Journal: (n) a book of original entry; a periodical (v) to record occurrences, experiences, reflections, particularly those of specific import to a special group, learned society, or profession

Creative: Relating to or involving the use of the imagination or original ideas to bring something into existence; the effective use of intelligence to manipulate the environment in order to produce a re-ordered or original artifact or idea

Arts: The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination; the various branches of creative activity; subjects of study primarily concerned with human creativity and social life

Create: to bring something into existence

produced by Blueclay Publications in conjunction with Lonestar Montgomery Community College
COPYRIGHT NOTICE

The written and visual contents (“Works”) of ACAJ are protected by copyright. Third parties (persons other than the original Author/Creator) may not reproduce Work published in ACAJ without first obtaining written permission from the author or creator. Under all circumstances, the Authors and/or Creators retain all rights to their works, including but not limited to reprint, publish, license and/or sell their Work. Editorial articles, comments, and other matter are copyrighted to the producer of each.

DISCLOSURE

ACAJ celebrates free speech and freedom of expression in creative art. Work included in ACAJ is selected using professional criteria only. Imposition of political correctness is a violation of fundamental rights, and a hallmark of tyranny. It is sometimes a function of creative art to offend, and by offending to produce discussion, debate, and – sometimes – change. The opinions expressed or produced herein are a function of creative art and are those of their creators.

STATUS

ACAJ is a non-profit publication, supported exclusively by sponsors and volunteers.

SPONSORS

Blueclay Tribal Association

The Kyothae Nation of Indigenous People

Lonestar-Montgomery Academy for Lifelong Learning
Table of Contents

ALL CREATIVE ARTS: DEFINING THE TERMS

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?  CHRISTINE SUSANY, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

AUTUMN PASSING  JOHN TALBERT

LETTERS FROM HOME  CHRISTINA MEARSE

THE MERMAID'S KISS  JOHN TALBERT

DANGEROUS PATHS  JK MOORE

PRIMITIVE MAN'S SOPHISTICATED ART—MODERN MAN'S INADEQUACY: AN INDIGENE'S VIEW OF CAVE PAINTING EXPERTS  KATEI BLUECLAY

OH, OH, I'M GONNA GET IT NOW  JD BENNETT

MRS. HISSER'S CAUTIONARY TALE  JD BENNETT

TEA OR COFFEE  BEVERLY CLYDE

ALONG BRUSHY CREEK  JD BENNETT

THE LETTER  BEVERLY CLYDE

PAS DE DEUX  BROWNIE VINCENT

EVIL WINDS OF AUTUMN  JOSIE DAN

OLE MOSES: A LOUISIANA VALENTINE  W. MOON

NO REGRETS  JEANNE SAKURAI

CONVERSING WITH THE MAD SCIENTIST  EDITORS

THE MOVE  BEVERLY CLYDE

A CAUTIONARY TALE  MARION DEE

UTAH ADVENTURE  CHARLOTTE CRAVATT

KATHRYN LANE: AWAKE AND DREAMING  AUTHOR INTERVIEW

UMAMI IN THE KITCHEN  JEANNE SAKURAI

SHORT FISH TAILS  CHARLOTTE CRAVATT

I MISS SPRING  BEVERLY CLYDE

GRANDPA  JERRY DEAN

THE HOUSE ON CLAWSON ROAD  CHARLOTTE CRAVATT

A GIFT OF THE FUTURE  FROM THE EDITORS

FIREFLY TALES MISS CELIA'S LIFE AND TIMES  BELLA SENON

MILITARY BRAT  JEANNE SAKURAI

CHINA WAS DIFFERENT  BETH ANTAL

STATE OF GRACE  GRACE DINALEDI

WAITING FOR MY MUSE  JOHN HAYDEL

THE FERRY  JUSTIN KASE

TRUTH  JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY

THE F WORD  JIM CHANDLER

OHASHI LESSONS  JEANNE SAKURAI

BLUE CLAY BIDES  DARKWATERS

THE TREE BESIDE MY WINDOW  MARTHA HAYDEL

THE CREATIVE PROCESS  KATEI BLUECLAY, ED.

AT THE LAST MINUTE  MARY DIAZ

TWO ARTISTS AT WORK  KATEI BLUECLAY

DARK ENERGY  JOHN HAYDEL

ON CREATIVITY AND ARTISTS’ WORK  DR. REBECCA RILEY

TROMPE L'OEIL  W. T. CHERRY III

MCKIBBEN'S EYE  EDITORIAL STAFF
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USE &amp; BEAUTY: MARKING TIME</td>
<td>PRIVATE COLLECTIONS</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIVING, THE ART OF</td>
<td>EDITORIAL STAFF</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAYIN’ ALIVE</td>
<td></td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BEST DEAL IN TOWN</td>
<td></td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOOKS: Free and Easy</td>
<td>EDITORIAL STAFF</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACAJ SUBMISSION CRITERIA</td>
<td>EDITORS</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPYRIGHT LISTING</td>
<td></td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ALL CREATIVE ARTS: DEFINING THE TERMS

“ACAJ” stands for “ALL CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL,” and our mission includes providing a venue for all creative artists to show their work, providing a forum for discussions by and about artists, and providing access to resources for our readers.

So what are creative arts, and who are creative artists? Exactly who and what does this journal cover? The answer is simple: in a word, you.

“But,” you say, “I’m not an artist.” “But,” we answer, “yes, you are.”

Most of us learned to consider that an artist is someone like a painter, sculptor, or writer, who is “able by virtue of imagination and talent or skill to create works of aesthetic value, especially in the fine arts.” The fine arts are the purely aesthetic arts, such as music, painting, and poetry, as opposed to industrial or functional arts such as engineering or carpentry. Aesthetic means concerned with beauty, artistic impact, or appearance. We learned to discriminate between an artist and a craftsman, and in some ways, that’s right.

But, in the broadest sense, an artist is a person whose work shows exceptional creative ability or skill.

And that’s you.

Create means to bring something into existence; creativity means relating to or involving the use of the imagination or original ideas to bring something into existence; the effective use of intelligence to manipulate the environment in order to produce a re-ordered or original artifact or idea.

Can you see yourself in this picture? Sounds a lot like problem solving, doesn’t it? Or using life skills... Consider the definition of “design:” “to conceive or fashion in the mind; invent.” Design must then be a creative function.

Arts is defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination (original or re-ordered artifacts or
ideas); the various branches of creative activity; subjects of study primarily concerned with human creativity and social life, and creative arts is broadly defined as relating to or concerning the process by which something comes from nothing, out of the nowhere into the here.

The artist has to imagine a new thing or idea; the difference between a craftsman and an artist is design. A quilter, for example, who quilts using a standard pattern is a craftsman; a quilter who quilts using his own original design is an artist. A person who assembles automobiles is a craftsman; a person who designs a new automobile, or a new way to assemble automobiles, or a new assembly line is an artist. A cook who creates an original recipe is an artist.

Skill level is something else again. While the craftsman has technical skill without the desire or the ability to design something new, the artist may be able to come up with something new – but be unable to execute his design. Sometimes, an artist/designer creates the design, and hires the actual work done by someone who has the skill to produce the artifact, or execute the idea. This sounds reasonable when the artifact being created is clothing, for example, or something mechanical.

In fact, most artists live with the mind/matter or epistemological conflict: they never – no matter how long they work – seem to believe that they have finished the work. No matter how technically excellent their skills, they can never replicate the image in their minds.

But a craftsman may also be an artist: the defining point is the craftsman’s creation of any original design, idea, process, or artifact. Artists, on the other hand, may or may not be craftsmen: the defining point is possession of the skill to implement the original design, idea, process, or artifact.

We know all of this, but at some point, in our zeal to define, we decided that useful items are not artistic creations. That we use paintings, sculpture and other “artistic” productions
to decorate our homes usefully demonstrates the inherent problem with that idea. Useful things must be designed; design is a creative function; therefore useful things can also be creative art. And useful people can be creative artists.

That brings us back to you— and me. We are all essentially creative artists. After all, we made it this far, and in doing so we often had to cobble together some thing or some solution or some process to get us through some sticky patches. We exercised our creative ability when we applied it to living. Many of us have also created tangible art forms, whether or not we had the craftsman’s skill to make them what we wanted them to be— and whether or not we defined ourselves as artists.

Further, living well is an art form, and we can all be creative artists in that regard. For example, happy people say it’s not what happens to you; it’s what you think and say and do about what happens to you that determines how you ultimately feel. Rationalization? Maybe, and often rationalization is not good; it diverts us from reality – and survival requires some contact with reality. However, saying positive things to ourselves instead of beating ourselves up is a creative use of intelligence, and the end result is happiness, which is a proof that we are living well— artists, all, in the truest sense of the word.

I’m an artist— and so are you.

Welcome to our community of creative artists.

The Editor

ALL CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL
January 2017
Ms. Susany teaches writing at Lonestar-Montgomery. Whether you are a scribe or a scribbler, her Lone Star Scribes and Scribblers class invites you to experience, explore, and experiment with the art and craft of writing. Some of her students are among the authors being published in this issue of ACAJ.

Some people are born story-tellers. They can regale you or entrance you with hilarious or hair-raising tales of mishap adventures. When they pause, their listeners either wipe tears of laughter from their eyes or exhale a huge sigh of relief. Then someone will likely say, “That was priceless. You really ought to write that down.” Sound familiar?

Unfortunately, most storytellers never take their friends’ advice. Why? Well, many don’t believe they can write their stories. I’ve even heard some claim that they can’t even write a grocery list. However, too often the real reason is that they are afraid to write. Painful memories of high school compositions bleeding red ink across pages of wounded egos are all too common, and that’s a shame. Instead of helping students improve their writing skills, the harsh criticism dished out by strict grammarians generally served to stifle creativity and imagination. Writing assignments became something dreaded and despised. I know. I was one of those students who suffered from teacher-inflicted writing doubts.

Even though I was always a “pretty-good” writer, I never considered myself to be a creative writer. Creative writers wrote imaginative fiction and best-selling novels. I chose to master the craft of writing. To my mind, this made me a wordsmith, not a writer. I continued to hone my skills as a literary craftsman throughout a 30-year professional career, but I never realized my true talent for writing until I retired and joined a writers’ league. When I introduced myself to this group of seasoned writers, I apologized for not being a creative writer. “I’m just a tech writer
and editor,” I explained. “My dear,” the President replied, “we believe all writing is creative. Welcome.”

Now, I teach writing for the LSC-Montgomery ALL program. I started offering classes here because I wanted people to experience writing as a pleasurable and potentially profitable creative pastime. All things considered, writing is an inexpensive recreational activity that can be practiced and enjoyed by anyone, anywhere, anytime. It requires no greater investment in materials than something to write on, something to write with, and something to write about. The greatest investment anyone must make is a commitment of time. After that, who knows? Someone just might find himself becoming a prize-winning author.

I believe everybody has a story to tell and that my role as an ALL instructor is to help people explore various ways to preserve and share their stories in their own “write” way. By experimenting with the genres of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, participants often discover new ways of expressing their literary voices. Likewise, classroom freewriting exercises often generate dynamic discussions that help expand an individual’s creative visions. While I do want my students to understand and appreciate the craft of writing, my ultimate goal is to encourage people to shed their writing inhibitions and free their inspirational muses. Writing can be an enjoyable and therapeutic creative art, so I try to make it fun for all.

Well, that’s my story. Now, I’d like to know, “What’s yours?”
Edward sat on his front porch staring across the quiet asphalt street into the woods beyond. He was an old man with weathered skin the color of a baseball glove, and thin strands of white hair lay atop his head. His black suit jacket was slung over the back of his rocking chair alongside his best church tie. The leaves, he noticed, had taken on the familiar shades of red, yellow, and brown that he and Evie loved so much. The two of them had spent many hours on this porch, he in his rocking chair and she in hers, enjoying the cooler autumn weather and the turning of the leaves. The sun was settling below the treetops when a man came walking up the road and turned onto the front walk. He passed through the open white picket gate, closed it behind himself, and, without asking, sat in the rocking chair beside Edward.

“That chair,” Edward said without taking his eyes off the woods. “It belonged to Evie.”
“I know,” the man said softly.
“She’s gone now.”
“I know.”
“It’s fine if you sit there. She’d like that.”

For a while there was only silence. The woods across the road grew dark, and rain began to fall. The man spoke. “It was a nice funeral.”
Nodding, Edward asked, “You were there?”
“Of course.”
“I miss her.”
“I know.”
Edward’s eyes brimmed with tears, and after a while he spoke. His voice was tired and no more than a whisper. “When you’re old, people think it doesn’t hurt. I guess they figure you’ve had a full life together, that you should expect it, and should have made peace with it. They’re wrong.”

“Yes. They are.”

“I was holding her hand when she went. Peaceful and quiet-like. She opened her eyes and I could tell she knew me.” Edward pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes. “Then she was gone.” He let the tears come until he was empty.

Then the man said, “Tell me how you met Evie.”

Edward sat back. His voice grew a bit stronger. “I can see it like it was yesterday. She was 17 and about the prettiest girl I’d ever set eyes on. I’d gone to the movies with some friends. We were there to see “Destination Tokyo” and there she was, inside the theatre selling War Bonds. I got in line straight away, of course, just so I could talk to her. But when my turn came I froze. I just stood there slack-jawed and dumb.” Edward laughed. “It didn’t take much for her to talk me out of my movie money but it was worth it. We made a date for the following Saturday night.”

The man laughed along with Edward. “Tell me more.”

“Well, we got married a year later and I went off to war. Leaving her was the hardest thing I’d ever done. But two years later I came home and she was waiting for me just like she’d promised. We started a family and raised three kids. She was happiest being a mother. She was a good mother. We had a good life together.”

Edward grew quiet and closed his eyes. He was so tired. The ache in his chest that he’d had since Evie died was growing worse. How could he go on without her? Salty tears soaked his cheeks, and he could hardly breathe. His thoughts blurred, and he felt confused and scared. A wave of pain and panic washed
over him, but then he could see her — her arms outstretched. She called out to him.

The man took Edward’s hand and spoke gently, “Come on, Edward. It’s time to go.”

Edward heard himself ask, “Where are we going?”

The man’s clothes became so dazzling white that Edward could hardly look at him. He smiled, and Edward’s fear and pain melted away. “We’re going to see Evie.”
Dear Darling Daughter,

It’s raining again tonight, and I’m feeling just a little melancholy. The rain reminds me so much of Albert. You remember – the bullfrog. As I told you back then, we met after a very heavy rain.

He was trying to cross New Trails to get to the large pond on the other side of the road. I stopped, got out of the car, and helped him along. He thanked me profusely, and then immediately claimed he was a Prince who had been turned into a frog. And, he said, for a kiss…yada, yada, yada. How many times have I heard that tale? And yet I could not get his story out of my mind, so when he invited me to spend the weekend with him, I agreed.

We had a lovely weekend together at the Hilton, enjoying a very nice room and a gorgeous pool. Of course, he was a much better swimmer than I. I took a chance and gave him a kiss – and, unbelievably, he actually turned into a very handsome Prince.
But when it was time to check out, I found that though he might have had a crown, he didn’t have a MasterCard! And, of course, no cash either. Oh, well…

As we were returning to my condo, I was filled with apprehension. Would things work out with us? Would we be compatible? Would he pick up after himself, would there be dishes in the sink, beer bottles on the coffee table, towels on the floor? Would he object to my obsession with “The Game of Thrones?”

Well, I shouldn’t have worried. About 7:00 pm, we took some wine and cheese out on the deck. He took one look at the lush, green wetland area behind my house, turned back into a frog, and hopped through the open gate into the swamp — and out of my life.

I guess I’ll always fondly remember him as the Green Guy who got away. Que sera,’ sera.’

Love, love, love,

Mom

Dear Darling Daughter,

Hope all is well in Florida. I’m glad you made it through the hurricane without too much damage. Everything is good here; still hot with almost daily thundershowers.
You’ll be thrilled to know I have a bit of news on the relationship front. I’ve met someone! There was an event at the Marriott Hotel in early July billed as a Singles Mixer for Party Animals. My neighbor and I attended and I met this fella. There was an instant attraction between us; I’d go so far to call it an intense animal attraction.

His name is Zack and he works for a company in Huntsville that makes uniforms for the Texas Prison System. He is in Sales and also works as a model for the company’s ads. He has a small office in Houston. He didn’t say it, but he probably got the job because of his stripes. He says he was born in Kenya and most of his family is still there. I’m enclosing a picture – you can’t tell from this photo, but he has beautiful black eyelashes and a great smile.

We went out for dinner the night after we met and had a wonderful time. He is so handsome and dresses very well; his hoofs are always polished and he looks sharp everywhere he goes.

We have so much in common. He likes the outdoors and usually runs three or four miles a day. He’s a vegetarian and agrees with me that you just can’t have too much roughage, but doesn’t mind if I order steak once in a while. We have such fun together. He makes me happy.
I know, I know, dating outside your species is not a good idea. You don’t have to remind me of my previous affairs with the dolphin and the bullfrog. But what’s a girl to do? The heart wants what the heart wants.

I think you’ll really like him when you get to know him. He has a great sense of humor, is very well educated, and has traveled to many countries.

Just think about this: when and if he becomes your stepfather, he can let the kids ride free at their birthday parties.

Love, love, love,

Mom
THE MERMAID’S KISS

JOHN TALBERT

Michael Thomas was a young man when, restless and craving adventure, he and three of his college buddies bought a lightly-used 40-foot ketch named Sea Nymph and went island hopping across the sunny Caribbean. They were a day out of Puerto Rico when the skies turned dark. It seemed like only moments before the storm engulfed them. Wind-driven rain stung like needles; angry waves pounded the hull. As the crew struggled against the storm, the boat heeled far over. Michael was running to shorten the mainsail before she capsized when a huge wave swept him into the roiling sea.

Michael fought desperately to reach the surface, until his strength gave out. “I’m going to die,” he thought. As he sank deeper, the face of a beautiful woman seemed to form in front of him. A warm glow radiated from her skin, and her long auburn hair floated around her like a halo. “Maybe I’ve died already,” he amended. Vaguely amused at the thought, he remembered all the divers’ warnings against rapture, and the instructor’s order to end a dive before he started seeing things. “Too late for me,” he thought, while she moved closer and smiled the most perfect smile he’d ever seen. As she held Michael’s gaze, her green eyes took on a glow of their own, then she reached out and touched his face with delicate fingers. The name Nerissa sang in his mind.

The next thing he knew, Michael was on the deck of the Sea Nymph, retching salty seawater, surrounded by his exhausted friends. “You scared the crap out of us, Michael. If Jim hadn’t snagged you with the boat hook. . .” Michael rolled on his side and threw up again.

The winds died, the storm subsided, and the sea grew calm. Michael closed his eyes and drew his knees up to his chest,
remembering what had happened. When his world began to go dark, Nerissa had kissed him. She was real. He remembered the feeling of being home, being complete, and he knew what he had lost when his friends dragged him onboard to save his life. The knowledge brought him the worst pain he’d ever known. In that moment he felt that death would have been better than life without her.

The storm had taken his friends’ appetite for sailing, so Michael bought out their shares of the boat. He never told anyone that he’d been kissed by a mermaid, but he devoted the rest of his life to searching for Nerissa. He haunted the spot where they had met, but in nearly 40 years, he’d never seen so much as a glimpse of her. Today would be his last chance to find Nerissa. He was dying. The last round of chemo had left him sick and weak, barely strong enough to handle the boat on his own. He knew the next round would be the end of him, so his search for Nerissa, one way or another, would be over today.

As Michael stood on the deck of the Sea Nymph, gentle waves lapped softly against the hull. The sun was warm and a light breeze blew promises of a pleasant day, but Michael didn’t notice. Casting a sidelong glance at his scuba equipment lying on the deck, he took a deep breath and blew it out slowly. It was time to do the one thing he’d never, in the forty years of seeking, been able to do: just like the first time, he would go to her with no provision for coming back. There would be no scuba tank on his back. No escape plan. This would be a one-way trip.

Michael cinched the weighted scuba belt tightly around his waist and slipped over the side. The warm Caribbean waters opened to him like the waiting arms of a lover. He sank quickly and soon his lungs began to burn. Deeper he went, the water becoming darker and colder. A wave of nausea swept over him, and he knew the end was near. For the first time, he doubted the reality of what had happened with Nerissa.

The last of his air escaped his lungs; a convulsion ripped through his body; and darkness began to engulf him. His eyes
had started to close when he saw a shimmer in the water ahead of him. The shimmer dimmed, and with it, his desperate hope. Then she was there, floating within a touch. The water came alive around her, sparkling like thousands of diamonds. Her voice sang like an enchanting melody in his head. “I thought you would never come back, my love.”

“I’ve been looking for you for so long,” he thought to her. Her green eyes widened. “I’ve always been here, waiting for you to come to me.”

As his eyes closed, she cupped his face in her pale hands and pressed her lips to his. For a moment nothing happened, then every cell of Michael’s body came alive as if jolted by an electrical shock. Every muscle, bone and tendon ached. His gut burned and his chest felt like it would explode. He was alive!

Nerissa laughed and swam a circle around him. He reached for her, but she dodged, laughing. Those amazing green eyes he remembered from so long ago danced before him teasingly. “You have to catch me to keep me, my love,” he heard, and she streaked away. A moment later he flashed after her, and they were gone into the deep.

******

DATELINE PUERTO RICO FRIDAY– The US Coast Guard announced today it has suspended search efforts for long-term Puerto Rican resident Michael Thomas, believed lost at sea. At approximately 3:30 p.m. Monday, Coast Guard watch-standers received a report of an abandoned sailboat approximately 60 miles south of Jobos Bay, Puerto Rico. The boat was in good order, according to the spokesman, and there was no sign of violence aboard. Local fishermen told investigators they saw the sailboat leaving the Port of Arroyo with Mr. Thomas aboard early Monday morning. It is now secured at the Port of Las Mareas.
In a small province deep in mainland China, I lay on my narrow cot at the mission and knew there would be no sleep for me tonight, not because of the heat of this late summer night, but because of the unrest that now crept over everything. It was 1931, and China was laboring through a brutal and seemingly endless cycle of civil wars, and now faced an impending invasion. Two warring political parties, the intransigence of the warlords, and the atrocities of the invading Japanese Army all took a heavy toll on the peasant population. It was heartbreaking to watch the steady stream of fleeing refugees that filled the road in front of the mission.

I had done missionary work in the United States, but this was my first overseas assignment. So much had changed in the 10 years I had been here. The mission originally included a school for girls along with the medical clinic. Because of China’s continuing interest in our progressive western culture, I had been sent as an English teacher for girls of influential families from the surrounding provinces — girls who were already committed to arranged marriages. I would look at them and sadly think “educated chattel, but still chattel.” China’s culture was all so new to me at that time.

Dr. Chang, a well-educated man in his late fifties, ran the mission and had agreed to a girls’ boarding school because of the political and financial benefits it would create. He was from a very powerful family and years ago had earned his medical degree in England. While there, he converted to Christianity. Afterwards, he returned to China and his province to build a medical clinic and to share his faith. At the time, his new faith was received with very mixed emotions by his family. Now, all of China was trying to redefine their political positions. Powerful
family names and allegiances were being questioned, and his strong stance on Christianity had created a bitter division within his family.

“Miss Jane, you must wake up now.” Even though I knew his voice well, I jumped.

“Is it time?” I asked, knowing the answer before he said it.

“Yes. Your bag is prepared as I suggested?”

“Yes,” I answered. We both spoke in hushed tones because of the fear and danger this night held.

At that moment, Old Mother came into my room and began quietly removing objects and pictures from the wall and placing them carefully in a wooden box, driving home the point of just how close the danger now was to the mission. Over the past six months, families had steadily removed their daughters from the school. Fear-driven distrust permeated everything these days. Those powerful families were now unsure of the direction China was taking, and knew that choosing the wrong side could have dire consequences.

Old Mother’s slow methodical movements seemed to add her usual calm to the tension of the moment. She was a tiny ancient-looking woman, a bit over four feet tall. It was hard to tell her height, for she was slightly bent at the shoulders. No one seemed to know her age or even when she had arrived at the mission. She was always working, just quietly there, and almost never spoke. When she did, she always made the same statement, “Okay, maybe sometime soon.” But sometime soon never came. She was as solid as the foundation the mission stood on, and I found that reassuring, especially during these times. She reminded me of the sun on a cloudy day, still there, even if I couldn’t see it right then. She always seemed to understand if anyone was troubled, and would find work to do close by, never talking, just radiating that quiet strength of hers to those around her.

Dr. Chang’s voice pulled me back into the reality of the moment.
“Li-Ming has just arrived from his village —” he was saying, when I interrupted, “Is it bad? Is he all right?”

