ate in some of my favorite restaurants and saw "Hair" on Broadway and "Dionysius in Sixty-Nine" Off Off Broadway. These four months of training had been the longest I'd ever been away from New York so I was enjoying being back like a tourist.

Before the end of my leave some friends gave me a going-away dinner. My hostess was having trouble opening a bottle of wine and I offered to help.

As I was pulling the cork I heard a loud pop and felt like my hand was hit by a sledge hammer. The bottle had exploded and the base of my thumb was cut to the bone. I watched, fascinated, as blood squirted from a severed

artery with every heart beat. At first the guests thought all that blood was spilled wine but then realized we were drinking rosé. Peggy, a close friend at the dinner, was a nurse. She reached into the opening in my hand and held the cut artery closed between her thumb and forefinger. We got into a car and were driven to the hospital with her holding me like that. There was no pain because I also cut some sensory nerves and already had a few glasses of wine before the bottle explosion.

As we walked into the emergency room, above her protests, an orderly put her into a wheel chair. He thought she was the patient because she had so much of my blood on her. When my artery started to pump again and Peggy gave a medical explanation of my condition, he realized his mistake and I took her place in the wheel chair.

As a doctor was examining my hand, someone with a clip board asked me questions about medical insurance. Not realizing that since I was on active duty my medical treatment was the Army's responsibility, I said I was covered by my father's policy. This raised other questions about parental consent because I was under twenty-one and needed surgery to put my hand back together.

Peggy took charge again and stated firmly, "If he's old enough to go to Viet Nam he can make his own decisions about surgery."

She was assertive, the doctor agreed and I was taken to the OR.

When I came to a few hours later my father was there and explained that the surgeon was able to reattach a cut tendon with wire that would be removed in a few weeks and patch everything else with thirty-two stitches. I wasn't supposed to move my hand for a month and to make sure I didn't, there was a cast extending from my elbow right over the tips of my fingers. I still had some leave remaining and didn't want to spend it in a hospital but I was stuck there for two more days.

I had a plane ticket to Texas but didn't know how I would manage a duffel bag full of uniforms and another bag of personal belongings with my arm in a sling. My father called the Red Cross and they said they could forward my bags for me. When we arrived to drop them off a woman who was walking into their building with us began to ask questions about my injury. She was a high ranking Red Cross official and invited us into her office. My father, always a charming gentleman, explained what had happened. He also

mentioned that he was a Marine in World War II and had the highest regard for the Red Cross.

Maybe she was a pacifist and anti-military and maybe she and my father got a little flirty with each other but the result of their conversation was her telling me, "You're not going to Texas."

She explained that in the military, you're either capable of full duty or you're not. If I went to Texas I'd be admitted to a hospital and stay there until fully healed, probably after months of therapy. It would make more sense and be more convenient if I went to a hospital closer to home. She called the director of Saint Albans Naval Hospital in Queens and made arrangements for me to be admitted that afternoon.

I spent the next eleven months there getting daily physical and occupational therapy. After the first few days my doctor determined I was ambulatory and I got to go home every night and weekend. Following a second surgery and some more therapy he decided I was fit for duty. I had less than a year left to my enlistment, too short a time for me to be sent to Viet Nam. I finished my last few months of service in a small Army base in upstate New York.

That was all a long time ago and I've lived a whole life since. At the time and in the language of the day, a friend told me, "Hey Man, its Karma." I suppose, in a way, I believed that and still do. It's very probable that a mishap with a flawed wine bottle kept me from going to Viet Nam. I was neither pro nor anti war; I was simply a fatalistic nineteen year old who put himself in the hands of fate and then fate handed me a bottle of wine that might have saved my life.

Bio- Robert Iulo has a Master's Degree in Urban Planning from New York University and is retired from a career with the City of New York. His work has appeared in *Epiphany Magazine* and he's had a special feature published in the *Mississippi Sun Herald* about his volunteer work on the Mississippi Coast after Katrina. He lives in New York City with his wife.