“He is safe and unhurt, but witnessed the execution of his parents.” His voice held only a hint of the emotions I knew Dr. Chang was feeling.

“Oh, dear God – then it must be as bad as we have been hearing. Should I go to Li-Ming?” Even as I asked the question, my mind raced through all the things I should be doing instead.

“No, I have already sent him on to friends where he should be safe at least for a while,” he replied, then quickly went on to say, “Now there is not a lot of time; I need you to listen to me carefully.” His voice carried a tone of urgency in it that I had never heard in all the years we had worked together. He continued, “I have arranged for you to be taken up into the hills and slipped out of the province through the long valley. It will be a hard journey and —”

“Wait! What — what do you mean? Are you saying you’re not coming with me?” Shock made me say it louder then I intended. As he nodded his head ‘yes,’ his eyes and sad smile told me he understood the betrayal I felt at that moment.

“But you promised! We both know how dangerous it would be if you remain here.” I took a quick breath and continued before he could interrupt me. “You’re a Christian, a doctor, not to mention your family name, all of which puts you even higher on the list than me being from the West. You can’t stay!” I pleaded.

“Miss Jane, I know you want to argue with me. Many times I have seen that tiger with a soft heart — but there is no time for that,” he said, in a voice I was all too well acquainted with, that voice that meant ‘subject closed; we move on.’ I could hear his complete acceptance that our paths must now part. He had made his decision, and I needed to accept and respect the fact his choice was not made lightly.

“There is a favor I must ask —” he continued.

“Anything,” I quickly replied.
Old Mother pulled a beautiful red silk robe covered in intricate gold embroidered flowers, scenery, and symbols, out of the wooden box and handed it to him. It looked very old, and he handled it as carefully as he handled any of his valued surgical tools.

“I need you to take this with you. Fold it small and put it in the bottom of your bag, for it is of great importance and many right now would not think twice about killing you in order to possess it. I am sorry to ask this thing, but it must not get into the wrong hands,” he said.

“Am I to give it to someone?” I asked, as I quickly placed it beneath my one change of clothes.

“No,” he replied, “you are to keep it with you.”

“Whose is it? What’s it for?” I asked, as I retied my bag.

“I’ve never even seen it before. I don’t understand. You mean me to take it to America? To someone there?”

“No, you keep it with you, and if — Shhh,” he whispered.

There was a slight movement at my window. He spoke to someone in a dialect I did not know, turned back to me and said, “It is time. These are good men. Trust them.”

I looked at my window and thought how strange that a mere four inches lay between two very separate worlds. In the time it would take to crawl out that window, I would have stepped out of this familiar life into the unknown, where everything would be changed, maybe forever. How do you say good-bye to friends who have been such a close part of your life for the last ten years? Those who had become closer than your own family? Someone that you would probably never see again? So many emotions and memories rushed through me as I looked at both of them.

“Goodbye, Dr. Chang,” I whispered, tears sliding down my cheeks. “Thank you for everything. God keep you safe. And goodbye, Old Mother.”

He smiled and whispered, “Go with God, Tiger with Soft Heart.”
It was the pet name he always used when my stubbornness caused me to tread into what he believed to be dangerous places. Looking back for a moment, I braved a small smile, then slipped out the window into the darkness. This night, all of us understood just how dangerous our paths would now be.
Kai Blueclay is tribal historian and cultural anthropologist for the Kyothae Nation of Indigenous Peoples. She is a justice on the Kyothae High Court, and serves as Kyothae Ambassador to the Americas.

Over the years during which they have concerned themselves with the subject, scientists have proposed and adopted many different theories to explain the meaning and function of ancient man’s cave art. Each of these theories in turn has gathered proponents eager to force the “facts” into their own little boxes. Unfortunately, these theories tell us much more about the theorists than about so-called primitive man.

Each of these theories grows from the personal experiences, beliefs, preoccupations, and cultural milieu of the theorist. When we examine each theory, what we see is a reflection of the period during which the theories evolved, the personalities or philosophies of the theorists, their personal experiences or backgrounds, their cultural milieu, and their personal biases. In most cases, these experts do not recognize their biases, or have what they perceive as valid reasons for indulging them, so they do nothing to overcome them.

“I think; therefore, it is” seems to be the underlying basis of most of these theories.

This is the problem with the theories proposed by archeologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and other experts on ancient man: they are all based on premises without substance, without evidence, without valid proofs. In physics, we can drop an apple and see it fall. We can measure the speed and distance it falls. Then, using the facts, observed and able to be duplicated, we can develop theories with a valid basis, and we can test those theories.
In the study of ancient man, scientists cannot start with valid premises. They don’t know anything, so they build their theories like castles in the air. Those working in the field become experts by virtue of repeated “studies” and publications; their theories are accepted and incorporated into the knowledge base, are accepted as fact, and become the source of continuing error.

Neanderthal man was defined as a brute, little above the beasts, without intelligence, tools, art, or speech. Since the discovery, among others, of Neanderthal cave art at Gorham’s Cave in Gibraltar, Neanderthal culture is being redefined. Now, finally, experts believe that Neanderthals had the capacity to develop complex symbolic thought and abstract expression. Yet indigenous historians have maintained for years that scientific perceptions of ancient man were badly flawed, citing as basis the fact that survival in the extremely hostile environment of the time required consistently intelligent action.

These errors are self-maintaining and slow to be corrected. For example, Henri Edouard Prosper Breuill, (1877 – 1961), French Catholic priest, archaeologist, anthropologist, ethnologist, geologist, and historian, developed and fostered a theory of cave paintings that involves quasi-religious sympathetic magic. It is not strange that he would do so; religion was the central theme of his life. Ordained in 1900 after completing his education at the Sorbonne at the age of 23, by the age of 28, he was lecturing and considered an authority. He had a recognized tendency to romanticize about certain works of art, and this is seen in his treatment of the “White Lady” of Brandberg Mountain, Namibia, a cave drawing which reminded him of the figures of ancient female athletes on King Minos’ palace in Crete; these figures wore brown jerkins and white or pink lower body tights. The central Brandberg figure thus became a white lady, according to Breuill, and she was racing. Breuill postulated that the cave paintings were made by migrating Eastern Mediterranean travelers – for how else would they have been familiar with King Minos’ palace or Crete’s female athletes? Later
analysts decided that the figures were male and were dancing (native dancing, of course). In order to make these outlandish determinations, Breuill and later scientists had to ignore the rest of the painting, which — to indigenous historians — depicts a number of figures with sticks and bows apparently herding cattle on the run. [See image at http://www.brandbergrestcamp.com/rock-art/]

Of other cave paintings, Breuill said that the small circles on some of the animals indicate that the animal was or would be stoned to death. These were later found to be faults in the rock. But why would he have even considered stoning as a method of killing prey? Perhaps the accepted view of dumb, toolless primitive man led him to believe stones were the only weapons available to them.

Further, while Father Breuill was undoubtedly familiar with the religious practice of stoning heretics, he could not have had any hunting experience whatsoever, if he believed that stoning was an effective means of killing cave bears and other such prey. There is a vast difference between stoning a weak, fragile creature like man and stoning a heavy, fast animal with sharp claws, big teeth, thick cranium, and a taste for flesh. Yet his theories were accepted widely for a long time.

André Leroi-Gourhan (1911–1986), a French archaeologist, paleontologist, paleoanthropologist, and anthropologist, was also educated at the Sorbonne. Beginning in 1933, he held various positions at museums around the world, including the British Museum and the Musée de l'Homme. Leroi-Gourhan correlated the types of animals pictured and their position within the caves. This scientist saw the caves as temples, and saw similarities to modern religious structures in terms of image positioning, routes of direction, and stations of initiation.

He discussed this as demonstrating what he called “technical tendencies,” or universal technical dynamics, which we would consider patterns determined by the external environment, i.e., behavior patterns required and/or produced by the actions of the requirements of physical existence. Leroi-Gourhan's
understanding of human evolution was based on the belief that transition to bipedality freed the hands for grasping, and the face for gesturing and speaking, and thus the development of the cortex, of technology, and of language all followed from ancient man’s adoption of an upright stance, with the assumption that ancient man first went on all fours.

Here again one sees the baseless assumption of belief as fact.

However, if one considers that perhaps no such transition occurred— that, in fact, humans have always been bipedal, then the theory collapses.

In his Autobiographical Notes, Albert Einstein mentioned examples that demonstrate “the fact that even scholars of audacious spirit and fine instinct can be obstructed in the interpretation of facts by philosophical prejudices.”

A hundred years past Breuill’s assumption of the lectern and acknowledgment as an expert, are we any further from error than at his time? No, it seems that the process of creating error continues.

Some of today’s researchers advocate theories that tie the cave paintings to the preoccupations these theorists believe the cave painters were subject to, i.e. hunting, fighting, and sex. These theorists are remarkably able to spy sexual aspects and eager to label and explain them. Part of their proclivity to see sex everywhere is a result of the modern sexual revolution and the prevalence of overt sexual material in the culture. They also continue to pontificate on the religious and spiritual meaning of the cave paintings, assigning meanings not readily apparent to the indigenous peoples, and frequently allege sexual involvement.

What seems to be lacking in all of these explanations of cave paintings and ancient man is the practical application of reasonable facts and assumptions about the real world and its imperatives at the time the cave painters were painting. An application of Occam’s Razor seems to be indicated.
Ancient man lived in a hostile environment, and he lived on the edge. He hunted to eat; many of the animals he hunted were extremely dangerous predators, and if he was careless or stupid, instead of bringing home dinner, he became dinner. His was a subsistence existence. He worked hard, and he had to have been focused on survival. He had to learn as much as he could and teach it all to younger members of his tribe or group. He had to focus. Survival mechanisms informed his entire existence. In terms of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, ancient man was stuck at food, shelter, and clothing.

Indigenous peoples, including Native Americans, who maintain and understand their oral histories, have a different, more practical explanation for all of the cave paintings. Survival was dependent on securing adequate food. Each person lived in constant danger. Each person was required to assimilate as much information about the primary business of food and survival as could be made available. Instant recognition of predator and prey and the ability to make appropriate decisions immediately were survival tools. To us, it is apparent that the cave paintings are teaching tools. Animals are depicted in movement and still, partially visible, varying silhouettes in various situations. Animals are depicted in camouflage, as they would be partially seen or hidden, as in the red dot panel, which we see as two leopards moving, but of which scientists have differing interpretations. Some animals are clearly pregnant; it was essential to maintaining the food supply that animals be allowed to propagate, so young hunters had to be able to recognize a pregnant female moving within a herd. The cave paintings are patterning aids, as mnemonic devices, for example.

To indigenous peoples, the cave paintings are a practical response to the necessities of the times, and scientists’ theories concerning the cave paintings are a sad commentary on impartial scientific thought. We are in a desert, but these experts are seeing that desert through the ocean where they live.
Experts define *apophenia* as the human tendency to perceive meaningful patterns in random data, or seeing connections with apparent but actually non-existent meaning. Neuropsych experts today believe that an instance of apophenia does not provide insight into the real world or its interconnectedness but is a "process of experiencing abnormal self-referential meanings in the surrounding experiential field."

Indigenous peoples know that there is a universal human tendency to seek patterns in random information, that developed from the necessities of survival in hostile environments and is hardwired into our genes. We, however, constantly crosscheck for validity, and continue to sample our surrounding environment in order to survive. The experts don’t do that.

Neuropsych experts define pareidolia as a psychological phenomenon involving an image or a sound in which the mind perceives a familiar pattern of something that does not actually exist, i.e. perceiving images of animals, faces, or objects in cloud formations or rock formations, or in the moon or star fields, or in plants, food items, or other artifacts. They link it with various forms of mental illness; however, it is a form of patterning that is detectable in animal behaviors, as well, and known by indigenous peoples to be deliberately developed by ancient man as a survival mechanism, which works well *if and when it is balanced with constant reality checks*.

Scientists analyzing the cave paintings appear to be afflicted with apophenia and pareidolia. They perceive patterns, but their perceptions are based on internal referents- and are culturally biased. They don’t do reality checks. They perceive patterns, but faultily, based on an invalid internal reference system. It is on this invalid internal reference system that researchers base their theories about the cave paintings found in Chauvet Cave in France.

Perhaps the most ridiculous misperception of the Chauvet Cave drawings is reflected in the incredibly chauvinistic
labeling of the painting they called “Venus and the Sorcerer,” described as “a composition creature - half human and half bison - referred to as the Sorcerer,” together with “the front view of a woman's lower body with long tapering legs.” The theorists think that the woman’s pubic triangle and her vulva are clearly drawn, and that Sorcerer's figure folds around and faces the pubic triangle. “This is certainly a powerful composition, perhaps symbolizing a relationship between a mortal woman and a supernatural animal spirit,” they continue. [See image at http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/chauvet/venus_sorcerer.php]

Indigenous peoples have a very different view of the cave paintings in general and of the so-called Venus and the Sorcerer, specifically.

When we look at the “Venus and Sorcerer,” we do not see a venus or a sorcerer – both of whom have no validity within the real world of the cave painters. We see a classic hunting joke, designed to impress an important point on the young hunters being taught in the caves. This joke worked; everyone who saw it remembered and modified his behavior as a result of the impact of the visual. The joke has been passed down in the oral history of many tribes, including Kyothae. We see a male bison in the moment when he suddenly discovers that he has mounted a lioness. The young hunters are to consider what happened after the shocking moment when the male bison discovered he had mounted a lioness – and the joke burns the lesson into their memories.

It is sad that modern researchers cannot tell the difference between the rear end of a lioness and the front view of a woman. It is worse that scientists close their eyes to the reality of what is in front of them in order to produce meaningless mouthings that degrade the life and work of indigenous peoples.
OH, OH, I'M GONNA GET IT NOW
JD BENNETT

I'm five years old. I'm bored. Here on a quiet Sunday afternoon in small-town Pennsylvania, Mommy is busy in the house, Daddy's in his workshop, and I'm bored. Mommy says only the boring are bored. That may be; I'm just looking for something — anything, to keep me from having to take a nap. Ours is a nap-taking family — what a waste of my time.

Looking out my bedroom window, I see our black '38 Chevy, just sitting there. It looks bored, too. I'll just go visit it for a while. Out the side door I go, just at a regular pace.

Why get in a hurry? It's Sunday, a day with many long hours to use up.

The car does look swanky, patiently waiting to take us somewhere, anywhere. Daddy and I washed it yesterday. He held the hose while I sponged off all the low places; that's where all the shiny stuff is. Now the Chevy looks its Sunday best. The door is unlocked — it always is, and I'm tall enough and strong enough to open it easily. It's hard to scramble up into the seat on Daddy's side 'cause it's so high and all, but I make it by grabbing onto the steering wheel. I look around at all the different gadgets on the driver's side. Why aren't there more on the side where I sometimes sit?

Oh, I spot something I recognize: that thing Mommy and Daddy use to put on the end of their cigarettes to make a flash of fire and smoke. How does that thing get red when it's just stuck in that little hole? Exploring with my fingers, I answer
my own question. Just push and it goes in farther, and WOW, it pops out all by itself. Would you look at that! All those perfect round circles, red and hot. Well, I don't have any Camels or Lucky Strikes, but wait — I do have this itchy, prickly cloth on the inside of the door. What would happen if I just — Hey, look at that beautiful shape. I'll put another one right beside it. Oops, not as sharp. I must need more fire. Yes, push the thingamajig in that slot and wait for the "pop." Now, for more designs.

Gosh, it stinks in here — and I can't see out of the window very well. Oh, golly, here comes Daddy, and he's running toward the car. Why is he running? The car door opens with a jerk and I feel his hand on my left arm, tugging and lifting me into his shoulder as we run away from the Chevy.

"I saw the smoke inside the car and thought you were in trouble, hurt even. What was going on in there anyway?" He paused and said, "I can see you're not hurt, but you may be in big trouble." I interrupted, "Daddy, I was making the prettiest designs; you wanna see?"

"Not now. You scared me to death, little one. So hear this loud and clear: the family car is not a play place for you. Do you understand me?" ‘Oh, oh, I'm gonna get it now for sure,' I thought. Daddy had never spanked me before, but I guess there's always a first time.

I looked at Daddy. "I'm gonna get a spankin', huh?"

Daddy looked back at me. "I know you can see how really upset and afraid I am," he said. "We can't have this type of misbehavior any more." He could see Mommy looking out the window. "Go into the house and tell Mommy what was going on and why. She will explain that what seems like fun can turn out to be dangerous and scary. When you understand what could have happened to you in that car, just thinking about it will last you much longer than any spanking you'd get, so scoot."

As I slowly started toward the house to tell Mommy what I now knew, I heard Daddy mumble, "We'll just have to
live with it. When I trade that Chevy in, maybe the new owners will like a nicely decorated door panel."
"Children, children, gather round," coaxed Mrs. Hisser. "Our family is in grave trouble. Daddy has been seriously injured; he has third-degree burns and scorch over one-fourth of his hide. He is not well and will have to remain in our underground home for two to three weeks."

"Mother," squealed Slither, the oldest Hisser offspring, "what happened to Daddy?"

"Mommy, will Daddy die?" questioned Slinkey, the baby, tears pooling in her eyes.

"No, my sweet, Daddy just needs rest and a dark shelter for a while." Mrs. Hisser continued, "Now, darlings, we must all be very strong and wish Daddy a full recovery."

"This is ridiculous," shouted Mamba, the rather surly adolescent Hisser. "How can a grown snake like Dad get scorched?"

"Now, now — watch your tongue, Mamba. You were out slinking around overnight and know nothing of the events leading up to Daddy's scare, so let me tell you the facts."

Mrs. Hisser settled into a comfortable coil, resting her head on her fifty-first rib. Looking at each child intently, she began, "As you well know, Mr. Ferguson lives above us. He is the man whose lawn we use as our playground, nursery, and diner. For several months now, Mr. Ferguson has been most inhospitable toward Daddy, Uncle Sidewinder, and Uncle Whipper. It seems that the Fergusons undervalue the presence of our families and are determined to move us from this neighborhood. They fail to realize that we keep rodents away from the corncrib and grasshoppers out of their tomato patch. Why, with my own ears, I've heard Mr. Ferguson yelling at the top of his lungs for a hoe to get us out of his backyard. He's sure we live under the back of his house."
"Children," Mrs. Hisser warned, "Mr. Ferguson is a dangerous man. He has tried rakes, hoes, even shotguns to disrupt our happy home and to demoralize your father. But what he did yesterday was unbelievable! He used fire to try to burn us out. Racer, do you remember yesterday when you wondered why Daddy wasn't home on time?"

"Yes, Momma, and right about then we smelled smoke and heard all sorts of cracklin' noises. Oh, we were so scared."

"Rightly so, my dear," responded Mrs. Hisser. "You see, Mr. Ferguson had just seen Daddy and Whipper racing across the backyard, heading home. The old man ran in his backdoor and came out with a huge wad of newspapers, already set on fire! Right away things got out of control. Mr. Ferguson set his own house on fire. Well, Daddy was badly hurt, but Mr. Ferguson was hurt even worse: he lost the back part of his house, including the roof."

"Children, we must all learn from Daddy's close encounter," Mrs. Hisser emphasized. "We need to be watchful of Mr. Ferguson slowly walking by or peeking under the house; we must listen carefully for any rustling sounds; and we must learn to recognize hoes, rakes, and shotguns. We live near a dangerous person, but we are undaunted. The Hisser family are survivors. We are determined to remain in our home; we won't leave. Now, off to bed with you, darlin's," cooed Mrs. Hisser, as she coiled up on the cool, red earth underneath Mr. Ferguson's front porch.
Liz eases onto the bench, lays her cane beside her and flicks open her travel mug. Smiling as she inhales the pungent aroma of Earl Grey tea, she takes a sip. Ahhh, on a cool September morning, the smoky, citrus taste of Earl Grey is perfect. The sun feels warm on her face, and she settles back on the bench to enjoy her tea.

Her sister, Sarah, is a coffee, a double-mocha-latte-with-no-foam coffee, person, but Liz is definitely a tea person. There are also dog people and cat people. There are people who love the mountains and those who love the beach. “Into what other categories can we divide people?” she wonders. Maybe her column for the Sunday paper could be about what people like. Liz knows that she is a tea-sipping, dog-petting, sitting-by-a-mountain-lake person, and Sarah is a double-mocha-latte-drinking, cat-massaging, walking-on-the-beach person. Liz ponders her column while continuing to sip her tea.

The breeze picks up, and Liz draws her jacket tighter. Something touches her hand once, and then again. She wipes the top of her hand and feels moisture. What could it be – maybe dew from the leaves or spray from the fountain? Was rain forecast? Liz decides to finish her tea and hurry home.

Suddenly, there is a crack of thunder in the distance and drops of rain begin to fall. Liz draws her hood over her head, picks up her cane and begins her walk home. The drops of rain get larger. Her foot slips on the wet leaves; she steadies herself with her cane. She tries to walk faster, but the sidewalk is uneven; she is afraid she might fall. The rain is coming down harder, and she steps in a puddle. Walking with her cane, she sounds like thump, tap, squish, tap.

The thunder is scaring her, confusing her. She climbs the steps to her house, but the key doesn’t fit. Why doesn’t the key fit? Is this her house? Frustrated she tries again and again, gasping for breath. Suddenly, the door flies open.
“Oh Liz, it’s you! What are you doing out in this rain? Come in, come in,” says Mrs. McGill, as she lowers her baseball bat. “Get back, Tiger! Bad kitty.”

“Mrs. McGill, I couldn’t find my house. With the noise of the rain, I couldn’t count the steps to my house. I stopped at your house by mistake; I’m so sorry, Mrs. McGill,” Liz cries.

“Nonsense, girl, give me your hand and come in. I’m putting your white cane by the door. Tiger, get back; don’t trip Liz. We’ll get you dried off, and then have a nice visit until the storm blows over. Give me your coat,” Mrs. McGill orders. “Here’s a towel; now dry off. I’ll fix us a fresh pot of coffee.”

Liz, the tea-sipping, dog-petting, sitting-by-a-mountain-lake person, smiles to herself. “Today I’ll gladly drink coffee, let Tiger sit in my lap, and hear about Mrs. McGill’s Caribbean cruise,” she thought, “— thankful that I am dry and safe.”
Brushy Creek coursed right through Round Rock, and held all sorts of attractions for five-year-old twins Tommy and Robbie: who could capture the most crawfish, who could find the most sparkly stones, and yes, who could skip a rock the farthest. It was summer, and summer meant having more exploration time for the boys and their dog Corkie.

"Mom, why did we name our dog Corkie?" asked Robbie.
"Look at his tail, Robbie. See the bend in it? Rather like a corkscrew, isn't it?"
"It doesn't hurt him, does it?"
"No, sweet," Mom chuckled, "it just adds to his personality."

Robbie and Mom were in the kitchen peeling carrots for supper and Corkie, always alert even while napping, knew they were talking about him. His tail thumped and his eyes blinked. The back door opened and in came Tommy and his friend, Keith, from down the street. Keith's folks, Arnold and Willa, were good neighbors and great domino players who had made Mom and Dad feel welcome as newcomers two years ago. From the stack of freshly peeled carrots, Tommy grabbed two and tossed one to Keith.

"Mom, we're going out to look around. Be back before dark and for sure in time for supper."
"All right, boys. See you later. Just stay nearby," Mom cautioned. "Now, Robbie, what are you going to do until time for dinner?"
"Oh, I guess I'll catch up with those guys. See 'ya."

Robbie set out to find his brother and Keith. Corkie got up, too, nose to the ground as a beagle is born to do. He checked on Robbie then veered off for parts unknown.

"Hey, Keith, let's see what's in that place up there."

Tommy pointed to a large columned building sitting alone, surrounded by stately oaks sheltering a sidewalk leading up to numerous steps.

"Wow, there must be twenty-zillion steps goin' up there," Keith surmised. "Come on, let's count 'em." After stepping off
only fifteen, the boys noticed a light on inside. Curiosity was a powerful incentive for two kids with time on their hands and exploration on their minds. Down the carpeted hallway leading toward some pretty windows, Tommy and Keith spotted a pool.

"Hey, they got a hot tub in here," Tommy exclaimed. "I've never seen one inside before; they're usually out near the patio. Let's try it out, okay?"

"You go in first, guy, I'll be right behind you," Keith whispered. Whispering seemed right in this huge, dim room.

"It doesn't matter if we get our clothes wet, they'll dry on the way home. Just take off your shoes. Man, it's warm, not hot—just right. Don't try to swim, though, it's too small to do laps. Just soak it up," Keith advised.