My Comfy and Somewhat Crowded Shell

by Stephen Goldberg



I'm shy. My wife is shy. Begs the question, "If we're so shy how did we get into a relationship?" The question will go, for now, unanswered. Some un-shy people (said with the same disdain as describing vampires as un-dead), believe that if they could just pry us out of our shells and have us discover what it is like to be un-shy, we would be able to lead happy and fulfilled lives. My boss, Rafiq, was unabashedly un-shy and decided that the Christmas Ball held by the local marketing club was the perfect place to drag me, kicking and screaming, into his world. He erred.

At the Christmas Ball, ad agencies and other suppliers would wine and dine clients like me. It was great; all these people would offer me drinks and conversation. In return they expected me to spend money with them (now that I am writing this, it seems so sordid). I didn't have to hide in the shadows and figure out how to initiate contact. I have absolutely no ability to make small talk, unless discussing Star Trek is small talk. I can also talk about Star Wars.

The Christmas Ball was always at the same downtown hotel. We usually took taxis because my wife and I wanted to drink at these events, with me naively thinking that being drunk would make me un-shy. This was moot because I never actually did drink, thanks to Murray, the drunken Vice-President. I was at my first sales meeting and everyone was at the bar after the day's business. Murray called me over, put his arm on my shoulder and asked me what I thought of the company. I told him, "It's a great company. There's a lot of room for advancement and everyone's really friendly."

"But what do you really think, man-to-man?"

I repeated my answer.

"Friend-to-friend, two ordinary guys in a bar, what do you really think? You can be honest."

I actually was being honest, and being sober, realized that this was a trap. How stupid or drunk did Murray think I was that I would criticize the company in front of him in my second week at work. There was only one way out. I told Murray that I had had a beer and needed to take a leak. I didn't go back to the bar. And never drank at any business event thereafter.

My wife and I dressed fancily for the Ball, in a long dress and in a dark suit; clothing normally reserved for bar/bat mitzvahs and weddings. On the way

to the banquet hall, I saw Rafiq talking to a belly dancer who was leaning provocatively against a bank of payphones (coin-operated phones used in the period between cave-paintings and cell phones). I found the scene a little unusual but otherwise innocuous until I saw him slip the belly dancer some cash. My “fight or flight” warning system started up, but evidently not enough.

After we had all congregated in the dining hall, a supplier, Laila, invited my wife and me up to her hospitality suite at midnight. I wasn't sure I wanted to go but Laila was very nice and I didn't want to offend her. But after all the music, food, and speeches, my wife and I wanted to go home. As we stood up to leave, Rafiq told us that we couldn't leave yet, that we had to stay long enough to go to Laila's hospitality suite. My “fight or flight” warning system was obviously defective, but my wife's intuition, honed through years as a high school teacher, was in overdrive. She said that something was going on and that if I went to the suite, it would not end well. I ignored her. I paid the price.

Rafiq told me again that I had to stay for Laila's suite. I nodded, waited for him to head back to the dance floor and then quickly got up, grabbed my wife's arm and headed for the door. Walked right into Laila. She made us sit down again.

I made several other attempts to escape, but either Rafiq or Laila blocked me at every turn. My wife again warned me that something was going on but she couldn't quite put her finger on it. I couldn't wait for midnight, when the hospitality suite opened so that I could go to Laila's at 12:01, leave at 12:02 and be home for 12:20.

Inexorably, Rafiq and Laila corralled us into the suite. Laila had configured the room weirdly in that all the seats were at the far end. My wife and I grabbed a couple of chairs and started talking to our neighbors when in walked the belly dancer that I had seen talking to my boss. My wife's intuition picked now to become contagious and a wave of foreboding washed over me, like a wave on a beach. With jellyfish in it. I immediately wanted to leave but that would mean walking out just as the dancer, Laila, and Rafiq were walking in. I shrunk back in my seat, and tried to become invisible or at least very small. I mentioned to my wife that Rafiq had been talking to the belly dancer before the dinner and everything clicked and she started to laugh. I was not amused.