Meanwhile, Robbie and Corkie looked up one street and down the next with no luck in finding the guys. "Heck fire, Corkie, let's head for the creek. We don't need those creeps, anyway." Grinning, Robbie challenged, 'Better hide, crawdaddies, we're comin' for ya."

As twilight set in, Mom and Dad began to worry. "I didn't see either of the boys on my way home from town. I came down from the bakery and over the low-water crossing. I didn't even see Corkie, and he's usually out doing his beagle thing," Dad offered.

"In that case, let's go for a walk to see what's going on with those adventurers," Mom suggested

As the couple stepped out onto the front porch, Tommy, Keith, and a gentleman they didn't recognize came up the sidewalk. "Are you the parents of these two?" asked the stranger, as the soaking wet boys hung back. Dad replied, "One of them – Tommy. Keith lives down the street. What can we do for you?"

"Well, sir, I happened to be in the church office when I heard giggling and splashing out front. Lo and behold, these two dolphins were dipping up and down in our baptismal font," the man answered.

"Daddy, we thought it was a hot tub like Arnold and Willa have on their patio," Tommy tried to explain. "Their church isn't like ours out in Palm Valley," Keith chimed in. "Do you want us to mop up for you?" Keith wondered.
"Don't worry about that," the pastor said. "Just remember, not all pools are for swimming, okay?" Both boys nodded and anxiously replied, "Oh, yes, sir. We will."

As the pastor turned away, Dad said, "Keith, you head on home now so your folks won't worry, and think about how you're going to tell them about this fiasco. Tommy, go on inside, get dried off, have a snack, and stay put, you hear? Mom and I have to go find Robbie and Corkie. How come they weren't with you, anyway?" he asked, and then continued without waiting for an answer. "Then again, I'm glad they weren't; that font wasn't big enough for a gang and a dog. We'll be back soon."

"Now, if Robbie and Corkie are together, where do you suppose they'd wind up?" Mom wondered. Dad replied, "As I was coming across the creek, I noticed lights on at the ballpark; I bet that's where they headed. You know how much Robbie loves baseball!"

"Let's go," Mom said as she grabbed their large flashlight. "It may be dark before we get back."

The two followed the creek along the back of their lot, listening for Corkie's bark and wail. Nothing. When Mom turned on the flashlight, Dad said, "Look, honey. See that muddy spot near the water's edge? I bet Robbie was digging out crawfish there. The path to the ballpark is up ahead; let's keep going." Just then a black and white flash streaked past them, splashed in the water, and came back again at full speed.

"Corkie," Dad yelled. "Where's Robbie?" The beagle shook off half of Brushy Creek onto Dad's pants leg and headed up the path. "Sweetheart," Mom said. "I see Robbie over by the bullpen. His pockets are wet, and they seem to be moving."

"Robbie, Robbie! Come here." The couple climbed farther up the bank as Mom called. "We were so worried. It's getting dark and you weren't anywhere around." She and Dad stood together and hugged Robbie for a long time — too long for Robbie. "Gosh, Mommy, Corkie and I were just messin' around, and look what I found." Robbie patted his pockets, and the crawfish twisted and crackled.

"Get those creepy things out of your pants, now," Mom directed. "We're heading home, and by the street this time."

When they got home, the family piled their soggy clothes beside the washer/dryer in the garage. Dad checked on Corkie's
food and water, then all slipped into the kitchen. "Hey, there, Tommy. I see you've had a real bath and a snack, so please help me with supper while Robbie heads back to do the same. I think his cleanup may take longer, though," Mom quipped.

While Tommy set the table, Dad called Mom aside. "Honey, what are we going to do about these guys and their comeuppance, as Grandma used to say?"

"They didn't do anything all that bad, just used poor judgment, right?" Mom asked. Dad agreed and suggested a thorough family discussion after supper.

Seated on the green shag rugs the family used to play and picnic on, Mom and Dad asked the boys some probing questions: did you know where you were going; did you think about the amount of daylight left; did you remember that we had said to stay nearby; did you consider doing something else? After the discussion, Mom told Robbie, "Corkie leads with his nose, but you must lead with your thinking cap."

Then Dad observed, "Tommy, when you are in a new situation, it might be better to give it more thought and less action. Right?"

"Yes, sir," muttered Tommy.

"All right, then. Mom and I will see you both in the backyard only, until you can tell us how your behavior will improve. Now, to bed, guys."

After the boys were in bed, the adults continued their discussion. "Do we expect Tommy to go to the church to apologize? Also, do we keep Robbie away from the ballpark and the creek?" Mom asked.

"Let's do this," Dad said. "Ask Tommy what he thinks about the apology idea. I bet he'll do it. Then we'll take Robbie to the next game with the understanding that going to the park only happens when we get there in the car or on bikes."

"Oh, sweet, that sounds good to me," Mom responded. "Now, let's go to bed, too. It's been such a long, trying day. I'm frazzled."

Soon the whole family slept, while nearby, Brushy Creek flowed quietly on its way, still carrying all sorts of attractions for five-year-old twins — along with all kinds of trouble for their parents.
I was practicing my lute, trying to learn a difficult piece of music, when my maid Hulda entered the drawing room with a letter. I didn’t recognize the handwriting, but the paper was of the highest quality. Hulda stated that a messenger had brought the letter and was waiting for a reply.

I looked at the letter and saw that it was from Erik; I would need time to think before replying to this letter. “Tell the messenger that he may come back tomorrow afternoon, and I will have a reply at that time.” Hulda quickly went to obey my orders.

Opening the letter, I read:

My Dearest Marta,

I am back in Amsterdam and would like to call on you. I went to your parents’ house and learned that you had married Johan von Klasen. I thought we had an agreement; as I built my fortune in the Spice Islands, I was working for us.

Do you remember the dance at the home of the Altdorfers? We danced and danced; I was lost in your beautiful green eyes. Toward the end of the evening, we found a darkened alcove and we kissed. You have the softest lips and your smooth skin was a thrill to touch. After that night, I knew you were the woman for me.

The day I told you that I would be sailing for the Spice Islands to seek my fortune, you promised to wait. I now have a coffee plantation and a clove and cinnamon farm. I built a lovely house in Sumatra. Please allow me to come and tell you about what I built for us.

With all my love,

Erik van Haden
I reread the letter, and I was stunned. I did remember the dance at the Altdorfers. I loved the feel of his hand in mine and how safe I felt as he swirled me around the room. In the alcove, the citrus smell of his shaving lotion was intoxicating. When he kissed my neck, my knees went weak. As his fingers stroked my hair, my heart pounded. I had to explain to my mother why I left with one hairstyle and returned with another. It was a magical night. After that, we went to concerts with friends and boating on the Amstel River. One day when we were picnicking by the Prince's Canal, Erik told me that he was going to the Dutch East Indies or Spice Islands to make his fortune. I knew he had been thinking about going, and I had tried to convince him to be a broker for the spice trade like my father, and stay in Amsterdam. He wanted the adventure of building a business in a foreign land. He asked me to wait for him; he said he would send messages to me as often as he found a ship going to Amsterdam. In shock, I agreed.

One year went by, and I received no message from Erik; maybe it was more difficult than we thought to find a ship heading this way. The second year I received no message; the third year there was still no message. In the fourth year, Johan von Klasen began to court me. Johan is a good man, and a kind man. Erik had been gone so long that I decided he might be dead or married to someone else. Johan and I married in the fifth year.

Johan has been a wonderful husband; he is kind and understanding. He has provided well for us, and we now have a delightful son, Hans. Hans is two, and the center of our lives. I pray that we will soon have more children.

I heard Johan open the door and a murmured exchange as he handed his coat to Hulda. I quickly slipped the letter into my desk drawer.

“Johan, did you have a good day? Dinner will be ready in just a few minutes. I’ve been practicing a new piece on the lute to play for you tonight after dinner. I hope you like it.”

“Marta, speaking of dinner, I would like you to give a dinner party for a new client of mine. I think he will be a very profitable client, so I want to get the relationship started off right. He has a coffee plantation and clove and cinnamon farm on the island of Sumatra.”

“Who is your new client, Johan?” I prayed it wasn’t Erik.
“His name is Erik van Haden.”
“You want to entertain a client in your home. Wouldn’t it be better to take him to your club?”
“Marta, no. I want him to feel special, and you plan such wonderful dinners. Get extra help if you need, and hire a quartet to play that evening. I want it to be a good evening.”
“If you are certain, then I will plan a dinner for next month.”
“Next month, no. Have the dinner next week. What’s wrong? You always enjoy having company and planning dinner parties. Are you feeling ill?”
“No, I’m fine. I’ll start planning the party tomorrow. Let’s go have dinner.”

All night I tossed and turned. I had to choose between two men who loved me. I thought about how I loved Erik’s touch, his smell and his daring. He is the adventure in my life. Johan, he is all that is calm and patient; life is good with him. Is Johan enough? Would I be throwing away too much to go to Erik? Oh, my heart, what should I do? I finally fell asleep, and when I woke I knew what my answer would be.

After seeing to Hans, settling him down with his governess, and approving the menus for the week, I went to my desk. I pulled out Erik’s letter and reread it. Then I took out my best stationary and began to write.

Dear Erik,

What a surprise to hear from you. I haven’t heard from you in seven years. I thought you might be dead or married to someone else. As you found out, I am married and have a two-year-old son whom I adore. You also learned that my husband is a spice broker. Thank you for choosing him to sell your spices; he is delighted with your contract, but he does not need your business.

I spent last night trying to decide if I would meet with you. You will always be the man of adventure and daring in my life. I admire that you were able to go to the Spice Islands and do so well. There was a time when I would have enjoyed the adventure and daring, but now I need someone who is constant and peaceful. I need a man who
will be home every evening and teach my son all that a man should know. Johan is a man of calm and peace.

If you still love me as you say you do, I have a favor to ask of you. If you should see me walking along the canals, please don’t speak to me. If you should see me at a concert or party, please don’t come up to me. When you receive an invitation to dinner at my house, please invent an excuse not to come. It is too dangerous for me to see you.

Sincerely,

Marta von Klasen

I gave my letter to Hulda for the messenger, then I walked over to the fireplace and threw Erik’s letter into the fire. “Good bye, my darling Erik,” I thought as I watched the letter burn. “May you find a woman worthy of you.”
With the sure gait of a stallion and all the machismo a less-than-five pound, year-old Chihuahua could muster, a small white canine trotted into the backyard. The morning sun’s rays lit up his rough-and-tumble, five-o’clock-shadow profile like a rock star on center stage. He stopped, lifted his head in slow motion and pushed his hind legs back until they met the paw prints he had left behind.

The little giant held that lengthening pose for a moment, and then opened wide for a yawn that demonstrated his perfect harmony with the universe. “I am the great, the mighty JAGGER. HEAR ME ROAR.” He broke into a junkyard dog growl. Then, with distinct bravado, he released a series of token yips, as if to first mark the space around him before marking his terra firma.

In simultaneous step from stage right, the nine-pound, eight-year-old Italian Greyhound, glided — *en glisser* — on her long, slender limbs. Across the green belt between two columns of trees, the lovely, cocoa colored Giselle moved with the lyrical grace of a prima ballerina. Her aristocratic nose hovered just above the ground during a purpose-driven search. In a sudden pause, with her body fully extended and her tail in precise curl formation, she found the essence of familiarity. She lowered her hind legs in a deep *plie*, marking her stage with finesse.

Junkyard Jagger leaped like a wild steed towards her in the midst of her *releve* — her rising with an air of elegance. He lingered and delighted in the scent of his exquisite lady. He took a stance on three legs with his tail in perfect comma formation. “An *arabesque* for my lady. I kinda like talking in this new ballet lingo my girl is teaching me.” He marked the site of her *plie*. He puffed out his chest, stretched his neck as far as it would go, then turned his head upward in flawless *attitude* and exclaimed, “I love the smell of a dog’s life in the morning. It sure beats my stint on the streets before this pack took me in. Ya know, second chances are the best ones.”

Jagger sprang to Lady Giselle’s side. His clipped pace kept up with her stride in their dance of a new day. Then came the grand finale. In the last movement, Mother Nature’s music
and choreography directed him to turn left and her, to the right. After their final steps, the pair exited their backyard stage and returned to their backstage door where they called out.

Their human companion greeted her furry friends with one generous smile after another. “Is my dynamic duo ready to eat?” Her question was received with excited barks and wagging tails. “OK, then . . . breakfast for two is served.”

Wearing his loveable did-I-say-thanks grin, Jagger looked up before he took a bite. “It’s like I said before, second chances are the best ones.”
We all know about urban legends, modern folktales—exciting stories with plot and characters and elements of mystery, fear, horror, and/or humor—that serve a function or functions, often as cautionary tales or morality tales that depict someone acting badly who gets a well-deserved comeuppance. Many such tales serve the same function today that they served for our grandparents and great-grandparents, who lived—heaven knows how—without TV, computers, movies, cellphone or eBook readers. In the simplest terms, they entertain both the tellers and the listeners. The following story is a great example of the genre, so settle down and prepare to be righteously entertained by Josie Dan’s EVIL WINDS OF AUTUMN.

---

**EVIL WINDS OF AUTUMN**

**JOSIE DAN**

In a small Texas river community, an eerie calm weighed heavily in the still air as black clouds stretched across the distant sky, together announcing the impending arrival of autumn’s first major storm. A sudden flash of lightning branched from one side of the darkening atmosphere to the other. Thunder boomed, underscoring piercing human howls and shrieks—an unnerving duet for all those awaiting a seasonal dose of Mother Nature’s fury.

The human side of the duet, old man Gunther B, trolled the area surrounding his residence as the impending storm approached. Using one hand to maneuver his wheelchair in the middle of the two-lane blacktop road, he fashioned the other hand into his signature one-finger peace sign, and waved his contempt at the world. “Choke on this—a piece of my mind for all you jackasses! Heee yaahh.”

Relentless anger and hate drove this ugly lump of misery to explore new ways of crawling under the skins of every living thing around him. Not a day passed without his vicious attacks upon his neighbors. Even the preacher no longer carried his message of love and forgiveness to Gunther B’s door.

As though determined to wake the dead and cause angels to weep, Gunther B flung nonstop obscenities to the heavens. He stopped alongside a neighboring fence, where he lit yet another cigarette, and glared at two grazing horses. The chestnut mare
bolted. The paint mare reared, gnashing her teeth, and snorting wildly. Catching sight of Gunther B, the owners raced their jeep across the pasture to stop whatever lunacy he intended, and Gunther B moved on, reveling in the torment he had inflicted.

Echoes of his cackles followed by shrill wails soared high above the pines, flushed the few birds left in the trees, and shattered the quiet for what seemed like miles, as Gunther B straddled the broken yellow lines in the road in his fast moving seat for one, trailing a stench that permeated the area for hours. His dirty silver hair spiked out like long thorns. From behind, his head resembled a porcupine in a defensive pose. From the front, his weathered face was a tattered map that mirrored hard living and reflected the wickedness responsible for the escalation of nightmares and apparitions among the surrounding river population. Claims of Gunther B hovering in his wheelchair outside bedroom windows contributed to sleepless nights and children insisting on sleeping in their parents’ beds. Even the youngest and the most vulnerable had been traumatized by the depravity of this one man.

His cigarette hung from cracked, discolored lips; emptiness masked the color of his eyes. His thin form spasmed, and — at the top of his lungs — he cursed his twenty-two year confinement in a motorized chair, a chair that took him everywhere except to a place of peace. Spewing profanities, Gunther B hastened through the main gate into his property and came to an abrupt halt. On the ground lay a section of his fence, kicked in earlier in the day by a beast destined, if Gunther B had anything to say about it, to receive a lesson he would never forget. His neighbor Holly Vara pulled her truck to the edge of his driveway, but remained in her vehicle. “I noticed the break in your fence, Mr. Barber. Need some help?”

A slip of his hand to the small of his back produced a handgun, which he aimed and held steady. “Looks like you’re in luck today, little brown-stained Missy. I’m gonna be a gentleman, and let you off with a polite warning. Get your mangy half-breed ass off my property, or I’m gonna demonstrate what my American lead can do for you — and that pile of foreign crap you’re driving.”

Without a word or a parting glance, Holly Vara drove away in the direction of retired couple Calvin and Lila Young for a final
check in before hunkering down for the storm. The Youngs met her on their porch, pacing, using exaggerated gestures, talking over each other’s high-pitched words — each one describing the verbal abuse of their horses and their prized bull’s ordeal with the notorious Gunther B. Once again the two most serene people on earth had been Gunther Blasted, a common condition in those parts.

“Uhhhhhhh! I would love to beat his backside with my broom handle. I’d beat him good — or at least until I felt better. I know I should turn this over to the Lord. But it’s always in His time. Holly, we’ve got a time change around the corner — you know — the fall back of the daylight savings.”

“Lila, take a breath.” Holly put her arm around her elderly friend.

“No. No. No more taking breaths. Why should Gunther Barber have one extra hour to mucky-muck somebody else’s day? The Lord owns the biggest broomstick in the world. He should begin the beat-down and keep it going until I FEEL BETTER. Uhhhhhh, that devil has no respect for moral boundaries!”

Placing both arms around Lila, Holly reminded the couple about the approaching hurricane. “We need some cool-headedness here, Miss Lila Young. Don’t let this man highjack your sensibilities. We can deal with Gunther B after tomorrow, but right now, our plates are full. Who knows what the morning will bring. OK? If y’all need anything, call me or come on over. We can barbecue briskets tomorrow for the road-clearing volunteers. I’ve made a few extra German chocolate cakes to share with those good friends. Hey, Calvin — don’t worry about Freight Train. Freight Train’s a big boy; he can take care of himself.”

Calvin’s Brahma bull Freight Train had no kinship with anything ordinary. Everybody knew that Freight Train held a better understanding of humans than humans held of one another. You had to admire the ‘live and let live’ attitude with which he met all comers — unless, of course, they interfered with his afternoon walk to the river.

According to the Youngs, Freight Train’s daily saunter down the blacktop to enjoy his favorite watering hole was interrupted by the local madman’s vile rantings. Calvin and Lila
Young rushed to end Gunther B’s attack on their docile Brahma, but arrived too late. Gunther B had spoiled the mood. Taking offense at this deliberate showing of bad manners, Freight Train responded to his loathsome adversary by kicking down a section of the man’s fence, then that hunk of beef lumbered back home to his stall, foregoing the best part of his day.

“Freight Train, my big guy, you are my hero.” Holly’s wide smile approved that beautiful Brahma bull’s execution of logical consequences for unacceptable behavior. “Cheshire becomes me,” she told him. “I think I’ll keep this grin.”

Nightfall was accompanied by a hard rain. Wind speeds increased, and both rain and unknown objects pelted against exterior surfaces of homes. The velocity also created muffled wind screams, similar to those made by Gunther B, while forceful blasts circled the same paths relentlessly. The sound like speeding locomotives and the snapping and crashing of trees prompted children to curl up in fetal positions to seek safety in their parent’s arms. Parents prayed their roofs would remain unscathed, as electrical devices surrendered to the storm and coppertop batteries took over until sunrise.

By early morning, residents had geared up to assess the damages. One by one neighbors emerged from their homes. Toppled trees blocked the streets, so they brought axes, chainsaws, ropes, chains and tractors to clear the roads for emergency vehicles. Downed power lines meant no electricity or water for a week, maybe more, since people depended on electricity to run well pumps for their water supply. Household generators began to buzz throughout the area.

Neighborly checks uncovered only one serious incident. At first, no one wanted to set foot on Gunther B’s place for fear of walking into one of his ambushes. Holly volunteered to do the checking, and the Peterson twins grabbed their hunting rifles and horses, despite their mother’s disapproval, and joined her.

Gunther B’s house stood intact. No trees, no shrubs — not even his uninhabited birdhouse — displayed any signs of disturbance. To add to the picture, the broken pieces of Gunther B’s fence lay in the exact spot where they had fallen on the previous day. The mighty winds had chosen to bypass the ten-acre Barber homestead.
Holly shouted his name several times. No response. On horseback, the three passed with care through the fence opening, then up the front walkway. All her calls to Gunther B continued to be unanswered. When they reached the back of the house, broken glass covered the patio. “Mr. Barber, you OK?” she called. “Mr. Barber. It’s Holly Vara, Mr. Barber.”

Dismounting from her horse, Holly eased toward the still-quiet house. The sound of cracking glass under her feet accompanied the pounding of her heart in her ears and in her chest. She hesitated, heaved a breath, then leaned in slow motion to take a peek. “It’s too dark. I can’t see a thing,” she whispered. “Help me out, boys.” The twins swept their battery-operated high beams into the darkened bedroom — back and forth, up and down. Holly pointed, “In the corner – to the left.” There sat the old man himself, in his wheeled throne, in the corner of the room, his cigarettes scattered across the floor.

Holly climbed over the sill. The twin brothers stayed close behind. “Mr. Barber . . . Mr. Barber . . .” There was no answer. “I think he’s dead,” she whispered. Holly could not look away from the Gunther B’s face. In death, his sunken eyes displayed the same emptiness they wore in life.

“Miss Holly!” It was Ryan, his pulse obviously speeding. “What are these splatters on the walls and the ceiling?”

“Anybody notice something weird in here, besides the smell?” Ian suddenly interjected. “No shards of glass or water damage on the floor—” he hesitated, listening to agitating sounds from outside. “Hey, what’s wrong with the horses? I think we need to get back.” Throwing both his legs over the windowsill, he was outside in a single bound. “I’m outta here.”

Word of Gunther B’s passing quickly spread, as wildly distorted accounts of what the twins saw in Gunther’s house made the rounds. Rumors breathed life into a story of an army of dead who came from the grave to collect a soul deemed worthy, although somewhat reluctant, to burn in the pits of hell. During a fierce battle, it was said, Gunther B’s flaming arms threw a dozen shadow marchers with a force of such diabolical magnitude that they melted into the surface of the walls and ceiling. It proved, people agreed, that demons lived in him. This, and the evidence of glass discovered only outside the house, reinforced their beliefs that Gunther B was possessed. The locals decided their
truth of Gunther B’s life and death: spirits Gunther Barber had offended during his time on earth dragged away his soul, then transported it from this world into the fires of the next.

His personal storm of volatility and mayhem had ended in the black of night — alone. Who would mourn Gunther Barber? When called to prayer for Gunther B, what everyone prayed was that his soul be gone forever.

Satisfied at this appropriate ending to Gunther B’s long and vicious persecution of his neighbors, in the midst of the devastation neighbors all worked together, preparing for more losses in the coming days. The river would indeed crest, but every neighbor took comfort in the knowledge they could count on one another to survive any storm. The morning mist subsided, and the sun’s brilliance painted the sky. The air smelled fresh and clean. The evil winds of autumn had put an end to Gunther B’s long reign of terror.
Not too long ago, deep in the dark, dank green of a Louisiana cypress swamp, there lived a very old, very large alligator named Moses. He had lived in that swamp so long that none of the other swamp creatures knew how old he was. Alligators grow a little larger every year, and Moses was the largest, scariest gator you ever saw. He had big claws on all his toes, a long, fat ole tail that sounded like a tree falling when it slapped the water, and he had a snout full of sharp teeth that would’ve made any dragon proud.

Most everyone in the swamp was frightened of Ole Moses. According to Missus Hoot Owl, who kept track of such things, Moses had tasted a sample of just about every living creature in Big Cypress Swamp!

Now in actual fact, despite his evil reputation, Ole Moses had never eaten anything but fish – well, maybe just one or two ducks and of course a few frogs, but usually he wouldn’t go out of his way to chase anything with wings or legs. He just didn’t care. Fishing was easy, so he mostly ate fish.

Ole Moses’s home was in a hard-to-get-to part of the swamp. It was next to a sort of natural canal that wound through the cypress trees and palmettos. But it was clogged with old logs, duckweed, water lilies, and other swamp plants, so the only human who ever made it back in there was an occasional hunter. When that happened, Moses would just slide into his favorite hidey-hole behind a curtain of willow branches and Spanish moss. Moses was never very far from his hiding place, but one day, as he was sunning himself on a bank nearby, a family of
possums moved into a hollow under the roots of the very willow tree that hid his hole!

“WHO?” said Missus Hoot Owl who happened to be sitting in the willow, “WHO are you?” Missus Possum didn’t answer, she just started digging under the willow to make her new home a little cosier.

“ You must be from some other part of the swamp, cousin, or you wouldn’t be digging under that tree!” said Missus Hoot Owl. But Missus Possum just kept digging, her baby possums hanging on for dear life as dirt was flung up every which way.

“I guess you didn’t hear me, cousin,” Missus Hoot Owl continued. “You happen to be digging in the den of the most fearsome meat-eatin’ monster in the whole swamp.”