The belly dancer turned on the music and started to dance. She removed a long blue scarf from around her shoulders, sashayed over to me, draped the scarf around my shoulders and pulled me to the dance floor. She tried to teach me to dance but all I could do was shuffle my feet, avoid eye contact with everyone, and plan a couple of homicides. Fortunately, my lack of dancing ability was making the belly dancer look bad and she released me back to my seat. As soon as we had the opportunity, we left. My wife was very pleased that she had figured out the conspiracy.

I don't know why the un-shy think feel that they have to drag us out of our shells. If only we would try, we would be happy. Well, we are already happy. Our shells are warm and comfortable, we like it in there, and we like sharing it with our loved ones. Who can also be shy, like our children. This was, in fact, the major complaint that my kids' teachers had about them. It must have been difficult for our kids' teachers, having students who sat there quietly doing their work.

The un-shy give shy people a bum rap; we are not aloof or egotistical, we just keep to ourselves and try not to bother other people. Shy people don't get into fights. We don't start wars. The world would be a better place if more people were shy.

As to the original question, "If we're so shy how did we get into a relationship?" this will continue to go unanswered. But it is a funny story.

Bio- Stephen is a medical writer working at an advertising agency. He tried writing short fiction and fantasy (please, no snide remarks about advertising being either one), but the events of his life are indeed stranger than any fictional scenarios he could concoct. He enjoys telling stories and making people laugh.

### That First Omelet

by Rachael Z. Ikins

When I was growing up, my mom was a decent, but uninspired cook. We had certain meals on certain nights every week e.g., Thursday was TV dinner night because Dad had Rotary club. Wednesdays, fried chicken, on the weekends, Sunday was always something like pot roast or leg of lamb.

My grandmother was of the Victorian era and was a much better cook than my mother. She retained all her German family recipes in her head. Every year at Christmas and Easter, she would bring out her enormous mixing bowl to create Knapfküchen, a dry German breakfast cake topped with melted butter and granulated sugar. She, like many a grandma who came from another country, made enough of this delicacy for all the relatives.

One year as I grew out of childhood and into adolescence, someone suggested I ask her to dictate the recipe to me. This proved to be fodder for family jokes on through future years. There were many versions. Since she cooked from the gut, so to speak, when I asked her for a measurement or measuring device, she'd vaguely gesture toward a coffee cup and mumble something about a "few of those." One recipe had 18 packages of yeast but only a pinch of sugar in it. Over time, I was able to figure out what was supposed to go into the ingredients. One of my favorite childhood memories, is of the cold outdoor kitchen at her house and the battered green table covered with cakes of all shapes and sizes, each draped with a damp towel as they awaited pick up and distribution.

Getting back to pot roast, my grandmother's made-from-the-heart gravy over succulent roast crumbling in juice was, in my father's opinion, as close to heaven as you could get.

Meanwhile, my mom cooked along, scared of trying new recipes, afraid of using recipes from the newspaper because what if they left out a crucial ingredient? After my father, and then her second husband died, my mother married for the third and final time. She is now 87 years old. Somewhere in years we were incommunicado, her new husband encouraged her to take courses in the evening offerings at a community college nearby. She chose cooking.

When we reconnected, the first few times I sat at her table, I was stunned at the variety, complexity, and savory tastes of the dishes being created by my mom. One of the first was a cold summer salad that had couscous and cucumber in it. Yesterday she made us delicious BLTs on thick whole grain bread for lunch, using her special microwave technique to do the bacon. A few years ago I had the opportunity to stay with her for 6 weeks. Inevitably I had to ask her how she learned to cook so well. Because when it came time to prep, she had four or five cookbooks comparing the same recipe in each, she'd have made her daily trip to the market for ingredients, and truly, watching her sauté and bake was a lot like watching a master artist create.

When I married in 1987, I was lucky enough to marry a man who loved to cook. He auctioned off six course French dinners on PBS's local Tel Aucs back in the early days of what we then called "channel 24". So when our courtship began in earnest, his first visit to my apartment brought him with several eggs in one pocket and a container of cream in another as he respected without comment the empty state of my student fridge. From these humble ingredients came the most spectacular, succulent omelet I'd ever eaten. Thus commenced our cooking adventures. He taught me everything from potatoes Dauphinoise, to beef Wellington beginning with the "from scratch" puff pastry with butter, flour and ice cubes, to quiches of all sorts, sauce melba drizzled over ice cream, tournedos Rossini, breads, soups and sauces.

One particular winter we began a stock in a large basement fireplace and for 48 hours, we filled an enormous stock pot with bones and chicken wings and herbs and vegetables. We kept the fire stoked until we ended up with tiny bags of what he called "brown gold," demi-glace sauce to be parsed out as carefully as a miser would his pence. In future years, I began to explore cuisines from all Asian cultures, Hispanic, as well as anything else that appealed to me and he always enthusiastically accompanied me on these culinary journeys.

In 2007, we went our separate ways. Eventually I was in a serious relationship with a woman from a nearby town. Since I worked from home, I did most of our cooking. She was ever enthusiastic to arrive home to savory fragrances, in anticipation of whatever herbs had been combined to make that night's supper delicious.

Then, we parted. For the subsequent four years I lived with someone who was a self-described "meat and potatoes" lover of bland food. One by one, my favorite recipes, whether salmon cooked in soy sauce, brown sugar, lemon and dill butter or home-baked bread to home-made and home-grown spaghettis sauces with my own garden of herbs fell by the wayside as the sight of someone fastidiously picking through a plate of food to remove anything unwelcome took away the heart and soul of my desire to express myself artistically in the kitchen.

Now I live happily by myself, contentedly peaceful with myself, my dogs and my cat. Doing my own grocery shopping the first time was a bit confusing as I had overlapping memories of a master list shopping with my husband mixed with memories of walking the aisles of a local chain grocery

next to her cart as she disagreed with any ingredient I said I liked, and I relinquished everything to do with food to her. I had no longer any realistic idea of what a food budget might entail nor what I might serve myself for dinner.

Among my first purchases as a free woman were a carton of eggs, a bag of spinach, a bag of onions, and a block of Swiss cheese. Friends gave me a wonderful housewarming with a set of Oneida pots and pans and a tote full of herbs and spices along with olive oil and balsamic vinegar as gifts.

I came home from somewhere, art class probably one midday really hungry, and into my head popped the idea of making an omelet, that pivotal dish in my own cooking career. I did not use a recipe. I like to cook from the gut, too. I shredded Swiss cheese into the bubbly fluffy egg mixture seasoned already with sea salt and fresh ground pepper and onion. I wilted a handful of the super food, spinach leaves, onto the shiny surface, folded it over and let it heat through. Then I slid it out of the pan, onto a plate and a piece of whole grain bread. I was so stunned when I looked at the table, I grabbed my camera and snapped a shot of my first omelet in, oh, say, 20 years. I imagine Phillip was smiling in heaven, wherever that might be, as I ate the delicious art I had just created from the memory of cooking with love with a master chef who loved me.

Bio- CNY native author/artist Rachael Ikons has been publishing her writing and selling artwork since she was a young teen. Recently her first novel, a fantasy titled *The Complete Tales from the Edge of the Woods* debuted to a standing room only reading in Canastota, NY. The YA novel joins her poetry chapbooks and collections of poetry and short fiction of which she is a part, on Amazon.com. Her work has appeared widely throughout Great Britain, as well her home country. Rachael has won eleven prizes for excellence in writing and also for visual art. Find out more about her on her website, Facebook and Twitter.