Missus Possum paused to eat a grub she had found. She glared up at Missus Hoot Owl in the branches above her and growled, “Look, you don’t scare me, and if you come anywhere near my babies, I’ll rip your dirty feathers off and use ‘em to line this hole.”

“WHO? Who do you think you are? I wouldn’t lay a claw on one of your filthy children, you foolish marsupial! I was just trying to warn you, but since you refuse to listen to your betters, I’ll not waste any more time on you. Good day!” And with that, Missus Hoot Owl took her ruffled feathers to another roost.

Meanwhile, Moses had dozed the afternoon away on his nice sunny bank. When he woke up, he decided to spend the night in his hidey-hole to conserve the body heat he had built up during the day. When he slipped into his hole, Missus Possum wasn’t there to see him. She had decided to go out foraging. She found a perfectly good gaspergoo rotting along the bank and feasted on it until a bobcat scared her off. On her way back to the old willow, she came across two fat juicy night crawlers just begging to be guests for dinner.
Afterwards, Missus Possum crawled back under the Willow, passing within inches of Ole Moses’s tail, which she took for one of the tree’s massive roots. She lay down in her nice dry hole, coaxed her babies down off her back, and let them have their supper.

About this time, Missus Hoot Owl was telling everyone in the neighborhood about “that foolish possum family” who were destined to become alligator meat. Snug in her den, Missus Possum didn’t hear Missus Hoot Owl, and Ole Moses never listened to gossip, so the possum family and the giant alligator happily spent the night of February 13th in mutual ignorance of each other’s presence.

Early the next morning, Missus Possum decided to climb up into the willow’s branches. She stopped about halfway up, coiled her strong ropelike tail around a branch, and let her body swing out into space, with nothing below her except the water and Ole Moses. The five babies clung to her back and surveyed their surroundings with wide eyes.

Missus Possum felt drowsy and was about to take a nap when she happened to look down at the water below her. She saw what appeared to be a huge old cypress log with part of its twisted trunk lying up on the bank among the roots of the old willow. “What a big ole log,” Missus Possum said to herself. Suddenly, to her utter astonishment, the log moved.

Moses slipped out of his lair, the moss curtain brushing gently against his hide as he made his way out into the morning sun. Missus Possum watched him go, and breathed a sigh of relief when he was gone.

“My goodness!” she said to herself. “That’s the largest alligator I’ve ever seen! So that’s what that crazy owl was hooting about. She was right! I have to find another home.”
Missus Possum didn’t go hunting for a new house right away though. Instead, she took a nap, hanging upside down in that willow tree!

Meanwhile, Moses was just starting to warm up when he heard an unfamiliar sound. He raised up on his front legs and listened. He heard a squirrel barking somewhere, and the little splashes of minnows jumping out of the water to escape a hungry bass. He heard the croaking of tree frogs, the quacking of ducks, and the squawking of a crane driving a rival out of his territory.

And then he heard a terrifying sound, the sound of a human voice, followed quickly by the loud “Bang!” of the human’s gun. The whole swamp fell silent and, as fast as a pirogue on the way to a fait-do-do, Moses slid into the water and paddled back to the willow tree.

When Moses slipped into his hole, poor Missus Possum was halfway down the trunk of the willow. When she saw him, she gave a startled little growl and quickly scrambled back into the tree.

Moses spied Missus Possum, but he ignored her. He was too busy worrying about the hunters to pay any attention to a family of possums. Moses turned around in his hole and faced outwards, just as Missus Possum had first seen him that morning. After a while, they heard a motor start up and slowly fade into the distance. Moses knew the humans had gone away, but he didn’t dare move from his den. He had an uneasy feeling they might return.
Soon, the swamp sprang back to life with its usual sounds, and Missus Possum relaxed a little. She was hungry and wanted to climb down, but Missus Hoot Owl’s words kept coming back to her like memories of a bad dream. “The most fearsome meat-eating monster in the swamp!” Oh, my, and here she was, with her poor little babies dangling above the monster’s wicked snout like so many juicy plums. Oh, why hadn’t she listened to that awful hoot owl?

Missus Possum stayed in that willow tree the rest of the day and half the night. When the moon came up, she finally decided she had to either face Ole Moses, or wait there for the humans to return. So, very carefully, watching Moses like a hawk, Missus Possum began to back out of the willow. When she was almost down, one of her babies made a small mewing sound. Moses whipped his head around, and Missus Possum froze in her tracks.

If Moses was the monster Missus Hoot Owl claimed, he could easily have had himself a possum dinner. Missus Possum could tell Ole Moses was hungry and frightened, but at the same time, she knew with the instincts of any mother that this creature meant her no harm. So, she swallowed her fear and began to back down the tree again. Just as she reached the ground, a furtive splashing noise caused her to freeze once more.

Moses’s head snapped back toward the canal. A ghostly blue light suddenly illuminated their little moss-covered chamber, went away, then suddenly returned. Moses backed up until his tail was resting right next to Missus Possum.

Outside, two hunters were studying the old willow. The blue light was reflected off the curtain of moss, and it bathed the hunters and their jon boat in an eerie blue glow. One of the hunters whispered to his friend. The other man nodded and they began to move closer to the willow.

Inside, Missus Possum had heard the whisper. She didn’t know what the words meant, but she knew the hunters were closing in. Missus Possum was ready to run for it. She
could scamper behind the willow and vanish into the night. She was ready to flee, but for some reason, she stood her ground. Somewhere deep in her breast, some primitive emotion was fighting to surface.

The blue light was very close now. It was time to go. Time to run. The mother possum, laden with her babies, turned and started to scuttle away. Suddenly, a thin wooden pole poked through the moss and jerked it aside. Then a bright white light replaced the blue glow.

In that instant, the emotion in Missus Possum’s breast broke out through her throat in the form of a furious war cry. The possum turned back toward the canal, and before she knew it, she was charging along Ole Moses’s back like it was a broad mossy log,

All of this happened in the blink of an eye. The man with the pole heard the surprisingly loud growl and the scrabble of the possum’s charge, and the man with the light pushed away from the tree so quickly that his poling partner nearly lost his balance.

“Watch out, Boo!” hollered the man with the light, and reached for his gun.

“Hey, Jean,” laughed his partner, “what you doing with that shootgun?”

“Me, I’m fixing to shoot this shootgun!”

“Whooee! What you thought it is, huh?”

“Me, I don’t know, but certain sure I’m gonna find out,” Jean shouted.

“Aw, Jean, it’s only a mama possum. We’re after gator, not possum. Me, I don’t want to shoot no mama possum!”

Jean lowered his gun, and smiled sheepishly at his partner.
“OK, Boo,” he laughed, “but you don’t tell no one, or me, I bring you back and throw youself to that possum!”

Boo grinned, and promised he would never tell about the ferocious possum, no. Then they both decided to call it a night.

Mama Possum stood on her haunches listening to the men as they made their way back out of the swamp. After awhile, she heard the sound of a motor start up and fade into the distance. As she turned around to go back to the high ground, the surface under her moved, and it suddenly came to her that she was standing on the back of a hungry alligator. With her heart in her throat, she scrambled quickly to the bank. When she looked back, she saw Ole Moses’s wicked snout smiling crookedly at her.

Now on any other day, in the big Cypress Swamp, this story might have had a very unhappy ending. But this wasn’t just any other day. It was Saint Valentine’s.

Ever since then, that possum family and Ole Moses have been the very best of friends. And even now, if you could make your way deep into the darkest part of the swamp, you just might see a very surprised Missus Hoot Owl watching a family of possums taking a ride - on the back of wicked Ole Moses, the most fearsome meat-eating monster in Big Cypress Swamp.
The young woman sat on the sill of her open window listening to Edith Piaf, “the little sparrow,” sing *No Regrets* on the radio. She looked down at the humanity walking under her wet sheets hanging out to dry in the warm sun and thought about how often she had done this before, and how often hundreds of others had done this before her.

They were lucky to have found this room in the remains of what used to be a grand hotel. The last shelling had taken out the back row of rooms, right along the corridor, and she could see the rubble left in the courtyard. It was amazing that the front rooms along the footpath still held onto their former glory.

She looked down at her hands, worker’s hands, swollen red and raw from the lye soap she used to scrub brush the sheets on the table with water retrieved from the fountain. This was washday, and the cherished soapy wash water was reused to scrub the floors clean until they could eat off them. She was weary and content with herself; all in all, it had been a good day.

They lived in a port city. Although the war ships in the harbor menaced their daily lives, the fishmonger still came with his cart of treasure. Looking up at her, he beckoned for her to come and admire his catch of the day. Good old Joe, he always saved a special something just for her. He probably saved a special fish for all his customers, but somehow he made her feel as if she was the only one.

She peeked over to the open bureau drawer to see if the baby stirred—not a muscle. With as little noise as possible, she grabbed her satchel, tiptoed out the door, and bounded down the path to see what goodies Joe had for her today. Joe was a round and happy man, his cheeks ruddy from his hard life at sea. As he displayed his catch, he sang the refrain of the song she had been listening to on the radio, *No Regrets*, and told her what he knew about it.
No, nothing at all:
No, I don't regret anything at all:
Neither the good that was given me,
Nor the evil. They're all the same to me.

According to Joe, Piaf had dedicated this song to the French Foreign Legion. At the time, the 1st Foreign Parachute Regiment had backed a failed putsch by the French military against the civilian leadership of Algeria. When the military coup was defeated, their officers were arrested and interned, and the regiment was dissolved forever, the non-commissioned officers, corporals and Legionnaires reassigned to other units. When they left their barracks, the regiment was defiantly singing Piaf’s song.

Uplifted because the civilians had triumphed over professional soldiers, the woman decided she would buy whatever Joe had on his cart. It happened to be sardines, one of her favorites—another good omen, she decided. Though surrounded by despair, desolation and destruction all around her, she ran almost joyously back to her room. “At least for tonight,” she thought, “no regrets!”
You can call Miguel Timm “mad scientist” for more than the obvious reason. Yes, he’s an inventor, a designer, a creative genius at work don’t bother him right now!

But he’s also angry. Like most of us, he’s been looking at the world and the trends, and he’s not happy about what’s happening. Miguel is an engineer, and he has worked in the oil and gas industry for a long time. He knows the score.

He’s also a savvy businessman. Miguel’s company, AXIOM TECHNOLOGIES, LLC, is in good shape; he’s in the process of transferring the business to his employees as he retires, so it’s clear that he is socially proactive. AXIOM is a Texas company that provides safety system products for the oil and gas industry, and all of its products are manufactured in Texas. Oil and gas field emissions are a serious problem; they are unsafe, and they endanger the environment. The danger goes beyond the nearby workers; we’ve all heard about major explosions caused by gas leaks. AXIOM’s innovative products are the next generation solutions to human safety and environmental problems.

Miguel Timm invented a solar air compressor that he used in developing the ZEUS System, Zero Emissions Under The Sun, for the oil and gas industry’s wellhead monitoring. The Dual Solar Air Compressor completely eliminates natural gas emission sourced at the well site. Solar also eliminates power disruption problems. See more, below.

Our conversation with Miguel was wide-ranging. We talked about his creative process (See THE CREATIVE PROCESS article, above), his interest in the environment, about his inventions and innovations, about what’s wrong with people, the real purpose and effect of entitlements, what’s wrong with the world, why we are not seeing solutions to the serious problems
we’re facing –why there is not the explosive development of new ideas, methods, and solutions for which we obviously have the brainpower and technological expertise.

Mr. Timm says that development of solutions is being restricted, deliberately, by a number of interests. As we talked, it occurred to us that the environmental debate is a good example of that process. What’s happening with “climate change” is a microcosm of the larger problem. Here’s what happened – and what happens every time we hit a major snag: somebody discovered the problem and threw it out there for the world to work on. Some bodies noticed and decided there was something in it for them – and the money train started to move.

Instead of people getting together to solve the problem, people clubbed up to get their share of the pot. Politicians, for example, decided this “issue” could be pivotal – that it could help them keep their constituents churning and might produce some contributions. It was also a great way to funnel money to their supporters. Each special interest group picks a small facet of the problem to agitate about – and nobody’s minding the store. Keeping the problem or issue alive helps to maintain their status quo – their standing, their power, their source of the folding green stuff.

“Yes, there is climate change. Instead of analyzing the problem and proposing solutions, interested factions picked a self-interest position and concentrate on that alone. Democrats decided climate change is caused by fossil fuels. Republicans, reacting to Democrat attacks, decided it’s not. Instead of attacking the problem, they are attacking each other – and no effective solutions are being implemented. Instead of figuring out how to protect ourselves and future generations, they are busy figuring out how to use the problem to take their opponents down – or to increase their personal wealth.
Serious thinkers agree that using fossil fuels plays a part in climate change. But history teaches us we’ve had a lot of climate change, serious climate change – and long before we increased our use of fossil fuels. Ice ages, glaciation, and interglacial periods are matters of fact. The various contributing factors have long been established as “fact,” but the special interest groups ignore all of that.

Intelligent global thinkers agree that fossil fuel is not the essential factor. They believe that humans have destabilized the natural chemical factory we live in by destroying the plant balance, and the lack of plant action to purify the environment is the most serious problem – and that it’s easily correctable. It’s because we, who live in a closed system that was perfectly balanced, with the earth renewing and cleansing itself, deliberately unbalanced it – and we continue to unbalance it. The plants not only produce the oxygen we breathe, they also clean toxins from the environment. Human activities first began to have a significant global impact on the earth’s climate and ecosystems about 8,000 years ago, with the intense farming activities of our early agrarian ancestors, including China’s large-scale rice agriculture, and the deforestation in Europe, according to accepted glaciation experts.

Increased industrialization was OK as long as the plant balance supported it. Agriculture and deforestation affected the balance, and when we increased industrialization we simultaneously started denuding the earth, clearcutting and replacing the plants with heat-building, heat-retaining concrete, for example – and overloaded the system. We build roads, and we don’t use just the land we need; we make wide right of ways,
keep them cut down to the earth – and contribute to our own gradual destruction. While factions perpetuate the controversy, subdivision builders continue to clearcut, as do many others.

So why aren’t the climate change contenders doing anything to fix the problem? The reason is that they are occupied with their own selfish interests. Another factor might be that the simple solution doesn’t play into power politics. Anybody can plant a tree.

It also occurred to us that for thousands of years we replenished the earth with our own bodies; in the recent past, for hundreds of years, we’ve been denying the earth those elements. We take essential elements from the planet for food, clothing, shelter, and other uses. Then, when we die, we lock our bodies into caskets that never deteriorate, thus removing the essential elements from our closed system: so much for recycling. It wasn’t broke until we fixed it.

Miguel Timm is familiar with history. “The world has been good to us,” he says. “Every time we got in trouble, there was a solution waiting for us. We used coal, but then there were more problems with it, so we started using oil. Now we’re finding the problems with that, so we’re changing how we do things, and we’re going after other energy sources.” But we’re not moving strategically, and we’re not moving fast- and we’re not moving efficiently.

We live in a closed system that defines redundancy. But we can’t just rely on Mother Nature and chance. Miguel thinks we have to start taking responsibility for our actions. We only have one world; it doesn’t look like the US government is taking any steps to enable us to move off of Earth – so we’d better get busy.

The biggest problem we have to overcome is ourselves. Miguel says that there is no lack of talent and energy, no shortage of bright minds and great ideas. We have the technology and the expertise to move ahead. But, he says, the advances we need are being deliberately stifled. Old tech is
fighting to hold its dominant position. He knows this because of his own experience.

The reason Miguel started his own company is that he was designing and inventing great new things – but the powers that be in the company he worked for kept shutting him down. They did not want advances. Like a lot of us, they didn’t want change. They were perfectly happy doing things the old way – and maintaining their power and control. In order to follow his dreams, Miguel had to start his own company.

That’s the way it is in everything, Miguel says. Humans have a natural resistance to changing the status quo. Part of that is security interest: we feel safer with the things we know. New things can be dangerous. Humans also have a natural resistance to letting go of power and control, once they have it. This natural resistance translates from the personal into the larger world, in all areas of life.

In business, for example, Miguel says that in order to be successful, you have to keep moving, find the next need and be ready to fill it. You have to be willing to embrace change. But when you try to change, you run right into the entrenched inertia of the individuals at the control level. Timm believes that the only time such individuals embrace change is when they clearly perceive an advantage to themselves in that change.

He also says that balance is essential: you have to maintain the profits or go out of business. People have to be willing to pay for the solution you develop. But development stops when the powers-that-be are more invested in safety than in development. He mentions several big companies; he’s an investor, too, so he keeps track of what’s going on in a number of industries. He sees movers and shakers who are playing it safe, going for the safe money instead of developing for the future, and he believes that attitude is one of the reasons we are lagging behind in essential developments.
With all of this concern for the environment and climate change, you would think individuals and companies would find selfish advantages and embrace advances that address these issues, but it ain’t necessarily so.

ZEUS is a prime example. Miguel Timm developed ZEUS to eliminate significant gas leakage that occurs in the oil and gas industry. Leaking gas not only damages the environment; in many cases, it can kill. We are all familiar with examples of explosions caused by leaking gas. The current systems not only develop leaks, they frequently do not have notification protocols that work most efficiently so leaks can be timely addressed. ZEUS stands for “Zero Emissions Under the Sun,” and it uses solar energy, rather than the gas other systems use – the gas which those systems are monitoring. It is cost-effective and prevents damage to the environment – and is less dangerous to the workers. Great idea, huh? All of the oil and gas companies must be jumping on that, right? – particularly since Timm’s company, AXIOM, will install the equipment and allow the user to test it without charge for a significant period of time. Add in the fact that the oil and gas industry is under a lot of pressure because of the environmental issues, and defense costs are rising, and anybody can see that they are all rushing to try this new system. Right?

It ain’t happenin’. The oil and gas industry is clinging to the old ways, the way they’ve always done it. Meanwhile a group of state attorneys general have openly announced their conspiracy to deprive those they label “climate deniers” – ExxonMobil, for example – of their rights under color of law, a federal offense, by filing suits that will cost those companies a lot of money to fight. The AGs claim that the different opinions of the “deniers” as to the causes of climate change are not protected by free speech; that these opinions are fraudulent, and that the “deniers” are deliberately despoiling the environment, in effect. The usual suspects are involved; the idea is to compel the
“climate deniers” to pay up, big time, in settlements to those filing suit.

One would expect the feds to put a stop to this unlawful behavior, but instead the US Attorney General got right onboard that money train. And nowhere in this brouhaha will a concerned citizen find any attempt to address the real problem – and none of the money, if they are able to extort it, will be applied to solutions.

The result, the AGs hope, is that their actions will have a chilling effect on those who do not get in line with the AGs- and their supporters. In other words, they’re going to use their offices to silence the opposition. *Right here in River City, folks!*

Miguel says we’ve got to start addressing the real issues if we want to continue living in a free, American society. We agree. Conversing with Miguel Timm gave us a lot of food for thought. For example, it occurred to us that for many years, the politicians and paid activists could feed us whatever they came up with, and without an active impartial press, we had no way of knowing the truth. Now, however, we have sources we have never had before, and we can find out who is doing what and why. The internet is unrivaled for immediate access. That is why politicians want to put some controls on it – access to information is not in their best interests when their interests don’t coincide with ours. *The truth will keep you free,* but it is often difficult to determine what is truth and what is not; it is not true, as many young people believe, that anything online or on television has to be true or it couldn’t be there. We have to seek information and we have to be smart about the information we get. We have to look at the *why* of things.

For example, many people believe that the so-called “entitlements” are implemented in order to help poor people. We
agree with Miguel that it is a fact that the entitlements are barely sufficient to help people squeak by- and insufficient to help them rise above poverty. The entitlement programs are self-sustaining, and what they serve to sustain is an underclass for all practical purposes enslaved to the politicians who ensure that those insufficient entitlements continue. The entitled have become a constituency that is necessary to the continuation of the power and money of the politicians- so it must be maintained at all costs.

After thinking about it, we realized that politicians and paid activists (“they”) know the solutions to the problem of poverty. All you have to do is look at them and their families to see that they have implemented those solutions for themselves. They and their children are educated and skilled. Meanwhile, back in the pore folks’ world, we get entitlements, but no help to educate ourselves into skilled jobs that will pay adequately. They don’t provide daycare or transportation to classes, or special programs that work.

When Miguel started us thinking, we realized that, instead, “they” provide a scapegoat- the 1%- to focus our attention on anything except those who are charged with fixing problems but instead work on maintaining the status quo for their own personal benefit. It’s called a scapegoat because that focus allows those who are really at fault to escape the repercussions of their wrongdoing. Infact, the 1% and the top 49% of moneymakers pay all but about 2% of the taxes that build and maintain our infrastructure, according to federal tax statistics.

We noticed that “they” also continually agitate about other, nonessential things. One example is the controversy deliberately stirred up over providing free birth control to college...
students. To hear the pundits, this was a world-shaking problem. But those of us in the “elder” community are well aware that the best birth control method is absolutely free, and we consider that the idea of providing free birth control to students, while denying essential items like hearing aids, glasses, and dentures to elders, is beyond ludicrous, particularly since we all paid our social security and medicare taxes so we would have adequate services in retirement.

We thought about the fact that “they” foster illegal immigration in defiance of the US Constitution, and that the result is further reducing the number of jobs available for American citizens, and burdening our tax monies – which is helpful to politicians and paid activists busily creating constituencies, but not helpful to the rest of us. They tell us we should share with these poor unfortunates; however, they are not willing to share their assets, and they have yet to explain the difference between illegals who break the law to acquire money in the US and those who break the law in other ways – all for money.

Why do “they” do these things and many others that are counterproductive for the American citizens they are supposed to be serving? Like the ancient Roman emperors, they believe that providing “beer and circuses” will distract us from the important issues. They are not serving American citizens; they are serving themselves.

Corruption in government becomes obvious once we start thinking about it. That the corruption in government extends to our judicial system is self-evident: Democrats and Republicans would not be fighting about judicial appointments if judges were not corrupt. Under the Constitution, judges are bound to obey the law of the land, which is the Constitution and laws in compliance with it. The Constitution is clear and unambiguous, so party

“Sometimes it seems that if a man cannot build, he needs to destroy.”
affiliation should not be a factor. An uncorrupted judge will rule in compliance with the Constitution, regardless of his political leanings. Further, judges are to serve only during “good behavior.” Violating the Constitution can certainly not be seen as good behavior. But the politicians are absolutely sure that appointing judges from their own parties will result in benefits to them.

Another factor indicating judicial corruption is the “immunity” which judges have granted themselves, in despite of the Constitution. There is no immunity in the American law of the land, the US Constitution. In fact, the Constitution expressly forbids it when it states that each citizen shall enjoy the rights and privileges of all other citizens, and have equal justice under the law. If judges are immune, we are all immune. Corrupt judges also granted unconstitutional immunity to local, state, and federal governments. For government immunity, they cite the 11th Amendment. But the 11th Amendment is a simple jurisdiction statement, that the federal judicial system has no jurisdiction over suits filed against a state by a non-citizen of that state. There’s no immunity there.

We realized that a lot of people in government have gotten away with a lot of things in the past, primarily because of the lack of knowledge on the part of citizens. We also suffer from inertia. We have not been minding our store.

Miguel Timm does not agree with us on all of the issues we discussed, but we all agree that it’s past time that we started paying attention and compelling our government officials to obey the law of the land. We briefly discussed the Nuremberg Accords that arose from the Nazi war crimes trials, when it was made clear that both the issuer of an illegal order, rule, or law, and the person or persons who obeyed that illegal order, rule, or law, were equally guilty of unlawful action. In the United States, any order, rule, or law that does not comply with the Constitution is illegal. The frequency and blatancy with which our officials issue such illegal orders, rules, and laws leads us to believe that
they either don’t know the Constitution, or just believe that they can get away with practically anything.

As you can tell, our conversation with the Mad Scientist quickly exceeded the boundaries we established for our interviews with creative artists. We found that talking with Miguel is a synergistic experience, just like the process neuroscientists use to describe how creating thinking works. Miguel Timm’s ideas flow, and his ideas stimulate ideas in others. A brilliant man, a creative thinker, a designer of innovative products, and a thought-provoking conversationalist, he is a great example of a creative artist — Miguel Timm, Mad Scientist.
THE MOVE
BEVERLY CLYDE

I ease the car into the parking space. As I walk toward James, I feel the warm sun on my face and the dewy grass tickles my sandaled toes. The bench feels cool as I sit on it. I raise the gardenias to my face and am overwhelmed by the rich floral scent of the blossoms. I lay the flowers on the grass in front of me and say, “Hello, James. I brought you some of the gardenias from the yard. I’m glad you planted them near the back fence and not around the pool as we planned. The fragrance would be too strong around the pool, but the white flowers sparkling against the dark green leaves accent the back of the yard beautifully.”

Stretching, I pull some blueberries out of my tote bag. “James, I’m too old to sit on cold stone, but this is the only place I can talk to you,” I muse. “The blueberries are so plump and sweet this year. The bushes are full of berries, but I must fight the birds, especially the robins, for the fruit. I don’t mind the robins getting the blueberries because it’s wonderful to wake up to their cheer-up, cheer-up chirp. You planted those bushes over twenty years ago. Our garden is a magical place and it brings back so many memories. I can’t imagine living somewhere without a garden.” I pop a couple of blueberries in my mouth.

“Let me stretch my legs for a minute, James. Many people would think I was crazy to come talk to you out here, but it gives me a sense of peace. Thanks for listening. Like you have any choice, but then you didn’t have a choice at home, either,” I say as I caress the top of the stone.

“Can you tell that I have something important to say, but am working up my nerve? Of course, you can; you know me so well.” I continue with tears welling up in my eyes. “I’ve made a decision, James, and I wanted you to be the first one to know. I’m selling the house and moving to Creekwood Manor. Caring for the house has become a burden. I haven’t been upstairs in weeks; I only use a couple of rooms downstairs. The yard maintenance is completely beyond me now; my knees won’t let me kneel to weed or plant. For several months, I’ve been looking at senior living facilities, and about a month ago I decided on
Creekwood. They called yesterday and there’s an apartment available. I said I would take it and I’m going to sign the papers today.” I sit back on the stone bench, letting out a long sigh.

“There. I’ve told you. Please don’t be upset.” I sit back quietly for a minute and feel like James says, “It’s okay.”

I continue, “Barbara will be upset that I didn’t choose Greystone Place because it’s closer to her, but I don’t know anyone at Greystone and I do know people at Creekwood. Also, Creekwood has wonderful gardens and Greystone doesn’t. This time I need to do what is best for me, instead of the children.”

“James, for the last few years Barbara and Rob have been trying to get me to sell the house and to quit driving. I, on my own, have decided that selling the house is a good idea, and I’m delighted with my new home. I’ll tell them about the move at a family lunch on Sunday. This decision should make them happy. We’ll be having fried chicken for lunch; you remember how much Rob and you love my fried chicken. Yes, I’m trying to soften Rob up for my next decision,” I admit.

I notice a dandelion growing near the bench and reach down to pull it. As I straighten up, I continue, “I hope there is not too much of an uproar when I tell the children that I have made up my mind to keep driving. Even when I’m at Creekwood, I want to go to my church, my book club and my mahjong group. If I desire the sweet crunchiness of peaches and pecan ice cream, I want to hop in my car and go to Frosty Sam’s. I know I’m not the driver I used to be, so I have made some changes. I don’t see as well as I used to; therefore, I don’t drive at night. My reaction time has slowed; therefore, I don’t drive in bad weather, but I can still drive on a bright sunny day like today. Be with me in spirit, James, when I tell the children on Sunday. I need your strength.”

“Barbara and Rob are good children and I know that they love me, but they see a frail old woman. I don’t feel like a frail old woman and I don’t plan to act like one either.” I start pacing back and forth on the grass and exclaim, “I’m a little late to women’s lib, but I’m deciding where I’ll live, how I’ll spend my time and when I’ll quit driving, which is not now.”

I sit down and stare at the tombstone. “James, I wanted to let you know the decision I made about the house and moving to Creekwood. Oh, I have missed you so much. I’m looking forward to having dinner companions and people I can walk with
in the gardens at Creekwood. Those gardens are almost as pretty as our garden – and maybe I’ll hear the robins chirping cheer-up, cheer-up there, just as I heard this morning in our yard.”

I rest quietly for a minute, feeling comfortable and at peace, and then prepare to go on my way. “Regardless of what the kids want, James,” I tell him, “I’ll keep driving the car so I can come to the cemetery on any sunny day and be with you for as long as I wish. I’ll talk to you again soon, and I’ll bring you some more flowers from the garden. I love you and miss you. Goodbye, my love.”
Dear Readers, this is a cautionary tale filled with scheming, intrigue, sex, lies, nail-biting suspense, and private eyes. As your narrator, I will take you through this exciting series of events.

At the time, I was employed by a private investigator we will call “the Boss.” The firm consisted of the Boss, his partner, several investigators — male and female, a bookkeeper, and a small support staff.

I worked as the Boss’ right arm, secretary, and “girl Friday.” The job included editing the various investigators’ written reports. My editing consisted of, for example, changing “when the police arrived, the victim was treated to a gunshot wound” to read, “when the police arrived, the victim was treated for a gunshot wound.” I also held a private investigator’s license.

Several times over the years, I had asked the Boss why we took cases for people of questionable character or even for people like the attorney of a known murderer. He always told me, “We are just like a prostitute; we work for whoever has the money.” That made sense to me.

We did work for large and small companies as well as for individuals. Our cases included investigations of employee thefts and embezzlement, employees taking drugs during office hours, “slip and fall” accidents in department stores, workman’s compensation, child custody cases, and adulterous husbands and wives — in other words, “lyin’, cheatin’ and stealin’ of every ilk.

Our Cautionary Tale began one Monday morning when a gentleman called and asked to speak to the Boss. I put him through, and they had a very lengthy conversation. Afterward, the Boss came out to my desk and gave me a piece of paper with this man’s name, Mr. Bradley, and phone number on it. The
Boss told me that Mr. Bradley would only be speaking to him or to me; no one else in the office was to have contact with him.

He came in the next day for a meeting with the Boss, who made a point of introducing us, as I was to be his contact when the Boss was not available. Bradley was a nice-looking man, about forty-five or so, impeccably dressed in a suit and tie—what I’d call an accountant-type. He was very business-like. He talked as if he were ordering the services of an architect or someone to tutor his children, rather than hiring a private eye.

After their meeting, the Boss told me that Bradley wanted to hire our firm for some surveillance work over a period of weeks, maybe months. “He’s worried about his wife cheating?” I asked. “No, not his wife,” the Boss replied, “his girlfriend. It seems he has fallen in love with her and plans to ask his wife for a divorce, but he’s suspicious that his girlfriend may be cheating on him.”

“Evidently this guy has slipped the surly bonds of common sense,” I muttered, as I walked back to my office.

Very soon we had Mr. Bradley’s routine worked out. His lady friend, Mrs. Pane, was also married, worked full time, had two children and took some educational classes a night or two a week. When I heard this, I absolutely freaked out. I couldn’t believe it—married with a live-in husband, two small kids, a house with a yard, working full time, taking classes at night and having an affair with a married man. Good Grief, Charlie Brown!

After I calmed down, I began to try to come up with some way to find out what Wonder Woman’s diet was. I knew for a fact she didn’t need an exercise program. Just thinking about all her activities made me tired.

Mr. Bradley usually hired one of our investigators to follow his paramour around three or four days a week. The surveillance usually started in the parking garage belonging to Mrs. Pane’s office. She would leave work, and after a few errands, would arrive at her home. At that time, our investigator left the scene.
Whenever he called, our client was always very polite, inquiring about my health—“how are you today?”—and maybe something about the weather—“did you get any rain last night?” The rest of the conversation was all “strictly business as usual”—you would have thought he was inquiring about which mechanic would be working on his car that day. I would tell him who was available on that particular day and then, believe it or not, he would give me an exact itinerary of Mrs. Pane’s planned activities. Jesus, I thought, *if he knew what she was going to do and when she did it, why pay us $85.00 an hour to follow her?* I guess he would go over her daily plan with her and then use us to see if she was doing what she said she was.

Occasionally Mr. Bradley would call me to “run the plates” of cars that were parked near her house to give him the identity of those “suspects.”

*Oh, paranoia, thy name is a cheater who thinks he is being cheated on.*

On one particular day, in the late afternoon, Mr. Bradley called me and asked, “Who is on duty today?” I told him our investigator, Pete, was on the case today, and he told me to contact Pete and ask him to move his car closer to her car in the parking garage. I replied that his current location assured that she would not see him when she got off work and went to her car, but he could still see her car. He said he knew that, but to do it anyway, and I complied. You probably won’t believe *this* conversation was carried on in a “very business-like” manner, but it was.

*Wait just a minute: if he knew where Pete was, where in the hell was he?*

Later Pete reported to us that when she got in her car, Mr. Bradley walked up and got in the front seat next to her. They talked a few minutes and then her head disappeared in the general area of his lap and then, and then… I’ll leave the rest to your imagination, Gentle Reader. What is the opposite of a voyeur? Voyee?
One day, Mr. Bradley called to inform us that he had rented a very expensive townhouse close to Mrs. Pane’s office for their lunch hour “meetings.” You must remember, this was back before “the little blue pill” had been developed. This new wrinkle was added to the itinerary. And so it went…

We had continued the surveillance for several months—$85.00 an hour really adds up after a time—when Mr. Bradley called, sounding very distressed and wanting to speak “immediately” to the Boss. “Someone is following me!” he shouted. “I don’t know what to do.” The Boss told him to give us the license plate of the following car, and then drive to the parking lot of a restaurant close to our office and park there. The Boss explained this to me and, as he hastily left the office, asked me to call and get an ID on the driver.

Oh, my God, I wondered, did Mr. Bradley’s wife find out and hire someone to follow him? Was it someone hired by Mrs. Pane’s husband? What was going on?

Mr. Bradley arrived at the parking lot and parked his car. In less than a minute, the car that had been following him pulled into the lot and parked a short distance away. Within minutes, the Boss arrived, leaped out of his car and confronted the driver, pulling him from the driver’s seat and demanding to know why he was following Mr. Bradley.

The man, visibly shaken, pulled out his private investigator’s license and told the Boss he had been hired to follow Mr. Bradley by... none other than Mr. Bradley’s employer.

It seems our client had been missing a lot of work the last few months.

We never found out if Mr. Bradley lost his job, his wife, his girlfriend. We never heard from him again. For us, that was

The End of the Tale.
This whole thing reminded me of the story about the dog, standing beside the railroad tracks. He desperately wanted to cross to the other side but could hear an oncoming train and feel the vibration of it speeding toward him. Stay or go? Stay or go? GO! He just barely made it across. As he stood there on the other side of the tracks, he felt a sudden pain in the very tip of his tail, which the wheels of the train had just removed. Without thinking, the dog turned back to check it out– and was decapitated as the rest of the train passed. The moral of this story? “Be careful not to lose your head over a piece of tail.” Sometimes I wonder if Mr. Bradley had ever heard it. . .

The End of the End of the Tale
When my husband Joe was invited to a work summit in Sundance, Utah, he was also invited to bring along his wife. It was to be a real adventure for the two of us. While the men attended meetings, the wives were given a choice of activities for ourselves, and one activity we could do with our husband on our last day in Sundance. I chose a scenic lift ride, a hike in the woods, a massage and a jewelry-making class for myself. For Joe and me, I chose horseback riding. It was a 2-hour horse ride from the resort down the mountain to a meadow where we would depart for Salt Lake City for our last night in Utah.

Those who chose to ride horses arrived at the stables and were asked if everyone had ridden before. I acknowledged I had never ridden a horse. I chose this activity knowing it was my first time, but I had been told by others that the horses were so experienced, they could ride the trail blindfolded, and there was not much I would have to do. We were instructed to carry something to drink because there would be no access on the trail, so I put a bottle of water in a small brown paper shopping bag and hung it on my saddle horn. I considered myself an amateur photographer, so I went with my camera around my neck, prepared to take some glorious pictures as we went down the mountain.

The ranch hand gave me verbal instructions on how to make the horse stop and go. I understood that I would ride an older, more experienced horse, since I was a novice. They brought my horse to me and helped me mount then lined us up in order of how we would go down the trail. My husband was up front, but I was placed at the end of the lineup with one other lady behind me.

As soon as we started, I knew I was in trouble. Not only was my horse frisky, he was also young and eager. He was all
over the place, with me trying to remember how to control him. The lady behind me told me I had to show him who was boss — and it had to be me. She couldn’t believe they had given me this horse. It became a battle of wills, with me determined to win. Trying to control him took every bit of my energy. This horse thought the forest was his salad; he wanted to go to anything green and eat. I quickly realized that although the scenery might be beautiful, I was going to be too busy handling him to take pictures. I couldn’t take my hands off the reins. When I got thirsty and tried to get my water, my horse spooked because the paper sack crackled. He wanted to take off, but I just managed to keep him in place. I was scared to death! I don’t know what I would have done if the woman behind me had not continually encouraged me. Glancing down the side of the mountain occasionally as my horse stepped over roots, ruts in the ground and under tree limbs, worried he might miss a step or stumble, I could see it was a long way down. The horse was probably more surefooted than I would have been, but it was scary anyway. Every so often, my husband would turn and wave happily at me. He had no idea the trouble I was in.

We finally made it to the meadow, where we all lined up for a picture. Our guide had to turn my horse in the same direction as everyone else, so he could use my camera to take the only picture of our ride. After that, I had to be helped off the horse and to cars waiting to take us to Salt Lake City, because I could barely walk.

When we arrived at our beautiful hotel in Salt Lake City for our last night. I laughed and joked at the check-in desk with the hotel representative, and then we were escorted to our room. The room was great, but when I walked into the huge mirrored bathroom, I found myself screaming in horror. My husband came running to see what was wrong. In those huge mirrors, I saw that I was covered entirely with dust from the trail. My blouse, pale pink when we started, was covered in dirt. The worst part was my face. Where there had been moisture around my mouth, eyes
and nose, the creases were now black—filled with something like mud. All I could think of was all these people I had talked to, who had seen my face and said nothing about how I looked.

That night we had a banquet to round off the trip. I dressed for the occasion hoping to make a better impression with a clean face and clothes. During the meal, we were entertained by a video of the events we participated in during the work summit. The company had hired a videographer to follow and film all the guests as we went about our activities. It was fun to watch everyone enjoying the hustle and bustle, but then I saw myself sitting on the horse at the beginning of our ride. To my horror, one of the other guests yelled out, “Look! She has a shopping bag on her horse.” I tried to explain why, but everyone was laughing too loud to hear me. Finally, I had to laugh, too.

In spite of everything, I don’t regret my Utah Adventure. My first and last horseback ride was memorable, although it was not an experience I want to repeat. Nevertheless, I had stepped out of my comfort zone—and I was proud that I tried something new.
Texan Kathryn Lane, published poet, short story writer, and novelist, is living her dream. After 20 years with Johnson and Johnson, working as Regional Vice President of Finance for South America and the Caribbean, working in and visiting 92 countries all over the world, Kathryn decided she wanted to write. She had a lot of stories to share. So she signed up for writing classes at Lonestar Montgomery in The Woodlands. That was about 8 years ago.

Shortly thereafter, she began to publish her poems. Soon, she was seeing her short stories in print.

Just 5 years ago, she started work on her first published novel. Within a year, she had it down in what she calls “skeletal” form, at which point she set it aside while she took more classes and continued with her other writing. From time to time, she worked on it, and finally had it finished the way she wanted, but she was still busy with other things.

It was Kathryn’s husband who insisted on finding a publisher – and he was successful. Kathryn wound up with a 3-book contract; her publisher wanted a series featuring her protagonist Nikki Garcia.

Pen-L Publishing released the first of the three books in 2016. **Waking Up in Medellin** was quickly named a Pinnacle Award Winner by the National Association of Book Entrepreneurs (NABE), and is currently being prepared for March 2017 release in Spanish as **Despertando en Medellín**. **Coyote Zone**, the second novel in the series, will be published in Fall 2017.

Kathryn Lane writes
fiction inspired by cultures she experienced firsthand during her career as an international finance executive, and capitalizes on her Hispanic heritage. The Nikki Garcia series is about a young executive who finds her work in the financial world more than a little thrilling. **Waking Up in Medellin** is set in Columbia; **Coyote Zone** is set in Mexico.

Ms. Lane also writes poems and short stories. In February 2017, Alamo Bay Press will release an anthology of her short stories, **Backyard Volcano**. Cover art for the anthology was done by Texas visual artist Reji Thomas; Alamo Bay Press editor Lowell Mick White produced the cover. Kathryn’s poetry has been published in numerous anthologies, journals and two chapbooks, **A Conversation on India** in collaboration with professional travel photographer Brenda Gottlieb, and **Spirit Rocks. A Conversation on India** has been a featured art gallery exhibit. In February 2014, The Association of Writing & Writing Programs (AWP) featured Kathryn as a reader on the panel of **Arriba Baseball!** in Seattle in February 2014.

Asked about her creative process, Ms. Lane defined it as a broader approach to problem solving. “It’s a 4-step process,” she says. “Before anything else, you have to correctly identify the issue or problem. Perhaps you want to write a book; perhaps you want to do a painting. After you identify the issue, you begin by suspending judgment and brainstorming, to come up with all possible alternatives or options. You entertain no constraints – you want all possible solutions.” That is very difficult for most people; one almost instinctively thinks about the “nos” or the “can’t becauses,” but this part of the process frees the
unconscious to submit solutions that might not otherwise come to
mind.

“Third,” she continues, “you assemble all of those
possibilities and then start applying the constraints. In this way,
you are moving to the feasible options. When you finish, you
select the most feasible options to implement. Fourth, you must
implement the solution you have found. That means that you
write the book and publish it; you finish the painting and exhibit it,
and so forth.”

Kathryn says that the use of imagination and
daydreaming is essential. By daydreaming, she means the
collaboration between the unconscious and conscious minds.
“That is where the most incredible ideas come from,” she noted.

How does she get her ideas? They arrive full-fledged
in her mind, for the most part. “I suddenly get an idea, and it’s all
in my head. I sit down and think about it, and realize what length
it will have to be. The anchor story in Backyard Volcano started
as a poem. Then I realized, there’s too much here for a poem, so
I did a short story. When I took it to my writing class, they all said
‘you can’t stop there; you have to tell it all.’ That’s how it grew to
the current novella length.”

When we asked about plot and characters, Kathryn
explained, “Plot is just characters under stress. Your story has to
be centered around the conflict among the characters.”

“I have a general sense of plot,” she continued, “but I
do more work on the characters. And characters start taking on a
life of their own. It’s fascinating. That’s why I never do a firm
outline: that firm outline becomes limiting. Trying to stick to a firm
outline when the characters obviously have other ideas can ruin
a story.”

Kathryn says that from time to time ideas just bubble
up from the unconscious. “I write a few notes, and keep them for
later. I never know what I might use.”

Sometimes she dreams stories. One of the stories
included in Backyard Volcano developed from a dream she had
one night. “I woke up and told myself that I just had to write that
down. The story grew into a ghost story from there.”

Like other professionals, Ms. Lane understands that
ideas mean nothing until she does the work necessary to write
her poems, short stories, and novels. Writing is work, and
promoting books is work. But Kathryn Lane is happy with her
work and happy with her life. “I want to entertain people,” she
smiled. “As long as people are entertained by my work, I’m
happy.”

As far as we can tell, Kathryn is only going to get
happier as time goes on, because her audience of entertained
readers is constantly growing.

For more information on Kathryn, please visit:
www.Kathryn-Lane.com

To purchase, Kathryn’s novel, Waking Up in Medellin,
please visit:
www.amazon.com/dp/1942428944/

Backyard Volcano will be available on Amazon in
February 2017.
UMAMI IN THE KITCHEN

JEANNE SAKURAI

We met at Lone Star College in The Woodlands, three women, each in her own way looking for a connection. It is difficult to find new friends at our age when backgrounds are so diverse, but Miyuki, Wing, and I found a comfort in each other like cuddling in a quilted blanket on a winter’s day.

We participated in a cooking class, learning the subtle flavors inherent in the intricate balance of Japanese cooking, while exploring the real and perceived differences between our various cultures.

I probably was the most boisterous of the women, so when sensei mentioned a particular Japanese axiom, I was sure it was to put me in my place. “Everyone wishes to hammer in the nail that sticks out,” sensei said. Miyuki immediately made the observation that the Japanese community is small and insular. She lamented the fact that everyone conforms to be just like everyone else, so that in each life’s cycle it is clear what role in society each person must play. If you are different, you cannot play within the community.

This philosophical discussion continued as sensei showed us how to create several different “umami”—one for the soup, one for the salad dressing and even a different one for our fish sauce. “Umami” is the Japanese word for excellent savory flavor, and it is sometimes referred to among chefs as the fifth taste, after salt, sweet, sour, and bitter, and thus, it is unique.

Although ‘umami’ usually refers to a unique flavor in Japanese cooking, my friends and I also apply it to our lives. Each person, we believe, creates her own umami that is perceptible to those who notice such things. We have had such varying experiences, flavoring our lives with such exotic recipes,
that we have become round pegs who can no longer fit comfortably in the square holes ordained by our cultures.

Watching sensei instruct us in creating umami from scratch, referencing the old and the new ways, made me nostalgic for my own mother and her life lessons, so as we sat around the kitchen table waiting for our lunch to cook, I told my Japanese friend Miyuki about a traditional Japanese song my mother taught me when I was a young child, and asked her to translate it for me. I told her how and why my mother, a traditional Japanese lady married to a US master sergeant, taught me the song, and described my dilapidated old photo album with the pictures that explained my personal umami. Its frayed black, construction paper pages chronicled a life journey started in occupied post-war Japan before my conception. This book represents how two sworn enemies met and managed to make a life together. It was lovingly put together by my father, who took most of the pictures.

One photograph my dad did not take was of my Japanese uncle and Mom frozen in a rigid pose. Both are staring into the infinite, dressed in uniforms, ready to go to the front lines of Korea. Mom, a combat nurse, always said she wanted to be there with our boys fighting for freedom. As a kid, it was hard to understand the passion it took to want to die, just to live on in glory. I call this picture “Kodomo Sakurai,” which means “Children of the Cherry Blossom.”

The cherry blossom, dense in subtle meaning dating back to the 8th century, symbolizes purity, simple beauty, and self-sacrificing short life to the Japanese people. It blossoms in such quantity that when you are walking under the trees combed by the wind, it seems as if you are walking through clouds. The blossom floats on the wind, at its most perfect glory just before its death. That’s why it was painted on the kamikaze planes in World War II.

Sakurai is my mother’s name, and it was hard to live up to. Being a product of two exacting warrior systems, the American
Department of Defense and the Japanese Samurai (one who serves), I was the beneficiary of my mother’s enthusiasm when she learned the DOD school was to give a pageant representing our military backgrounds. The picture of me in my “special” kimono outfit with the tabi (socks), and the geta (high wooden sandals) always brings back old and painful memories of my experience with my mother’s dream of the cherry blossom.

Since my dad was otherwise occupied, it was up to my mother to help me represent our military family history, and she knew exactly how that was going to be done, because she had enough ambition for all of us. Participation was not enough; we had to move mountains. She somehow decided the best way to show my proud and ancient Japanese military lineage was for me to sing the “Cherry Blossom” song—in Japanese.

What did I know? I certainly did not know any of the words to that song. But that made no difference to my traditional Japanese mother.

The two weeks prior to the pageant meant an agonizing eternity with this samurai drill sergeant pushing me to sing “with passion” the phonetic words to the cherry blossom song— for my father, my brother and anyone willing to give a moment’s attention. Nobody knew what I was singing, but everyone agreed it sounded ok. Except Mom. To Mom, it did not sound anywhere near OK—and her goal was perfection.

Over and over again we practiced, until the only thing that came out of my confused mouth correctly was the first line in the song, which translated to “cherry blossom, cherry blossom.” The more intense she became, the more I flubbed the lines, and the more frustrated she was with me. I didn’t really blame her. Here I was representing the honor of our family, and I couldn’t even remember a simple song. My mother was so shamed by my practice performances, that on THE NIGHT, it was in a resounding silence that she dressed me in my “special” kimono outfit with the tabi (socks), and the geta (high wooden sandals).
I knew that, for her, my performance would be shining a light on total family humiliation.

Each child had some small skit, some dance, or some recitation that was greeted with applause, until my turn. When they saw this little girl in a kimono under the spotlight, the audience applauded, but the applause was so polite that it sounded almost like little birds chirping. I thought they knew I was going to blow it. The quicker this was over, the sooner I could die a glorious death, I decided, like the cherry blossom.

\[
\text{Sakura, Sakura} \\
\text{Ya yo ee-no so ra o wa} \\
\text{Mi wa ta tsu kangi ri} \\
\text{Sakura, Sakura} \\
\text{Mo mo o tomo ri}
\]

Finished at last, I bowed my head to a long awkward silence. The audience had no idea the song had ended. They didn’t know what the words meant or even the tune— and other than the words “cherry blossom,” my mother is the only person that did know, and she never talked about it.

Over the years, I have asked her many times the meaning of the words, but she has never answered my questions. I believed that she considered the whole episode too shameful to speak about.