[www.rachaelikins.com](http://www.rachaelikins.com)

## Trees

by Ken Steinkamp

Several years ago, a mid-life career crisis prompted my wife to apply to graduate school in a rural New England College town. Thus, after a 15 year career in Los Angeles, we moved from the big city to the small arts community of Northampton. Upon receiving her degree, she was offered a

position by the local institution and we expanded our small town experience by moving to the Village of Montague, population 300.

As an artist, I welcomed the expansive views, rolling terrain and tree-ridden landscape, although I did not quite know how to embrace this openness. Where were the cars, the traffic and the seductive angst?

We had moved into our home with the lush foliage and humidity of summer engulfing us. After several months, when the leaves had fallen and the air was stiff and cold, I became enthralled with the trees and their gray finger-like branches. I marveled how they clawed and waved at the sky.

I photographed them, drew them, painted them, made yard sculptures from them and wrote poems about them. I adopted a delicate limbed, strong-bodied specimen in a nearby field as my symbol of being. That tree is not unlike the large oak I sat under as a child, watching the Cedar River from the bluff of the cemetery above.

To support my artistic lifestyle, I worked as an International Flight Attendant. On a trip to Frankfurt, Germany, I was looking forward to my layover and a good night's sleep, pleased that the trip had been quiet and uneventful.

As the passengers were disembarking, I inquired after a passenger who had not been feeling well and had asked for assistance during the flight. At that moment, a colleague frantically called to me to bring the defibrillator. The passenger had collapsed and was unconscious. As the gate agent called for the paramedics, I rushed to seat 26B to attach the device to a real person and not a practice dummy.

The remaining passengers and crew watched in disbelief as my associate tore open his khaki shirt and I connected the electronically sensitive pads of the defibrillator to this frail man. The digital voice command echoed "evaluating patient"; "shock advise"; "shock now!!!" I pushed the button. The man in khakis rose slightly off the floor from the jolt. I repeated the procedure: "evaluating patient"; "shock advise"; "shock now!!!" until the paramedics arrived.

I escaped to the next cabin for solace and moments later learned he had been pronounced "dead". The event disturbed me deeply. The site of his fallen image haunted me for some time.

When I returned home, I wrote to his wife in Germany, expressing my condolences and relating what the crew had done to try and save her husband.

Weeks later, I received an unexpected and gracious reply from his wife. She related that her husband had been a photographer. He was returning to Germany from a long anticipated photo shoot of the Grand Canyon, when death struck. She enclosed one of his black and white photos as a memento.

It was a large barren tree standing alone in a field.

Bio- Ken Steinkamp is a Rhode Island artist known for his talents in several artistic mediums. Primarily, he is a conceptual abstract painter and photographer who uses a variety of media to keenly frame his emotive responses to life's ongoing issues as viewed on his website: <http://www.kensteinkamp.com>

In 2010 his photographic book *Street Lines* was published.  
<http://www.blurb.com/b/1754551-ken-steinkamp-street-lines-cate-charles-gallery>

Several of his works have been used to illustrate stories or interviews in *The Write Place At the Write Time*. He is widely exhibited and has collectors throughout the United States as well as internationally. His other artistic talents are acting and writing. In this issue, his non-fiction story "Trees" appears. Written in 2000, it was motivated not only by a curious synergy but also by NPR's National Short Story Project that was being aired at that time and hosted at the time by the noted writer of coincidences, Paul Auster. Steinkamp also wrote the one act play probing an actors struggle with identity entitled *The Poser* that was performed in 2009 by the Stonington (CT) Players. His recent acting credits include playing Charles Webb in The Stonington Players 2007 production of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*.

## Chance Encounter

by Patrick Byrne

It was so long ago and happened so quickly that I must remind myself it happened at all. It was early December 1961, I had just completed Navy boot camp in San Diego and was finishing two weeks leave in my hometown of St. Louis, Missouri.

As I readied myself to board a train at Union Station back to the San Diego area, I was sad and apprehensive about celebrating my birthday and the Christmas holidays away from home. I had no idea what to expect at my first duty station, a helicopter squadron based in Imperial Beach,



California. I was to be there only six months before being reassigned to the Navy's Journalism School at Great Lakes, Illinois.

Union Station was then a dingy, near-empty, cavernous old relic from the heyday of train travel. Years later, I was delighted at its total reformation, albeit to a hotel, shopping center and restaurant destination. Never again, however, to be a bustling transportation hub.

I climbed aboard an old tired passenger/freight train for the classic description of a "milk run". Fortunately, in Kansas City I would board the El Capitan, a sleek, fast train that would follow a southwesterly route through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and onto San Diego. It was an elegant train designed for passenger comfort and enjoyment. Its double-decker dome lounge cars were great for easing back to sleep or panoramic viewing of some of the most majestic scenery in the country. I could hardly wait.

However, for now I slumped into a thoroughly worn and battered seat, all but alone in a drab passenger car. I sat and gazed without thought through a filthy window as the train chugged out of the dinosaur station. After a few hours of restless napping, I decided to take a stroll. Slowly, I ambled through empty passenger cars, coming to fully realize how totally the airline industry had taken over train travel. However, for me I had thoroughly enjoyed the camaraderie of my homebound trip from San Diego on the El Capitan. People were friendly, eating and drinking in a relaxed manner and engaged in sometimes loud but happy conversation. In short, they were having fun, a term seldom used today in connection with travel.

As I continued my aimless journey through one empty car after another, I suddenly flung open a door and to my shock, there sat three men in high back leather chairs, smoking and enjoying drinks. The car had the smell and ambience of a private men's club. Heavy dark wood décor, a hint of whiskey and a cloud of cigar smoke in the air. All that was missing was a moose head on the wall.

I don't know who was more startled, the three gentlemen or me, two of whom I could clearly see as they faced me. The third was concealed from my view by the back of his chair.

One gentleman, in an astonished but polite voice asked, "Can I help you?" As I gasped for a reply, the third man slowly turned from his chair until I could see the bespectacled face of former President, Harry S. Truman, who

was visibly amused by the intrusion. Being in my Navy uniform, he asked, "Where are you stationed son?" I blurted "San Diego, sir," and then apologized for stumbling into his private car.

He knew that I wanted to back out of there as fast as I had entered, so he wished me good luck, smiling and obviously enjoying the entire episode. The other gentlemen seemed quite relieved as I turned to make my exit. Closing the door, I could hear them laughing in genuine enjoyment of the entire encounter.

Today, it is reasonable to ask how a 17-year-old sailor could barge into the private car of a former President of the United States. The answer is to take note of the date. This was December 1961. According to the Truman Library, Congress did not authorize Secret Service protection for former President Truman until after the Kennedy assassination in 1963. Even then, President Truman did not want Secret Service protection until President Johnson personally appealed to him to accept a Secret Service detail.

This led me to think back to the sunny Friday afternoon in Dallas, November 22, 1963 when the citizens of the greatest nation on earth were stunned into suspended animation at the glaringly public murder of their young and charismatic President John F. Kennedy. For those of us with vivid memories of that time, it seems as though that single event changed America to its very core for all time. I leave it to historians to challenge the validity of that assertion, but in the aftermath of that bloody and seminal event, I and millions of Americans were never able to view our country or the world in the same way again.

Bio- Patrick Byrne is a retired businessman (commercial real estate) currently residing in Tampa, Fl. His writing background after his Navy days as a young man, has been limited to business matters or subjects centering around his great interest in examining historical events. He specifically enjoys finding small events that connect to much larger events and then studies them in great detail. However, he co-wrote two book reviews concerning the validity of the Shroud of Turin in the past year. The reviews can be located on the website of the [holyshroudguild.org](http://holyshroudguild.org).