But I know the phonetic words now. And now, when I sing “Sakura,” her eyes light up and she sings along with me in the phonetic words just like she taught me during my pageant practices so long ago. We sing it perfectly together.

During my story, Miyuki had first bowed her head in respect, then she sang along to part of the song – and then her eyes teared as she asked if I could bring my mother to her house, so she could cook for her. I was surprised that my story had moved her to tears, and I wanted to know why. Miyuki spoke of the time when she was a young student in Japan, when all Japanese children learned this song in school like American kids learned “America the Beautiful” when they were children. She
wanted to save face for my mother, so she told me that my mother had taught me seventy percent of the song correctly— and then did not tell me the meaning of the words.

My photograph and the Cherry Blossom story explained to her some of what she calls my “distinctly unique umami,” and from understanding Miyuki’s reaction to what I had remembered as one of the more traumatic events of my childhood, I started to understand that event. Now, sitting in my kitchen waiting for our lunch to cook, I begin to realize how my relationship with my Japanese mother continues to add unique flavor to my changing life. Umami. . .
Years ago I went with a project team to Maner Lake Lodge, south of Houston, Texas. After my friend Ginger and I arrived and got settled, we decided to go fishing. First, we had to get outfitted. The bass were biting that day, so we had to choose from among the casting rods and lures. After much consideration, Ginger chose a pink Barbie rod and reel. She felt it better fit her persona.

Next, we went to the docks and chose our fishing guide. Our choice was Vernon, a young guy, probably in his 20’s, who was extremely shy and overwhelmed at having two women in his boat. Vernon had no idea how to deal with us. All we wanted was to have a good time, but Vernon was trying to help us catch fish. He was very patient trying to teach us how to cast, although most of his time was spent untangling our lines. My friend was obviously a better fisherman than I, or else her Barbie rod and reel was better than mine, because she was catching bass. As she caught the fish, Vernon removed them from her line and only kept the fish that were 14 inches or longer. We were having a lot of fun, laughing at how bad we were at casting, but how great Ginger was, since she was catching fish. I don’t think Vernon was having as much fun. I might have caught a couple of fish, but I decided to sit back and watch Ginger.

We had been out on the water for a while when we saw all these fish swimming under our boat. Ginger started yelling for me to ‘get ’em.’ I dropped my lure into the water and started dangling it among the fish, hoping to get lucky enough for one to grab the lure. By now, I was standing in the boat and bouncing my rod up and down. Ginger was yelling over and over, “Get ’em, Charlotte, get ’em!” Gradually, we realized that Vernon was very quietly saying, over and over, “Ma’am, Ma’am — we’ve already caught those fish!”

Vernon had probably been saying this for some time before we really heard what he was saying. The fish swimming under the boat were the fish that Ginger had already caught and Vernon had been putting on a stringer. When we finally understood, we laughed and laughed. We thought it was too
funny to be embarrassing — although we don’t think Vernon felt the same.

Later that same year, Ginger and I returned to Maner Lake Lodge. Again, we partnered up to go fishing. This time we were to fish for brim, since the bass were not biting. For brim, you fish using a cane pole, so we chose our poles and headed for the docks. We decided we wanted Vernon to be our guide, but when we arrived at the dock, there was no Vernon. We wondered later if he took the day off, knowing we were coming, or if it was just coincidental. The guide we picked, we secretly named Male Chauvinist. He was a young, good-looking guy who apparently thought he was God’s gift to women, and immediately assumed we were “secretaries” because we were “just” women. We headed out in our small boat with Male Chauvinist sitting in the chair at the motor, Ginger in the middle chair, and me at the front. We fished with earthworms, and I had no problem baiting my own hook. I dropped my line in the water and immediately caught a brim. I repeated this action over and over, catching brim after brim. I would no sooner drop my line, than I had another fish. I caught so many, my friend Ginger gave up fishing to watch me. After a while, the other two thought we had enough fish, and suggested we return to the dock.

We set off for shore going pretty fast. I was sitting in my chair with my feet propped up on the front of the boat, taking in the sights. All of a sudden, out of the corner of my eye, I caught a movement. I immediately remembered that this lake was known for its alligators. Before I really knew what happened, something jumped out of the water, landed in my lap, and started flip-flopping. Ginger and I were screaming at the top of our lungs, until the thing fell into the boat. Then we saw that it was a large bass. Male Chauvinist was laughing so hard he almost fell off his chair. He said he thought he would have to call an ambulance for us, and that he would not have believed if he hadn’t seen it with his own eyes.

A lot of people caught brim that day at Maner Lake, but I was the only one who caught a bass.
I MISS SPRING
BEVERLY CLYDE

I miss spring, when the world wakes up and seems full of possibilities and promise. I grew up in Georgia, where Spring bursts on the scene in a dazzling display of color. One day the world is dull and dark, and the next it is full of dazzling white trees and dancing pink bushes. It is glorious.

First come the dogwoods, completely decked out in white flowers with not a green leaf to be seen. There are a few pink dogwoods; they always strike me as rebellious teenage girls trying to look more sophisticated than they are.

Dogwoods are made for people. They are such human-size trees. They don’t tower over you like pines, grow large like magnolias – or drop branches, leaves, and acorns on you like oaks. You can climb them easily or photograph your children in their Easter finery sitting on the branches.

After the dogwoods come the azaleas. Entire bushes cover themselves in blossoms ranging in color from hot magenta and fuchsia to lemonade pink and snow white. For me, they can be small or they can be large, but they should always be wild and free. I feel sorry for the azaleas whose owners trim them into formal hedges. I want to shout at their owners, “Azaleas aren’t formal plants; let them run riot. Trim your boxwoods, not your azaleas.” However, to keep peace in the neighborhood, I just give a hearty sigh when I see trimmed azaleas.

Dogwoods and azaleas are very friendly plants; they are at home anywhere and everywhere. In Georgia, azaleas grow near the steps of white-columned mansions while dogwoods bloom in the yards. You’ll find dogwoods and azaleas in front of the shotgun house down by the creek. Drive along rural lanes, and wild dogwoods and azaleas pop up in the woods. On the boulevards of big cities, dogwoods and azaleas grow in the medians. Wherever they are, they seem to be proclaiming, “Come on out; it’s wonderful out here.” It seems imperative to accept their invitation and enjoy Spring.

Now, I live in a place where it’s too hot for dogwoods, and azaleas don’t like the soil. I miss the glory of dogwoods and azaleas in the spring. I find that Spring never starts here. The
days may get longer and the temperature warmer, but *Spring* never comes. There is never that day when you step outside, and the whole world is suddenly changed into a flower garden – a garden you did not plant or work, a garden that happened *just because it’s Spring*.

I miss the changing of the seasons; I miss knowing that world is waking up with an explosion of color and life. I miss the visible promise and infinite possibilities. *I miss Spring.*
When I remember Grandpa, I see again all of the incidental, everyday experiences we shared. My memories of Grandpa and me center around earthy, downhome doin's, like sitting under apple trees or pretending to be a turkey. Grandpa said I could gobble better than I could talk when I was about three. It was Grandpa who would put a knife to a freshly picked Northern Spy apple, then offer the unbroken red, scalloped twirl as a coronet for a little princess in waiting.

My grandpa was a country gentleman: country on the outside, gentle man on the inside. He had a bark-tough character of chiseled hickory combined with a welcoming lap for story time. Grandpa could wear a smile as he strode up to a stubborn bull, to stare him down and make him meekly back out of a corner and rush for open pastures, or have tears in his eyes as he downed a prized hog for butchering.

The textures of the man are vivid in my mind. The planes of his face resembled the topography of his farmland; the smooth, untanned forehead was a ripening hayfield; the furrows from cheek to jowl were erosions dug into plowed hillsides. His knobby hands and fingers mirrored the limbs and branches of the aged apple trees shading the west pasture.

"Did you know, Grandpa, that your church designed and placed a lovely stained glass window in your honor," I asked him in memory. "The Dean Phelps Memorial Window is the centerpiece of the sanctuary. When the western sun pierces the rosette's design, the muted colors race into the chamber, skipping around ladies' hats, squirming kids' curls, and onto men's go-to-meetin' shirts. The softened shades of the window's palette are another reminder of the visible you, Grandfather. The ivory is your smile; the azure, your piercing eyes; the ruby, your
cheeks and weathered complexion; and the green – your beloved land."

"Tears are coming, Grandpa," I told him. "I can't help it; I miss you. But though you are gone, I'll have something of you always: your spirit, nobility, and your respect for God's creatures. Yes, I have you – your pipe tricks, your Holstein ladies, and your barn dog, Wimpy – safely tucked away in my memory box. I need only lift the lid and there you are, bringing me peace and comfort."
The house on Clawson Road was home to my paternal grandparents. Although my sister and I loved spending time with both of them, Grandma was special. We thought she was an angel, probably because she loved spoiling us. At their house, we escaped the strict supervision of my mother, and were allowed to explore the out-of-doors freely. My visits to Grandma and Grandpa hold some of the best memories of my childhood.

Often when my sister and I arrived at Grandma and Grandpa’s house on Clawson Road, there would be no one else there, so Grandma would go to the dial telephone in its nook in the hallway to call the relatives. My sister and I would sit on her knees while she made the calls. Since it was a party line phone, we might have to wait for another person she shared the phone line with to finish his conversation, but when all Grandma’s calls were done, cousins would start arriving, and we would have someone to play with.

The house on Clawson Road had trees in the front yard. My cousins and I liked to climb, and we competed to see who could go the highest. I would climb to a certain height and no further, because it was harder coming down than going up. Even so, our favorite tree was usually full of children. We were often told to get out of the tree before we fell, but we never stopped climbing, and, fortunately, no one ever got hurt.

On one side of the house was a cesspool, and when we went outside, my grandma would tell us not to walk on that side of the house because we could “fall in.” The purpose of the
cesspool had been explained to us—and we were *grossed* out. One of my cousins found a way to cross along the fence line without going through the middle, however we didn’t follow her because we were frightened enough never to go over a dumping ground for sewage. It didn’t stop us from standing at the edge and wondering about the mystery of this cesspool, though.

On the other side of the house was a dirt driveway that led to a sand-floor one-car garage situated in the back of the yard. My sister and I often played there because it was a haven for doodlebugs. Doodlebug is a nickname for a certain type of insect that can only walk backwards. Because it appears they are doodling in the soil, people often call them doodlebugs. These insects are predaceous, and are particularly fond of eating ants. My dad taught us how to catch them by taking a small twig or straw and gently stirring in what looked like a funnel in the sand. We were imitating an ant that fell into the pit. As we twirled the stick, we *had* to say, “Doodlebug, Doodlebug, run away from home. Your house is on fire, your children are alone.” If we had enough patience, a doodlebug would finally reveal itself. We would hold the doodlebug in our hand and watch it scoot backwards. We were gentle with them, and, after a while, we would put them back on the sandy floor and watch them dig another pit.

The house had a front porch where my grandpa and other relatives sat to smoke their cigarettes or pipes. My grandpa rolled his own cigarettes. He’d take a thin square piece of paper and pour a line of tobacco on it, then roll the paper shut to form the cigarette, licking the long edge of the paper to make it stick and stay closed. Sometimes my great-grandfather, Papa Carter, would visit. He was a pipe smoker. Once when he smoked his pipe, I was intrigued by the wonderful sweet fragrance of his tobacco. Because I thought if it smelled that wonderful, it would taste as good, I asked him if I could try his pipe. He probably knew I wouldn’t like it, but because he was a kindhearted man, he was willing to let me try. I remember how awful it was—nothing *sweet* about the taste. They all thought it was funny when I wrinkled up my face and yelled, “YUCK!”

The living room was another place where the family gathered to spend time. Sometimes my dad would play the old piano and my grandpa would get out his fiddle and play along. All
of us kids would sing and dance, and act silly. Inevitably, there was always lots of laughter and fun in the house on Clawson Road.

A room on the back of the house held a big dining table where the family sat to eat, but in the kitchen, where Grandma spent most of her time cooking wonderful meals, she had a small table used for preparing food. I remember watching her knead dough for her incredible yeast rolls, and that when she put together something sweet, she would always let me lick the bowl and spoon.

Occasionally, someone would bring her fish, and Grandma would fry up a mess. The tails were left on and the fish were dipped in a corn meal batter before being fried in a cast iron skillet. Black smoke would billow up from the stove, but the fish were never burned. None of us ever knew her secret to frying fish so crisp we could eat the tail and all, but the cousins still talk about her fried fish to this day.

The backyard was another place where the kids played, and the adults sat and visited. It was a good spot to eat watermelon and have seed-spitting contests. Fun, but messy! One time when my sister and I stayed overnight along with other cousins, we all decided we needed a snack from the peach tree in the backyard. We didn’t realize the peaches were not ripe, but we found out the next day that picking and eating green peaches is not good for the tummy. Grandma knew what we did, even though some of us tried to hide our bellyaches. She took care of us and never said a word. I guess she figured the stomach pain was punishment enough.

Sometimes, my cousins and I would play in the neighbor’s yard. Their dogs and baby chicks got lots of attention. We carried them everywhere. Behind the neighbor’s property was a forest they owned. We explored and spent time playing in the bed of an old rusty pickup truck that had been dumped there. Most of the cousins were girls, so we turned it into a playhouse, gathering dishes and other odds and ends to complete it. The boys were older, so they were never around to bother us.

Back then, we all thought Grandma and Grandpa’s house was huge, however, after I became an adult, I asked my dad to take me by the old place. As we drove by, I was shocked to see how tiny the house and yard actually were. One small house,
countless memories. Although times have changed and we've all grown up, the memories we made as children at the house on Clawson Road will keep us young forever.
The Editors are pleased to bring you a gift of future reading joy – samples of excellent new works currently being prepared for full release in eBook format in 2017.

Bella Senon’s **FIREFLY TALES, MISS CELIA’S LIFE AND TIMES**, stories about a fabulous family matriarch, will make you laugh and cry – and remind you of the ultimate grandmother we all had – while taking you back to a kinder, gentler time. Unless you got on Miss Celia’s bad side. . .

Jeanne Sakurai’s **MILITARY BRAT** will open your eyes and your heart as you relive with her the growing-up years of a military dependent on multiple bases, and the difficulties military brats have with fitting into ordinary life as most of us non-military-brats know it. Daughter of an American army man and a Japanese mother, Jeanne had to deal with more than one kind of cultural displacement, and the amazing adventures of this military brat will make you laugh out loud.

Beth Antal’s **CHINA WAS DIFFERENT** is an amusing look at the joys and sorrows of expatriates working – or living with a working spouse – in China. Of course, they speak Chinese there — and Beth didn’t. . . Beth’s comedic bent shines a bright light on the good, the bad, and the indifferent aspects of living in a really foreign country.

Grace Dinaledi’s **STATE OF GRACE** is a thriller based on life, a life that too many women, even in the USA, are experiencing at this very moment. This tour de force, this story of courage and determination, this hair-raising escape from hell, will make you **stand up and cheer** for modern women.

John Haydel’s **WAITING FOR MY MUSE, A Reminiscence**, is a collection of stories, some hair-raising and some hair-pulling, about a Catholic boy growing up in small-town Louisiana during the post-depression WWII years. Covering a wide range from the poignant to the hilarious to the mundane facets of life in America during those years, this book has something for everyone. Among our favorites? First Communion, and Annabelle, both included here. Then there’s the story of learning how to drive on a levee with a stick shift, but you’ll have to wait for the release of the e-book to read that one and many others of equal merit.

Justin Kase’s **THE FERRY**, detective mystery set in New Orleans

Enjoy reading these, but keep pen and paper close at hand, because you’ll want to make a note of the authors’ names and the book titles. These samples are from books in the ‘can’t eat just one’ class. . .
THE SMALL HAND OF JUSTICE

Miss Celia epitomized the model of goodness, generosity and order; however, it was a model primed with a splatter of cunning and just enough rattlesnake venom to overcome tribulation. Standing tall among giants at four feet eleven inches, she lived up to the fire and passion of her biological predecessors, the mothers and daughters who helped tame the Texas frontier. She walked in the footsteps of those who fought for each day of survival.

Love and respect for Miss Celia ran deep, but even those familiar with her certified that no one could make fire fly up like the pint size volcano herself. While the stories became legendary in the family, some bearing no blood relation managed to adopt one or two of the accumulated ‘Miss Celia’s Life Capsules’ into their own family legends, and pass them around as part of what became known among the cognoscenti as the firefly tales.

Miss Celia’s glory days on earth ended at the close of the last century; nevertheless, the firefly tales continue to thrive long after her leaving this world. Those left behind passed on the laughter, the tears, and the heart of another era to new generations who never experienced the pleasure of her company, the company of my grandma Celia.

When my young grandniece Isabella and I sat down to enjoy a lunch we had prepared together, our conversation threw open the door to the one and only Miss Celia. The table set for two with a bud vase holding a pair of yellow roses reminded me of a similar table setting Grandma Celia and I shared a few months after her 80th birthday. Isabella furrowed her brow and giggled while I attempted to explain that on any occasion with Miss Celia at the helm, the unexpected existed to enhance the
commonplace. And, like my childhood Cracker Jack treats, I invariably looked forward to the day’s surprise at the bottom of the box. To paint a more accurate picture, I began to recount one of my favorite fire flying memories.

Late morning sunlight brightened the kitchen with a feeling of coziness and accentuated the crispness of the white aprons tied around our bodies. The windows framed Miss Celia’s cherished rose garden outside with artistic perfection. Our carefree banter and laughter suggested celebration instead of preparation of a simple meal for a grandmother and her granddaughter. Miss Celia’s famous avocado-chicken salad topped the menu. Fresh-churned butter and bread baked earlier sat beside two yellow roses dressing our lunch table. Apples baking in the oven flavored the air with buttery brown sugar and cinnamon. I could not wait to savor the taste of heaven in every bite. It was good to laugh, to eat and to be grateful.

The celestial tranquility collapsed when Grandma Celia screamed in horror. “Fur walking behemoth . . . GET OUT . . . GET OUT . . . GET . . . OUT . . .” Continuing her frantic screeches, she grabbed the broom and a baseball bat, then torpedoed through the kitchen and out the door. The hysteria escalated with the arrival of local law enforcement at Miss Celia’s sacred rose garden, now the scene of a most heinous crime. What followed parodied a 1950’s crime melodrama, as the facts, just the facts soon revealed.

In the young neighbor’s haste to erect a new fence, he failed to replace the soil removed along the fence line during construction. This failure allowed his dog to enter Miss Celia’s property through the unsecured opening the neighbor had created. According to Miss Celia, the canine, with premeditation, savagely defaced the fragrant holy ground with reckless and brutal clawed force. Evidence of willful littering, identified as mongrel waste, lay in plain view. The eighty-year-old victim affirmed she witnessed the terrifying beast making
deposits of his vile excrement and raising his hind leg to further violate her prized sanctuary.

Prior to police presence, the two neighbors engaged in a volley of raised voices, which led to the male neighbor placing his hand on Miss Celia. This catapulted Miss Celia into survival mode. Armed with her infamous baseball bat, she swung in full view of the arriving uniformed authorities. Although she failed to make contact, she did force him to flee into the street.

The officers, in their vigilant efforts to quell the disturbance, explained in detail that assaulting her brutish neighbor would without question result in her arrest and a large fine. Grandma Celia fixed her eyes on the policeman speaking. I could see the wheels in her head turning. She gave a deliberate nod as her eyes drifted to the ground. After a deep breath, accompanied by a moment of calm and renewed countenance, Grandma Celia extended an apology for her regretful behavior and offered some iced tea to cool things down a bit. She entered her little house and soon reappeared with refreshments for all.

As everyone sipped the beverages, no one noticed Grandma Celia snuggle her bat under her arm. She reached in her apron pocket and retrieved a spray of twenty-dollar bills totaling to almost six hundred dollars, and held them out like a bouquet of flowers. With the face of an angel and in a voice without guile, she politely addressed the officer, “I believe you mentioned . . . a fine? How many times can I hit him?”

That was Grandma Celia. But it reflected only a part of the wonder of my Celia. She moved through our lives like that small flying beetle that filled those younger Texas summer nights with twinkling light — the little firefly. Grandma Celia possessed a glimmering spirit, bright with amusement and devotion. We reveled in her animation and in how she not only brightened any darkness, but also lit up our universe. If an occasional shadow fell, she served as a beacon, illuminating our hearts, our hopes, watching over us for all time, guiding us
home to family. Those left behind still treasure the endless joy left in the wake of her sparkling laughter, her beautiful wit, her delicious drama and her small, but mighty, hand of justice.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Benny shifted his weight from left foot to right, again and again. He added his little hands to the choreography. The more he tugged at the seat of his crawling pants, the tighter he squinted and pursed his lips.

“Benjamin, stop that dancin’. Fix your face and fix those pants.” Miss Celia turned her eye to her granddaughter, Livi. “Olivia, help your brother fit into his trousers properly. Who knew this boy would stretch up so much over the spring?”

Livi’s doll-like fingers adjusted the brass clips on her three-year-old brother’s suspenders. Benny’s pants now rested on a new waistline. With a bounce and a squat, he wasted no time collecting rocks scattered on the ground, while they waited for the 9:45 morning bus.

The Number 11 to downtown Main Street rolled up right on time. Wheels squealed as they braked. Double doors exhaled when they snapped open. Miss Celia scooped Benny up and set him inside with one movement. She reached for Livi’s hand and lifted her to the step between the folded doors.

“Morning, Miss Celia.”

“Morning, Mr. Arthur.” Grandma Celia sat the two young ones on the bench seat behind Mr. Arthur, the driver.

He glanced at them in the biggest rearview mirror Benny and Livi ever saw. “You got some friends with you today, Miss Celia.”

“Yes. My grandchildren . . . Olivia and Benjamin . . . here for a little visit.” Grandma Celia tossed an odd-shaped coin into a glass box. She called it a bus token, used instead of money to pay the fare. “Can you believe this is their first bus ride? They don’t get into town much– living so far out.”
“Olivia . . . Benjamin . . . welcome aboard the Number 11.”
“Thank you, Mr. Arthur,” giggled a pair of small voices.

Several passengers greeted Miss Celia with kind words and warm smiles. People seemed to know and even like this no-nonsense woman. The little girl’s face beamed as she observed the respect fellow riders extended her grandmother. It made Livi want to display her best manners. She did not wait for Grandma Celia to remind her to sit up straight.

Benny detected a worn spot in the upholstery. Of course, curiosity commanded the boy to explore the area of interest further. Livi watched her petite grandmother place herself on the bench – feet together, leather handbag on her lap, gloved hands, back straight, string of pearls clasped around her neck and hat sitting on the top of her head like a cherry on a sundae. She was beautiful.

The summer morning heat filled the interior of the bus, even with the windows opened. Miss Celia retrieved a closed hand fan from her purse. With a flick of her wrist, a golden-winged angel appeared when the fan unfurled. Miss Celia rocked her hand back and forth to create just enough breeze to dry the droplets of moisture forming on her nose and above her lip. The soft lavender scent on her skin kissed the air around her.

Colorful ads ran the length of the bus above the windows on both sides. Livi perceived this as an invitation to practice her reading. After all, the promise of kindergarten mornings drew closer each day. Thoughts of Laura Jane, her best friend and long-time neighbor, crept into her mind as she read out loud. Laura Jane and her family planned to move to Mississippi at the end of the summer. Livi tried not to think about the immeasurable pain of the impending changes.

Miss Pearlie Mae, Laura Jane’s mother, usually cared for Benny and Livi while their parents worked. But when preparation for the move required an immediate two-week trip to the Magnolia State for her, Grandma Celia offered to keep the children. Only such an emergency held the power to keep the
children away from all things home – parents, dogs, horses and friends – and for best friends, fourteen days equaled a lifetime to be apart from each other.

Grandma Celia pulled the cord above her seat. A bell dinged, and Mr. Arthur slowed to a complete stop. The adventure in the city with Grandma Celia began as the trio stepped off the Number 11 onto a noisy sidewalk.

Shopping at the big department store felt like going to the circus, only not as much fun. Crowds of unfamiliar faces and unusual-looking people kept Benny and Livi close to grandma’s side. A brief interlude included hot dogs and Coca Cola for lunch . . . in the middle of the week . . . then more shopping . . . more walking . . .

Grandma Celia did not disappoint. She saved the best for last. One final stroll before heading home led the way to the Woolworth’s soda fountain counter – and the best milkshakes around.