Cats Do Go to Heaven

by Lori Noreika

I stood behind my friend's garage biting my nails in anticipation of my mother's wail, "Susan, stop hiding behind that garage and get to school." How she always knew I was behind that massive structure, halfway down the street I will never know.

Shoulders slumped, and tears forming in my eyes, I reluctantly traipsed down the hill, knowing that ugly brick building, where they stored children for most of the day, was just a short distance to my inevitable despair.

My only friend throughout the duration of school was my imagination, and we became great allies. One day, during our mandatory afternoon nap I was unusually still and lacking mischief. Sister Reginald was so surprised with my behavior that I became the student of the day.

"Susan, you may clap the erasers today," Sister said with her quirky smile, and smug demeanor.

I could not believe her words, and all the rest of the children stared at me in awe. Never had I been chosen for anything, let alone such a grandiose undertaking. Since clapping the chalky erasers was such privilege, I could never understand why all the children that were favored with such an honor went outside to perform such a magnificent duty.

I had made up my mind; my eraser clapping would be an event for all to see. I stood in front of the room, watching all the children's questioning faces. A tremendous "smacking" sound filtered through the room, as my eraser clasped hands met one another, and the dust flailed into the air.

Sister Reginald with her mouth agape, coughing from the powder, grabbed my ear and placed me in the corner of the room for the rest of the day, as the children snickered in their seats.

One moment I was the star of first grade, and the next... a chump standing in the corner of a classroom. Oh, but that turned out to be the "lesser of my sinful deeds" and caused my mother's many visits with my teachers after school.

As I entered second grade, even though my teachers wanted to hold me back, so I could learn the proper rules of first grade all over again. I made it my mission to become the child no teacher would ever want in their classroom.

It was a sunny, warm day as Sister Bernard walked up to me on the playground, and asked me why I was standing alone staring up at the striking, cloudless blue sky.

“I’m wondering why I can’t see all the animals up in heaven? You see, my mother told me that all animals go to heaven after my favorite cat, Ming, passed away.” I replied sadly.

“They most certainly do not; animals have no souls so they cannot possibly go to heaven.” Sister Bernard snapped with a growl that made me feel like the earth would open up and swallow me whole.

“Oh yes they do, I snapped back. My mom doesn’t lie.”

By this time, the Principal’s office was becoming a second home to me. As my mother stormed in, this time, I was not the target of her venom.

“Who told my daughter that animals don’t go to heaven? Of course they do, and don’t you ever tell her differently again.”

The Principal’s face went pale, as we marched out of her office. I was never so proud of my mother that day, and I had finally understood where my “sometimes” unruly attitude came from.

My sister had been wrong all along...I was not adopted; She always told me I was not like anyone in the family...today was the day I finally saw my family resemblance.

Psychoanalyzing myself, now that I am older, I believe I was simply bored with all the “hands in your lap, heads facing forward, don’t speak until you are spoken to.” It’s a wonder I ever made it through the Army as an adult.

I guess it just goes to show that sometimes there is a little devil in all of us, even if we are brought up by those angelic nuns in Catholic Schools.

Bio- Lori Noreika was born in Ohio and now resides in Washington State. She attended the University of Akron and the University of Colorado in Denver, earning two degrees in Anthropology and Sociology. She also served her country as an officer in the Army. In addition to non-fiction, Ms. Noreika enjoys writing fiction and is currently working on her first novel engaging the mysteries of Antarctica.

## Our Lady of the Books

by Terin Tashi Miller

As I walked my 10-year-old son to school along the wet leaf-covered sidewalks of our neighborhood in the damp warmer-than-normal December morning, I remembered my own walks in Wisconsin along similar sidewalks.

I'd walk by myself, my brother, despite implicit instructions, not wanting to walk with me. I always cut off the sidewalk leading from our street—Sweetbriar—to Columbia, where my older brother walked, and cut through the garden of the woman who my brother said yelled at you if you cut through her garden.