Livi helped Benny keep his hands out of his chocolaty treat, and kept him from falling off the spinning pedestaled stool. When hand-printed paper signs over two water fountains caught Livi’s eyes, she spelled and sounded out the words: “F-OR . . . I know that word . . . for . . . W-H-I-TES . . . whites . . . O-N-L-Y . . . only . . . for whites only.” The water fountain on the right stood in the corner. Livi read the sign above it. “C-O-L-O-R-EDS ONLY . . . colo-reds only. Colo-reds . . . what are colo-reds? What do those signs mean, Grandma?”

Miss Celia sat tall: “That is business between the Negroes and the White Man. That has nothing to do with us. We are Texas Methodist women. We go wherever the hell we want.”

Grandma Celia’s growling response put an end to further questions on the matter, but those two signs placed above two water fountains were Livi’s introduction to the color lines. On a summer afternoon at the Woolworth’s soda fountain counter, an out-of-classroom lesson began to teach a child why she and her best friend could not attend kindergarten together, even without
a move. Laura Jane Price was enrolled in a Mississippi school “FOR COLOREDS ONLY.” Olivia Diaz de Moya attended kindergarten at a school “FOR WHITES . . . ONLY.”

MISS CELIA’S THIRD EYE

In the century of Celia, Miss Celia demanded unwavering respect for certain guidelines for successful and happy living. Failure to toe the proverbial line resulted in consequences ranging from mild stings to rain from hell. Flattery, charm, cerebral skill – even bloodlines – carried no weight against Miss Celia’s third eye. Without firing a shot or the use of her serpent tongue, she could drop a grown man to the ground and wrap his pride in her honeyed smile. The idea that anyone would even think of trying to hoodwink Miss Celia boggled the mind.

But young Marcus turned out to be one of those mind bogglers. The twenty-one-year-old set up house in a loft owned by none other than his grandma Celia. Terms for securing this tidy, rent-free bachelor’s nest included maintaining the grounds, payment of utilities, a standing date for Sunday dinner and, most important, no overnight guests without the benefit of marriage.

The dutiful grandson adhered to all the conditions of the bargain rental, except one, when his wayward desires overcame his best intentions. Furthermore, he gave no thought to the fallout, which would indeed follow. Why should he? His loyalty and undying affection elevated him to a place of favor in his grandmother’s heart.

In any case, how would Grandma Celia ever uncover his indiscretions? No surprise visits – Grandma Celia clocked out for bedtime at eight sharp every night. In his youthful arrogance, he not only underestimated Grandma Celia’s faculty to know all, to see all, but also dismissed her proclivity for the use of her sleight of underhandedness – in the name of love, of course, to help everyone keep their ducks in a row.
It never occurred to the self-assured Marcus to make any provisions to help him stay one step ahead of Miss Celia. It never occurred to him that, sooner or later, rule breakers always trip up. It never occurred to this charming rascal that his little brother would be the family tie to bind and disable his deception.

Nine-year-old Jeremy worshipped his big brother Marcus and missed him as much as he knew he would after Marcus moved from home. When the phone rang on the last day of school, Jeremy could not believe his ears and the fantastic news. Marcus had invited little brother to spend the month of July at his new digs. Jeremy started packing as soon as he hung up the phone.

For the first week of the visit, Marcus took a week’s vacation. The rest of the month, Jeremy went to work with Marcus for a few hours two mornings a week. On the other days, Jeremy stayed with Grandma Celia until Marcus picked him up after work.

Mornings with Grandma Celia were busy with gardening, cooking and going to the park and the library with new friends. Afternoons with Grandma Celia were filled with special snacks, teas and conversation. Grandma Celia asked a question or two now and then, but mostly she smiled and hung on Jeremy’s every word. She was a good hostess, but a great listener. It made Jeremy feel quite special. No subject was off limits.

It was during one of these conversations that the subject of new friends and overnight guests came up. It seems that young Marcus had also been busy. He had not one, not two but three girlfriends, who had all spent the night at the loft.

“Jeremy, your brother Marcus thinks I make these little fruit pies just for him. But what he doesn’t know we’re eating probably won’t kill him. Have another pie with your tea.” She placed one more delicious treat on his plate and continued, “You were telling me about Julie, Terri and Monica. I hope they have been good friends to you.” Grandma Celia was up to her old tricks. But Jeremy was too young to see it. And he did love
those luscious, small pies. So, talk he did until grandma knew all.

Grandma suggested they throw a surprise party for Marcus to celebrate his new home, the end of summer vacation, back to school and brothers. “We can cook all your favorite dishes, invite the family, invite all your new friends in the neighborhood and decorate my house any way you want,” she smiled. “We can even invite Julie, Terri and Monica, if you would like.”

Grandma Celia never claimed to be perfect, but she loved all her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren equally—the good ones, the bad ones, the pretty ones, the not as pretty, the smart ones, the ones with not all the tools in the shed—all of them equally. She was a fair grandma. And she was an underhanded grandma—without a doubt.

The day of the party Jeremy was having the time of his life with friends and family. It was just the opposite for Marcus. When he saw the three girls there, he fled to the kitchen. Grandma Celia followed. The rest of the family had already been warned not to interfere or create a scene to spoil Jeremy’s party. She would deal with Marcus.

“Grandma, I’m sorry sounds so lame. But I am sorry,” Marcus stammered, “. . . for breaking your rules, for lying to you, for disappointing you.”

“You didn’t lie to just me, Marcus. You need to straighten things out with three other people. But not today, and not here. Fix yourself a plate. You’ll be hungry later. And go home. The party’s over for you. It is Jeremy’s party now.”

Marcus prepared his own plate as Grandma Celia looked on. He apologized once more, his shoulders slumped, his head bowed. Before he walked out the back door, Grandma Celia called to him. “Marcus, ducks in a row . . . quack, quack.” She opened and closed her forefinger and thumb like a duck’s bill. “Quack, quack . . .” She smiled her warmest loving smile.

Marcus walked out with his tail between his legs, mumbling to himself and wondering if he would still have a home.
after tomorrow. Hearing her grandson’s final words from outside
the backdoor, Grandma Celia raised an eyebrow, her ear-to-ear
grin flashing. Marcus thought he was out of hearing range when
he released his pent-up feelings. Miss Celia could not agree with
him, but she understood his chagrin and his most bitter
complaint: “Damn that third eye.”
WHO AM I?

When I start defining myself, I have to start with being a military brat. Otherwise, I really have no sense of belonging, and culturally I have trouble fitting in, primarily because being a military brat and moving from base to base every 3 years or less doesn’t give you many ties to people or places. If you couple that with being part Asian—Japanese—in a post WWII environment in occupied Japan, you learn early that life can be a challenge.

I have always been most comfortable going my own way and doing my own thing, but military life is structured around rules, and brats soon learn to fit into that program. Obedience and discipline are necessary to a brat’s happiness and good health. It just so happens that it is also the Japanese—my mother’s—way as well. As a brat, it was my duty to do chores, go to school, stay out of trouble, obey my commanding officers (in other words, everyone), and be a good soldier. It also meant adhering to Japanese traditions that were both foreign to and not followed by everyone else on base.

As dependents, our lives revolve around the military dynamic. Everything in a military family’s life is accomplished because of discipline and order. We start and stop between the reveille and retreat bugle calls. In a military family, the pecking order— from the bottom— is dependent, older dependent, parents, MP (military police), your parent’s CO (commanding officer), the CO’s CO, base commander, and finally the US government, if you are posted overseas. Being the low man on the totem pole doesn’t excuse you from responsibility for your actions and those of your subordinates.
Living and working on base requires knowing who you are and where you stand in the pecking order. In case you forget, your ID card lets everyone else know, and if you step out of line, identifies who needs to be called for remediation on up the food chain. Military brats learn early that each dependent’s action can reflect negatively on many careers. As a result, we also learn that it is better to become invisible and not stand out. A brat almost never openly acts out because the punishment for everyone in the line of command is swift and severe.

While growing up, military brats deal with many things that require strict discipline and adherence to schedule and protocol. In some people’s minds, it might seem as if there would be no time for a brat to take a deep breath and relax. It’s not that a military brat has no time to be carefree; it’s just a little more challenging to be a kid in that environment. I’ve been there, and I know. Once meals, school, and chores were completed, my greatest escape was to the forest’s comforting embrace. It was while walking as the wind blows that I happened upon some abandoned barracks, cut in the middle lengthwise and lined up in rows and columns at parade rest, just like the soldiers they once housed.

I blew in and out of those half-rooms, rustling the shaky pencil-thin walls, and disturbing any critters that might have thought of nesting in whatever corner they found comforting. I thought I had found heaven and the perfect home, so I took possession and made it mine. It belonged to me.

I wasted no time in claiming it. A half-barrack room became the great wall of Hannibal (no reference to any historical event or location) where I could defend and conquer invading forces; another served as counsel chambers for secret negotiations; and one roomelette was the grandstand from where I gave all my awe-inspiring speeches. Each half-room had a different purpose in the plays of my imagination. I spent hours, and then days, furnishing and arranging my haven with the rocks
and leaves I carried in from the forest. I even made accommodations for any guests that might wander by.

Of course, the day came when guests did come. The first MP (Military Policeman) startled me when he banged on the door with his baton. “Hey, you, little girl! What do you think you’re doing?” he yelled at me.

MPs hate it when you eyeball them. Without answering, I jumped to attention, dropped my head, eyes front, and tried not to eyeball him. That is why I jumped out of my skin when the second one grabbed my shoulder from behind. Now I had a dilemma. Should I stand and defend hearth and home, fighting to the death—or obey and submit, surrendering to the greater force? My choice was made when the senior MP demanded, “Name and rank, soldier.”

Every military brat knows: if the kid gets into trouble, dad will pay the piper—and I had already learned what runs downhill by stepping in it. No way could I answer that question without condemning myself and my dad to the gates of military hell. I took the only option I had: I cut and ran.

The other day I found a tattered photo album, filled with old pictures from my days as a military brat. One of these photos shows a ragamuffin “our gang” of smiling kids in dirty play clothes. We were a black, yellow, and white group of kids, although I don’t remember at the time being aware that there were any differences between us. We were all military brats and we knew how to comport ourselves with honor in public, but this time, my dad had caught us just being us. These photographs remind me of my adventures growing up as a brat, when my imagination was one of my most treasured assets and yet caused me the most trouble.

I can see that we all are in that insulated cocoon of overseas brats, a cocoon created by the DOD system with great pains to sustain its idea of American life for those stationed in foreign countries. Though insulated from a lot of things, brats on Post have duties and are expected to reflect the sometimes-
conflicting protocols of honor, independence, and discipline, so living and working on base requires knowing who we are and where we stand in the pecking order. In case we happen to forget, our ID card lets everyone else know, and— if we step out of line— identifies who will wind up where the buck stops, up the food chain. Military brats learn early that each dependent’s action can reflect negatively on many careers, and we feared disappointing our fathers, the military, and the United States of America, in roughly that order.

The dad’s military rank controls every aspect of Post life. For example, dependent housing is uniform, evenly spaced and utilitarian. The rows of family quarters, made for efficiency but not much on esthetics, reflect our father’s position in service. Although the higher rank determines position, all housing assignments are equal among ranks, with non-coms (non-commissioned officers) getting a strategic position in the row. The dad’s status also affects the role each brat plays in our world. I was not only the oldest and the biggest; my dad was pulling master sergeant rank. Therefore, it was up to me to maintain order and keep the troops— dependents— occupied doing useful projects, a chore that even today I still compare to trying to herd cats.

This photograph documents one of my cat-herding adventures. We were a larger group of five in springtime, and the air was clean and fresh. The snows were finally melting and the forest, which has always been a haven for me, was waking up. This time of year was warabi season, and we were hunting warabi, a plant that tastes something like asparagus and grows wild near water in the forest in early spring. The brook nearby had swelled its banks and was now a raging river from the melting snow, but judging by all the empty stems, the warabi on our side had already been harvested. I thought maybe— no, I was sure— there were more on the other side of the brook just waiting for us to pluck for dinner. The question was how to get on the other side.
Now, I had a mission for my brats. We had to reconnoiter the river to see if there was a way across. We imagined that we were the Indians we read about in books, checking the ground for tracks and looking for signs. This worked for about twenty minutes. I was in hunting mode, but I could see my tribe was getting restless and looking a little lost. At the last minute, the “Great Spirit” rewarded my persistence with a huge tree that had fallen across to the other side of the river. Wow! I was ecstatic. I ran and gathered the others and showed them my find. They looked at me like I had suddenly grown horns on the sides of my head.

“Yeah, it’s a tree, so what?”

I parried back, “It’s obvious; that is the path, a sign from the “Great Spirit!” My doubtful squad seemed to be looking around for the way home. Now, it was clear to me that we had to cross over the tree, but the troops were dubious and bored. Quick on my feet, before they could think, I shouted, “Look, look at me! We just have to walk across the tree!” as I climbed up onto the trunk. Any ballerina who can master the five ballet positions on toe shoes has no problem walking up and down this piece of lumber. To show them how easy it was, arms out with my hands in a graceful and relaxed cup, I traipsed on across to the other side, pirouetted and looked back with a shout, “See? It’s easy!”

Not one of them looked convinced, so, frustrated, I almost skipped back across and then showed them I could run across, “no problemo.” Finally, copying my mother in her best commando voice, I yelled, “AND WHY THE H*** NOT?” Each of them admitted they were afraid.

“What if, what if… I walk you across?” I offered. “I can take you guys one by one to the other side.” Now how could any one refuse such a reasonable offer? I could see they were dumbstruck. To speak was to reveal their cowardice, so to seal the deal, I grabbed my brother’s hand and helped him up on the tree. I gave him a few pointers and hand in hand we walked
across to the other side. One by one, with his encouragement, I walked two more over. The last one, I could tell, was stiff with terror, while the others were on the other side, chanting, “Go. Go. Go.” I offered my hand almost under his nose, so he had to grab it. With all my strength, I pulled him up onto the tree. My soothing words did nothing for him, so I hissed into his ear, “Man up, soldier, everyone is looking at you. Are you a coward?”

Oh yeah, that got the juices boiling. He squeezed my hand so tight it cut off my circulation. There was no way I was going to show pain, so I pulled my hand hard and he lurched forward. His arm still attached to my hand, he started to windmill and rock back and forth, moaning, “Whoa, whoa.”

“Go, go, go,” replied the chorus from the other bank. Then I knew I was going to get it when we got home, because the first splash on the way down was him, going into the river. I grabbed a branch of the tree, but his hold on my pants leg took me partly into the water with another splash.

The river and I both raged, as he frantically grabbed and my pants slowly crawled down my leg. Everyone was yelling, but strangely no one was crying. When I could hold on no longer, we were carried tumbling around for about fifteen yards before we ran aground. We both stood up on the pebbles of the riverbed, and I could see his trophy still gripped in his grubby little hands. My embarrassment was complete when the rest of the kids met us and crossed the babbling brook, chanting, “smarty pants, smarty pants, you think you are a smarty pants.”

Damage control was now my goal. We wandered in the woods until my smarty-pants were sufficiently dry to escape notice, then returned to base. When I looked up to see my dad approaching, I shivered but prepared to man up and admit everything. I was delighted when instead of reading me the riot act, he lined us up for a photograph. Looking at that photograph now, I know very well exactly why I was smiling so happily. I had survived another adventuresome day of cat herding, and I was safe in my brat cocoon.
One difficulty of being a brat is the moving. It can be great or it can be hell depending on your last posting and your next posting, but you know you will never stay longer than three years. Sometimes you don’t even stay six months. Although as a child getting uprooted periodically seemed so unfair, it was also a blessing. You could always count on the fact that regardless of any trouble you might have at your current posting, all you had need to do was “tough it out,” and it would disappear with your next assignment. You could then start fresh.

A fresh start didn’t mean all the sins of the family were purged within the family. What happened behind closed doors continued to reverberate from assignment to assignment, in your room, in the kitchen, in the house, in the car, on vacation and beyond. Nothing is forgiven or forgotten. It goes into the permanent file and can be used against you at any time. This is one of the ways that military parents try to control the fallout of possible later actions. Discipline is enforced by any means, both physically and mentally. Brats obey because, from birth, they have learned that challenges of authority are not tolerated.

Regardless of where we were posted, friendships had to be formed immediately or not at all. As soon as we arrived at our next assignment, any kid hanging out had to become our friend. We never knew how long any of our gang would last because he or you could be gone the next day, week, or — if we were really lucky — the next year. Every time the moving van would come into military housing, every kid on the block would hang around to find out if there were any kids, how old they were, and if there were any sisters or brothers. Moving meant playing host or visitor, but brats, for the most part, are friendly.

Most of the time, we lived in base housing, but sometimes we had to tough it out in the private sector. Moving from occupied Japan to the United States presented significant challenges, especially since my father was deployed to Germany soon after we got back to the States. This time my mother chose not to accompany him. We found ourselves NOT in the relative
security of the base, NOT among families with active duty fathers, NOT enjoying the privileged military environment — but among the “CIVILIANS.” Boy, did I have trouble fitting in!

Attending school on base was very different from attending a civilian school. Getting transferred is an accepted fact of life by everyone at a military base school. Everybody knows about being the “new kid” because they are, too, or will be soon, so it is interesting to other dependents to find out about your previous posting. Being the “new kid” at civilian schools is being an outsider for the entire time you are there. It seems that friendships among the civilian population have been formed since birth, so as a brat, you never fit in.

Civilians have other issues, too. It seemed they always felt they had to keep us brats in line. If a brat living off base ventured outside, it meant fighting to be left alone. For most of the time, you just hid inside your quarters. I remember one time during which we lived off base in a temporary trailer. We had to go out and walk to the school bus stop. On one of the first days we had to wait at the bus stop, the townies sized us up and planned their assault for the next day. That next day became “The Battle of Rock Snowball.”

The snowplows had furrowed a trench along each side of the road so that the brats from the trailer park had to pass through the no-man’s land that was the road to get to the bus stop. When we brats stepped into the road, the enemy popped out from behind the snow bank that served as their bunkers, and pelted us with snowballs. Of course, we brats — familiar with tactical warfare — beat a hasty retreat behind the opposite bunker. The snowballs we made on the fly to throw at the townies landed with little or no damage. For our efforts, we were pounded with a hail of “ice” balls that seemed to land precisely on target each time. My fellow combatants and I were slowly getting seriously injured. How were they able to pick us off so precisely, we wondered, and why did their snowballs hurt so much?
Jumping out into no-man’s land, I picked up one of the enemy snowballs. When I removed the snow, a rock in the middle was revealed. If I had been a cartoon, the steam would have been blowing out each side of my head as the top blew off. At that moment, my anger made me impervious to pain. I walked straight down into the belly of the beast, collecting the rock snowballs into the makeshift basket of my coat as they were pelting me. The closer I got to the intended target, the less accurate their aim, until I had no enemy ammunition coming my way. In fact, they either stood frozen in fear or turned tail and ran.

At the top of their bunker, I stared them down with a malevolent grimace as I slung their own rock balls back at them, leaving at least two crying in pain. My eyes shone with the glory of my one-man victory. Too slow to run after the rest of their platoon while hurling rock snowballs at them, I calmed myself back to reality, turned to my squadron, and safely escorted them across the road to the bus stop. I think I scared myself with the power of my rage.

From that time on, I trained my pain threshold to a point that I earned the nickname “the crazy-brat.” All I ever had to do to get people to back off after that was hit them with my malevolent look. I had learned a great lesson from these civilian brats. I use this technique to this day, and it still works.

So who am I? Once a brat, always a brat, I guess, but that is a group to which I feel comfortable belonging— even at the distance that develops as we grow into adults. They say that we can be studied as a group no matter where we ended up as adults, and it’s true. We are homogenous— without gender gap, without generation gap, without racial gap. Born into the American armed forces when our parents decided to become career military, the only difference that sets us apart from each other is our father’s rank. We all serve our country—unrecognized, silent, at attention, as the dependents of the American military. And we’re proud to do so. So I guess that’s who I am.
JOURNEYS END IN . . .

When I first met my Chilean husband in a Wal-Mart superstore, we eyed each other across the shopping carts with suspicion. He was seeing all kinds of backpacks in my shopping cart, and I was seeing an invasion of my space. When he finally spoke, he said, “Where did you find all those backpacks?”

Who is this guy anyway? Why is he eyeballing my shopping cart? When will he move on and leave me alone? I debated whether or not to ignore him, but military training won out, and I pointed in the general direction. “Two aisles over,” I said. He immediately turned on his tail and trotted down the aisle on a path following my finger. *Gee, that was pretty good,* I thought. *I can control this 6’ 4” guy with a wave of my finger. How cool is that?*

*On the other hand, maybe not.* In true military fashion, I decided an evasive maneuver was in order and fled down the aisle in the opposite direction. Just when I was comfortable inspecting the goods in the next aisle, he outflanked me and came at me head on. *Well, now we have a dilemma: do I hold my ground, I asked myself, or reject all rational thought and run screaming like a little coward?* I am a good soldier, so I braced, held on to the shopping cart, and showing no fear, in my best voice I queried, “How can I help you?”

That’s how our love story began, and if you can believe our love story began in the aisle at Wal-Mart, you can also believe there is cosmic and universal karma that prevails for the benefit of all mankind. This man had come all the way from Chile to a Wal-Mart in Dallas, Texas, to meet the girl of his dreams— who had come all the way from Japan. *Kismet.*

I had found a man from the other side of the world who was my soul mate. To find ourselves so in sync with each other was like finding home. He described his upbringing, totally different from mine, but which had placed this tall gangly
German outside his Chilean culture, just as mine had placed me outside my American culture, making him a loner just like me. Having journeyed all that distance, we had found each other, and in each other, we had found part of our selves.

“Journeys end in lovers’ meeting,
Every wise man’s son doth know.”
William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night

IDENTITY CRISIS

My husband agrees that we all need to know who we are, and he says that humans aren’t the only ones who have problems finding themselves. He believes this because of his personal observations as a child and young man in Chile.

One day, he says, a Chilean fishing vessel hauled in a live baby penguin in its nets. Deciding to adopt him, the fishermen gave him to the 8-year old son of one of them. What a treat for the boy, getting a new pal in the gang of the pier kids! The penguin followed the boys everywhere, trying to keep up with the rest of the kids. He seemed to believe that he, too, was a boy. The pier gang found the whole idea hilarious, and took great pleasure in leading the little penguin into various difficult places.

When it came time for the son to help his father ready the boat for the next day, he walked up on the pier, followed by the penguin. The father and his men started hauling the net onto the pier to dry and mend where needed. The little penguin wanted to help pull each net length on the dock. He made a nuisance of himself, getting in the way. They nudged him closer and closer to the edge of the pier. Now this was not good for the critter because he could hear the taunts of the boys and see other fishing boats crashing against each other on their moorings while tied to the pier. Then, to the penguin’s surprise, his boy pushed him into the water.
Landing with a huge splash, he went under. As he came up for air, the little penguin was seriously in danger of getting crushed by the other boats. Ripples of laughter came rolling over him from the boys on shore. To save his life, he took a breath, dived under all the boats, and came up on the other side of the pier. My husband, watching this scenario play out, swears to me that he saw the dawn of recognition on penguin’s face as he realized: ‘I am not a boy! I am a penguin!’ Miguel swears the little penguin gave the boys the finger, before he swam away into the sunset, never to be seen again.

IN SEARCH OF SELF

Knowing who you are and where you come from is critical for balance in life — just ask any psychrink — but searching for the answer to this question can become an endless quest. My sister and I have been all over the world, and one of our first journeys was to the “homeland,” Japan. We wanted to experience the “real” Japan, the land of the rising sun, the country that made my mom, my mom, with our mother.

And so we did. After touring many different cities, the three of us ended up in Nikko, a famous hot springs resort town located along Japan’s ancient Romantic Road. Our hosts, “sensei” (teacher) and Ma-san, suggested that we all go to the public bath in the underground hot spring before dinner. Mom agreed, and my sister and I, like good little Japanese girls, deferred to authority. Mom knew the score, but my sister and I were little better than babes in the woods.

After putting on our yukata kimonos, we went clip-clopping down the corridors to the public bathing areas. We were finding ourselves as traditional Japanese women. But as we came into the women’s dressing area, I could see through the glass door and into the pool—and they were all nude! I knew immediately that I was in big trouble...
“Nooooooo!” Grappling with all the women in the changing room, I tried to hold on to my yukata and to my dignity. For me, the idea of running around in public naked was sheer nightmare, but my sister, the traitor, quietly slipped out of her yukata and slunk unnoticed into the bathing room. And fighting was no use anyway. They outnumbered me.

And so I found myself, naked, in public, in the public bath. Surprisingly enough, after the initial terror, I found the steaming bath totally enjoyable and soothing. It turned out to be a pleasant, if at first riveting, experience, although it pointed up just how much of our selves was not traditionally Japanese.