There was a stone path through the garden, and I was careful to stay on the path. I never got yelled at for cutting through to the street parallel to ours, even though I was in plain view of her neighbors across their open lawn that went right up to the unfenced edge of her garden.

Once on the parallel street, I'd walk onto the nearest driveway to the sidewalk and into the back of the park that had a wooden ski jump, and a ramp, and was essentially a big hill sloping down from the tall brown wooden jump to the street and, across from it, our grade school playground.

It was sliding on the ice slide/path made by older boys able to stay on their feet in the cold of winter where I broke my collar bone the year before or so.

I'd go carefully down the hill, except before the ice and snow came, if I was in a hurry, to get to the line-up outside on the asphalt part of the playground outside our 5th grade classrooms to go into school when the bell rang.

I went home a similar route, alone, or with a few friends who lived nearby, but instead of cutting through the neighbor's garden I often walked along the sidewalk of the parallel street behind the park to Oxford, the large, busy artery that connected where we lived to the back lots and buildings of the sprawling University of Wisconsin campus.

On that street, somewhere between Columbia and Oxford, pretty much in the middle where I crossed over from the neighbor's garden path, lived a lonely old woman.

I say she was lonely, because she seemed that way to me. But she was also an angel, of sorts. She was not as old as my parents, who were in their 40s by then. But she was older than my sister, who was a teenager by then.

All I really remember about her was that she had long, light brown hair, bangs, and wore glasses. And she said she either was, or had been a teacher. And she liked to wear thin cardigan sweaters, like my father.

I met her as I was coming home from school one Spring day, having hiked up the ski hill as I liked to do.

“Hello!” she said as I almost bumped into her on the side walk.

“Hello,” I said, not wanting to engage a “strange” adult in conversation.

“What’s your name?”

I told her.

“Are you just coming home from school?”

“Yes.”

“Do you live near here?”

“Yes,” I said, “On Sweetbriar.”

I pointed toward the neighbor’s garden, beyond which was my street.

“Do you like to read?”

I thought it a rather odd, unusual question.

“Yes?”

“I have a lot of books. Would you like to come into my house and see them?”

I had been taught, as most children, not to talk to “strangers.” This was the time of children’s faces appearing on milk cartons and parents fearing their child might be next.

But the strangers always asked you if you liked kitties, or puppies, or candy. I'd never heard of one asking if you liked to read. So, I said, "Sure."

My brother, I thought, was likely a shout away, as were any of a dozen friends and neighbors.

The woman with the long, light brown hair and bangs and glasses led me into her living room, and I was happy to see, left the front door open.

Sunlight filled the room. And I was surrounded by books, on shelves that only didn't cover the windows.

The woman sat on a chair—a wing-backed reading chair and, smiling, explained either she was a teacher or had been one. And said: "You can pick any book that interests you. We're friends so I trust you to return it to me when you're done. Consider me like your own library. Do your parents like to read? Do they have a lot of books?"

"My parents are professors," I said. "Both of them. But I've never seen this many books..."

I borrowed books from her throughout the fifth grade, always returning them, sometimes telling her what I thought of them, sometimes essentially just saying "hi" or "bye."

We left for India that summer. I never saw her, or her books, again. I naturally stopped by her house when we moved back to our old neighborhood two years later.

But the book angel, the lonely lovely woman, was gone and no one ever answered her door when I tried to see her. And I never, ever learned her name.

Bio- Terin spent many of his formative years in India, the child of anthropologist parents. Since then, he has lived and worked in a variety of countries in Europe and Asia.

His writing has appeared in guide books, international magazines including *Time* and *Geografica Revista*, and newspapers including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Dallas Morning News* and *The Los Angeles Times*. He began his writing career as a part-time reporter for *Time* magazine, then worked for The Associated Press in India and North Dakota and AP-Dow Jones News Services in Spain and New York, and as a reporter for *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, *Amarillo Daily News* and the *Hilton Head Island Packet*.

Terin is also the author of *From Where The Rivers Come* and *Down The Low Road*.  
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