When I had the opportunity again years later while on vacation with my husband, I felt no trepidation about going to a public bath in Japan, naked. Besides, this time I knew what to expect.

My husband and I were visiting a Buddhist monastery in a quaint little town called Koyasan. Known for the spiritual worship of Kobo Daishi, it has much to do with contemplation and reflective meditation. To assist novices, they also offer the public bath.

OK, this time, I was ready to jump into the breach. I stripped down to nothing in the changing room, and stepped into the bathing room. In Japan, the bath is not for washing up. It is only for soaking with the steam in quiet contemplation, to relax tired nerves and refresh the sensibilities. There are spigots and stools along the wall with soap, white hand towels called “ten-ten,” and shampoo to do the normal ablutions before joining others in the thermal spa.

I cleaned myself up and hurried to jump into the steaming pool before they noticed I was naked. “Boy, this is hot.” I was too embarrassed to look around to see if anyone else was sweating like a pig, but “Boy, this is hot!” I took my ten-ten and mopped the sweat from my face. “Yow, this is really hot!”

Oh, my Japanese self was burning. And, all of a sudden, I was experiencing an epiphany of staggering proportions. Just
like my husband’s little friend the penguin, I had found myself—and I wanted the world to know it.

In my best karaoke voice, I stood up in the middle of the pool, stuck my white ten-ten on my head, and belted out,

“Well I’m a lone, tall Texan, I wear a ten-gallon hat,”
“Well I’m a lone, tall Texan, I wear a ten-gallon hat,”
“And people look at me, and say a rah, a rah is that your hat?”

I think they all knew who I was then – but whether they did or not, I knew – and that was good enough for me.
1 Moving to Shanghai

I am NOT averse to moving. 22 moves in 25 years qualifies me to at least be in the top 5000 people who have moved more than they've stayed put. And moving always worked out, somehow. But moving to China was different. I still haven’t figured out exactly why; it’s not like I’d never ever lived in Asia—5 years in Korea, 6 months in Japan, travels to other Asian hot spots— but moving to China was different.

Maybe it was the timing God chose. Maybe it was the fact that Jim and I had just settled into Katy, Texas, after many nomadic years—the high, or perhaps low, point being kicked out of a never-heard-of African country, Equatorial Guinea, on trumped-up charges that my husband was trying to assassinate their president—when all he actually did was refuse to pay a bribe to the local police chief. That resulted in our having 24 hours to leave that hellhole taking only what we could carry on a plane, leaving our worldly goods in Equatorial Guinea, and then wandering around the US for seven months trying to find a job, while living with family, friends, and anyone who would take us in...

Maybe it was that my entire family was uprooting at the same time: little sister after 20 years in Germany moving to Belgium; eldest daughter after 14 years in Korea moving to Sicily; youngest daughter after 17 years of marriage getting a divorce; and son taking a 3-year tour with the Coast Guard leaving his family behind. And this was all taking place in a two-month time span. Then Jim and I were off to the complete other side of the world— and back. Overwhelming!

So, when Jim got a job in Texas, we bought a house, I secured a great job, we found friends, we joined a church, I was able to join a Bible study, and I just KNEW our traveling days
were over. Of course, I’ve always suffered from delusions, and this turned out to be among my wildest.

Sure enough, one day in the midst of “settledom,” which I define as a false sense of security derived from being in one place for more than 30 days, Jim called me into his study. He had “the look” — a far-away stare with a kind of glaze over his eyes — and I knew the jig was up; my safety net was about to dissolve; and I would once more be plunged into the abyss of yet another move. When Jim gets “the look,” I get the rock in the pit of my stomach and a strong urge to wring his neck. Jim is a 20-year veteran of the Marine Corps. He moved a lot during that time, but after he retired, he REALLY started moving — to Africa, to Asia, to the US, to Europe— doing security for all sorts of places, including the US Embassies in various countries.

After 25 years of marriage, I totally understand “the look.” Bottom line, it means he has a job offer that’s just too good to pass up; we are moving; and all of my whining, crying, and protestations are for naught. And although as I’ve mellowed with age, I’ve also mellowed in my reactions to these moves, moving to China was different. I can honestly say I went kicking and screaming and praying every step of the way.

“Please, God, don’t let this happen. If You don’t want us to be there after we go on our look-see to Shanghai, let us know that we just can never EVER, move to China. We went on our look-see. For those of you who have never EVER moved from your county, state, or country, a look-see simply means that the company pays you to go over to the location of their choice, and gives you a week to find a home and to get the feel of your new area.

When we arrived in Shanghai in the middle of the night, the person who was supposed to meet us wasn’t there. We were left hanging around in the Pudong International Airport with my “see, I told you that we shouldn’t move here” look focused on Jim. Finally, Jim called someone somewhere in China, and they eventually arrived in the pouring, steaming hot rain, collected us
in a van (speaking no English), and took off. I was asking Jim, “Does this person know who we are? Does he know where to take us?” Jim kept assuring me everything was ok. I had my doubts as Jim’s language skills, though excellent in French and Arabic, are little to nothing in Chinese.

We finally got to a hotel somewhere in the bowels of Pudong, and sat in the lobby. It was now about 4:00 AM; we were both exhausted from jet lag and the airport fiasco, and I was gaining more confidence that the voice of the Lord was booming in our ears, “Go home, you two, go home!” Eventually, we were ushered to our teeny tiny room with a teeny tiny bathroom. As the rain poured outside in that early Chinese morning, I was crying inside and telling Jim that I just couldn’t do this. We were supposed to meet Jim’s new boss for breakfast at the hotel the next morning, and Jim said after he met with her, he would tell her it’s a no-go.

With little sleep, feeling like a wrung-out washrag due to jet lag coupled with the midnight rainy ride, we both went to breakfast in the hotel the next morning. His boss (the CEO of GM China) introduced herself as we sat down to an American breakfast, a good sign for me. Then as she began discussing the job with Jim, my heart literally fell into my stomach. The job she described had Jim’s name written all over it, and I knew that no matter what, he just HAD to take it.

Once again, I rolled over, acquiesced, and agreed that our next few years would be spent in Shanghai, China, population 24 million plus— all speaking Chinese, of course. We spent the rest of the week looking at apartments, going around the city, and attempting to familiarize ourselves with a culture that was as alien to me as being on the moon. We looked at apartments without tubs, apartments without kitchens, apartments that were brand new with huge cracks down the side of the wall— seeing visions of Poe’s “Fall of the House of Usher,” apartments that cost more than a year’s salary, apartments where NO ONE
spoke ENGLISH, and if anything broke down, I would be stuck—alone—in the black hole of language barriers.

Finally, we settled on a VERY EXPENSIVE teeny tiny service apartment about 850 square feet (an adjustment from 2200 square feet), but—and a HUGE but, it had a teeny tiny kitchen and a BATHTUB! I need baths; I require baths; I HATE showers. Showers are cumbersome, and never leave me feeling quite clean. It’s my personal peccadillo. None of the apartments we had seen had a bathtub, but finally our little service apartment at Lansen Place had not only a bathtub, but two bathrooms, so Jim and I would be able to keep some semblance of privacy for these years in China—because I was sure there would be no other place in the apartment to go when we needed a break from each other.

There was one problem with this apartment. We couldn’t move in for about six weeks after we moved to China, so we would have to stay in a much smaller apartment in the same complex for a while. But these were service apartments, which was a big plus.

Service apartments basically house lots of expatriates (foreigners, in whatever country). They are small, but clean, furnished with a housekeeper five days a week, a staff that fixes breakfast, a fully equipped gym, a staff to open the door when you come in and go out, a staff to give you an umbrella, a staff to call your driver—most expats in China as well as other places have drivers furnished so that they have one less thing to hassle with.

Our dear driver was Mr. Yu, an honest to gosh Jackie Chan look-alike who spoke a modicum of English and who I later learned was a neighbor of Yao Ming, retired basketball player for the Houston Rockets (another sign)?

Things might, just might, be looking up, and there could be some hope, but I still wasn’t through bargaining with God. After returning to Houston, I prayed one more prayer. “God, if you don’t want this move to happen, don’t let our house sell.” It sold
in one month. That was it! The bargaining was over; it was time for me to buck up and begin to find happiness living in Shanghai, China.

From ‘the look’ in May to the look-see to the house closing in July, every detail fell into place, so on August 15, 2011, we boarded a plane for Shanghai, China. There, Jim would be regional security director for General Motors. Translated: he would be in China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Russia, Vietnam, Australia, and Africa— and I would be sitting in Shanghai.

The story of our lives already read like a multi-tasking geography lesson: Jim in Sicily, Beth in Spain; Jim in Mozambique, Beth in Spain; Jim in Syria, Beth in Spain; Jim in Tunisia, Beth in Japan; Jim in the US, Beth in Korea; Jim in Pakistan, Beth in Texas; Jim in Australia, Beth in Texas. Now, it would be: Jim in China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Russia, Vietnam, Australia, and Africa, Beth in Shanghai. China!

2 Settling In

So here we go. House sold, goods and car in storage as the teeny tiny apartment was fully furnished with not one but two huge televisions (amazing what the Chinese can cram into such small spaces), goodbyes said. Family is so used to goodbye by now— it’s not “if” but “when” Jim and Beth will be on to another adventure. My kids swear Jim is a spy and is undercover for the CIA, a great topic around the dinner table. Sometimes, based on some curious goings on in our marriage, I can almost concur. They refer to us as the couple from the movie “True Lies” with Jamie Lee Curtis and Arnold Schwarzenegger. So for family purposes, I am Doris; Jim is Boris. I’ve kind of wondered if the kids might be right; however, I intend to remain in ignorant bliss and just call this huggable teddy bear of a husband I married a normal average man. Hmmm?

Landing in Shanghai in August was not exactly my idea of ideal. I think it was somewhere in the middle of the afternoon—
hot, steamy, miserable. But unlike our first introduction to China—a middle of the night arrival, no driver and sheets of rain—our faithful driver, Mr. Yu, was right there to collect our luggage and whisk us to Lansen Place, our new Chinese home-away-from-home. We were to be in a teeny tiny 600-square-foot, one-bedroom, with only a shower for six weeks. Then our HUGE 850-square-foot apartment would be ready, and I would finally get my Chinese bathtub!

Jim started work the next day, and I began the normal duties of recovering from the 20-hour flight, finding a Chinese teacher, finding where to shop, finding a job, and finding a church and a Bible study, all the necessities for staying sane amid the chaos of yet another move, as the good wife of a roaming nomad. Lansen Place was a great place to live because almost everyone spoke English. We usually met for breakfast. Everyone wanted to help everyone else.

We were a microcosm of the world—people from the US, Canada, France, UK, Korea, Japan, Mexico—you name the country, someone was passing through and seemed to land in Lansen Place. I could do this! Life was looking up. Hopefully this one small apartment in the middle of this huge seemingly indifferent culture would be my warm place and help to make China a little less different.

My first order of business was to find a Chinese teacher. In each place we’ve ever lived, we’ve also studied the local language, if only to be able to shop and order from a local menu. The wonderful Lansen staff was more than willing to help me in my search. And Erik, the manager who later became a dear friend, ordered my own Chinese teacher. Her name, no kidding,
was Miss Kaka. I thought her name was appropriate, because as I began studying the language, my brain felt like kaka 90% of the time. Little Miss Kaka was a petite 20-something-year-old who spoke some English. I found out that many Chinese study English in school, but very few can converse in English. Their English is usually quite stilted, and if you get into euphemisms or colloquial expressions, you totally lose them. I could only speak in subjects-verbs-and adjectives, with maybe a simple compound sentence thrown in for good measure. When Kaka and I settled for three days a week to get started, that was one thing on my list ticked off.

Next came shopping. It’s a good thing to know where to shop, where to get food, and most importantly where to get wine. Shopping on the local economy has always been an adventure in any country, but Chinese shopping was totally different. The local E-Mart was right across the street from Lansen Place. E-mart contained many stores—including a Chinese McDonald’s—and a supermarket that smelled like raw fish, a very necessary staple for the Chinese. Of course, as I would come to find out, there are hordes of people no matter what time of the day or night you decide to shop, and the aisles are always crowded. People were everywhere; there was not one space left unfilled by a human body. All of the workers were in some type of uniform—the girls wore little short pink skirts with aprons. Throughout all of the aisles were teeny tiny Chinese girls, calling to the shoppers in their singsong voices to come and sample their food. It was kind of like what we do in Costco or Sam’s Club—but there, no one ever sang a song to me.
I grabbed my teeny tiny shopping cart, attempting to maneuver through the aisles of Chinese, bumping into them, dodging them, and praying to God to get from the front of the store to the back of the store without being killed. As I would turn to attempt to look at a can or a jar of whatever I hoped the product was—every label in Chinese with absolutely NO ENGLISH subtitles, I would turn around, and there staring into my cart were at least three to five Chinese! This went on all the way through the market.

Finally, exhausted by the smells, the vast sea of people, the “starers,” and the defensive shopping cart driving, I made it to the check out. We hadn’t secured a bankcard yet, so all of our transactions were in Chinese Yuan. And there are bundles of Yuan to the dollar; I think it was something like 600 Yuan to 1 dollar at that point. So I had to pull out all of this money. The Chinese workers are very quick; my perception was they were impatient. The line of people behind me were all staring at this kookie American lady attempting to count her Chinese money—which was taking way too much time out of their hurried frenzy of a day. Ugh!

And this is what an American in Shanghai gets for the equivalent of $116.00 US:

2 chicken breasts, 3 pork chops, 1 small bag of peas, 2 teeny tiny heads of lettuce, 2 tomatoes, 2 peppers, 4 yogurts, 1 bottle of water, 1 bag of Omoo (Tide), 1 Clorox (teeny tiny), 1 box of fabric softener (teeny tiny), an assortment of cheeses, 2 bottles of red wine— and I needed the wine, after shopping...

It was all a bit overwhelming, to say the least. There had to be a better solution. Shanghai was too modern not to have another alternative to this madness. I would later find out that my instincts were correct.
Jim and I began to settle into our temporary one-bedroom apartment, trying to establish some sort of routine until we could move into our bigger two-bedroom with a BATHTUB. The kitchen was quite overwhelming— or should I say underwhelming? In my kitchen there was a door. To go out, you go in; to go in, you go out. I'm a dyslexic American. I never knew if I were coming or going!

It was the same going up and down stairs. To go down, you go left; to go up, you go right. Jim and I were always running into each other in the kitchen; however, since he's dyslexic in America, he was functioning well in China. I, on the other hand, was really having a problem with this reversal thingie.

My first "home made" meal in Shanghai was a disaster. I couldn't figure out the Chinese writing on the oven, left the gas on, burned the chicken, and the peas cooked to mush.

Washing clothes was another adventure because of the teeny tiny washer/dryer combo. You could get about three pieces of clothes into its bowels. It also boiled all the clothes for four hours. If you had one piece of clothing with ANY color on it, then all of your clothes came out colored. My poor husband resigned himself to wearing pink underwear during our entire tour of Shanghai. The dryer truly didn't work, so I ended up hanging my clothes on the balcony like everyone else. Our patio faced the front of our building and the parking lot. Needless to say, all the drivers, all the shoppers, and everyone in between were able to see our clothes hanging on the line, including our pink underwear.

Tiny kitchen aside, there are much more difficult challenges to face, living in China. Among them is the blocking of social media. Those of us in western culture are used to powering up our computers or cell phones and instantly being taken to our favorite social media site. Not so in China. Those things are blocked.

The Chinese monitor everything coming in and going out of the country. They monitor all of their citizens. And not only do they monitor social media sites, they monitor all foreigners. Jim
immediately checked our apartments for bugs, our car for bugs, and his business for bugs. Further, most Chinese citizens are also compelled to report the comings and goings of all foreigners. My healthy American need for freedom took terrible offense to this “different” way of doing government business in China. However, the government is too big, and you just have to be careful what you say and to whom you say it.

I cannot tell you how many times we were watching a news program from the US and suddenly found it blocked. If anything disparaging about China came on, the TV went black. To say I was a “little” upset when I turned on my computer in China and couldn’t get Facebook would be an understatement! So what was I supposed to do for three years in this Facebook forsaken place? Write letters? I didn’t think so.

After several breakfasts with other Lansen Place expats, I discovered a work-around called a VPN (Virtual Private Network). Of course, it isn’t free, but if you pay for a VPN, you can sometimes throw the Chinese spies off your trail. The way it works is that you hook up via Los Angeles, New York, Germany, or a dozen other countries or cities. The only problem is that the Chinese are eternally trying to hack into your emails and social media; when they do, then they block that access, and you have to take your VPN to another site. It’s a never-ending challenge to the user.

Some days were better than others, but many times I just wanted to go out onto my teeny tiny balcony and scream at the top of my lungs! This constant volleying between me and the Chinese would go on sometimes up to 15 times a day. Ugh! But I usually managed to muddle through the maze of Chinese spies, and contact most of my family and friends.

China definitely was different, posing challenges in language, challenges in shopping, challenges in doing menial household chores, and most important, challenges in personal security. Being watched all the time—because I was “different—” let me know exactly how different China really is.
3 Moving On Up

Adjusting to such a small space in such a huge city took some time. The people at Lansen Place made the adjustment easier, but we really looked forward to moving into our bigger place. Finally, the day came for us to move into our permanent digs. To say I was excited would be an understatement; I would have a REAL honest to goodness BATH.

We lived in one tower of the two towers (A and B) at Lansen Place. We were moving to the other tower in the same place. This was a HUGE deal, I would later find out. First, Jim and I had to move our suitcases between towers. Next came a phone call from Management downstairs, telling us that we MUST check out of Apt A before moving to Apt B (makes sense, but it's all in the same building– just on opposite sides); however, if we don't follow orders, they are holding us hostage by not turning on the internet. That does NOT set right with me. But what choice does one have when she isn't in her own country? We must abide by the local rules, so downstairs I go to "follow procedures," checking us out of one apartment and signing us into another. Not sure what I was signing as it was all in– you got it– CHINESE, but all the little clerks kept smiling and nodding. I was thinking I probably was signing away my firstborn– apologies to Missy. . .

So, I set about signing, and the Chinese set about stamping a “fapiong” (receipt or permit), and not just one fapiong — multiple fapiongs. In China it’s very necessary to have a fapiong, even to breathe: no fapiong, no service; no fapiong, no food; no fapiong, no job; no fapiong, no identity –at least in China.

After nearly a tiring fapiong hour, it seemed we were through. I was handed the new apartment key and was told that the electric and internet people would arrive shortly to do whatever they had to do to make sure we were up and running. Sure enough, no sooner had I opened our new front door than a
teeny tiny man came in with a card and put it into a machine which I later learned was our electricity machine; this would happen every month because not only did we pay exorbitant rent for living in Shanghai, electricity and gas were NOT included in that price. The electric man had just left when there was another knock on the door, and in walked a teenier tinier Chinese woman with a HUGE bottle of water, bigger than she was, and popped it into our water machine, because you do NOT EVER NEVER EVER drink the water in China— anywhere! Considering the water comes from the Po River where dozens of pigs were found dead, I was very happy to have the bottled water.

After the water lady left, the sheer lunacy of the move began to immediately escalate. Our teeny tiny apartment suddenly became a three-ring circus. We had been allowed to send a small shipment that was to arrive when we moved into the larger place (850 square foot apartment with two teeny tiny bathrooms and a bathtub). Jim had elected to stay home from his job to supervise the delivery of our small shipment. I told him I was worn out with the entire thing; I was going to sit on the couch and attempt to log into Facebook while he took charge.

One thing I can say about the Chinese: when the Chinese movers say they will be at your place at 9:00 AM, they aren’t kidding—unlike their compadres in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, who just might be at your apartment by 11:00 or 11:30 AM—when, of course, it’s time for lunch, so the real work won’t begin until say 2:00 or 3:00 PM, then they don’t finish by the evening, so they have to return the next day. You hope. Not the Chinese. In and out, with great efficiency, is what you get with the Chinese movers.

The bell rang, Jim opened the door, and the teeny tiny movers rushed in with boxes and carts, jabbering in Mandarin to Jim, Jim nodding, more jabbering, Jim pointing, more jabbering, Jim running back and forth, more jabbering. I was sitting on the sofa having a good chuckle. Boxes were unloaded in the teeny tiny kitchen, in our teeny tiny second bedroom (which Jim had
turned into an office), in the teeny tiny living room surrounding me on the couch, and on our teeny tiny balcony. Finally, in as quick a rush as they came in, the Chinese movers had Jim sign a document and left us to unpack our worldly goods.

China was now a reality; there was no turning back to life as before. I would adjust as always and absorb the good, the bad, and all in between, making China a part of who I am, as I had all the other countries. But I would be different — because China was different.
The young woman sat on the bench pretending to meditate while her young son played on the black and white squares of the pavement. The early morning in the square, in front of the closed shops, made a perfect picture of security and wholesomeness. How clean the old women, with their pinafores and kerchiefs, as they swept away the grime and crimes of yesterday.

She had taken the midnight train and crossed the border from Italy to a small border town, the first stop in a new country. She decided to leave the train before her ticketed stop, believing she was undetected and virtually unnoticed. Yet she was still uneasy. Without betraying movement of her body, she swept the square with her eyes, thinking about her young son, about the fact that he had barely recognized her when she snatched him from the police station. She realized that such a crazy maneuver succeeded only because of the sheer desperation of its lunacy.

All her hopes were resting on the fact that she had not gone to the airport during their escape.

“How do you prepare for battle when the rules of engagement are all against you?” she wondered despairingly. The time spent in her false meditative state helped to calm her jangling nerves. Though it wasn’t in her nature to be quiet, the appearance of a mother and child relaxing in the morning sun helped to disguise the fear crawling under her skin.

The shops were opening now and the early birds were starting to congregate in front of the bread shop. She offered her hand to her own nestling and asked if he was hungry. “How does focaccia sound?” She could feel her stomach growling as she whisked the boy up into her arms. Joining the early morning
workers in line to order, she sent him on ahead to sit and reserve one of the few tables in the shop. Being one of the first customers and a mother with a young boy garnered special courtesy from the shopkeepers, but she paid with lira to avoid leaving a trail or awaken any suspicion if the police happened to come by and ask questions later.

The warm café-latte was just sweet enough to dunk the savory Italian bread. Slurping the concoction down with gusto while making plans with her nine-year-old, she tried to radiate innocence and normalcy. It was much easier once the hunger pains had subsided. What a good boy he was; he probably was used to being a pawn in this game. He asked no questions and she offered no explanations.

Preparing the backbones of a strategy, they decided to shop in the open market for a small suitcase, some inexpensive clothing for both of them, and to purchase some panini for lunch with cash. In the afternoon they could find a small pensione and register for a couple of days, thus delaying unwanted inquiries at least until the next day. That would buy them respite for at least eighteen hours because the automatic checks of Identity Cards would not be cross-referenced on the normal daily tracking round-up until mid-morning. The next crucial move would be to find a bank. She would need to exchange her lira and cash some travelers’ checks for new currency.

They needed a rest, and at this point it would be non-productive to keep running today. So after picking up the discarded napkins, bowls and spoons, she made sure that all trace of their presence in the shop disappeared behind the service counter. The banks would not be open for a couple of hours, so she would have enough time to make the purchases she needed in the open air market. Although the opportunity to retrieve her son had forced her to abandon her luggage in the last hotel room, she was not concerned about the value of anything left behind. She had secured the bigger prize.
Carefully she considered what information the police could gather from searching that room. At last, satisfied that she had left no trace of her intended destination, she tore up her plane tickets to the US.

[Read the rest of *STATE OF GRACE* in eBook format later this spring.]
My family owned a combination flower shop, feed, and farm implement store located near the center of downtown Bunkie, Louisiana. Until I was nine years old, we lived behind the store in a small apartment with a little sunroom on the back.

My bedroom was right on the edge of a bayou, and I would frequently fish for crawfish out of my bedroom window before going to sleep. If I caught a crawfish, I would put it in a tin can under the bed where it would stay until Annabelle found it and threw it away.

Annabelle moved in with us when I was about five. She wore a white blouse with long sleeves and a red skirt that reached the floor. She also sported a red bandana with white polka dots on it. Annabelle slept on the couch in the back sunroom. I don't remember her having any personal possessions of any kind.

My earliest memory of her is a large, warm, soft being that floated from room to room. I knew this vision would give me a hug whenever I wanted or needed one.

She frequently prepared some of her special recipes. I don't remember exactly what she cooked, but her dishes had a distinctive, ethnic style. It was much different from my mother's traditional Louisiana cooking. My father raved about Annabelle's food.

Besides her domestic duties, she had a special unhappy job. On occasion, when I was naughty, she was instructed to spank me. However, my father gave her detailed instructions on how many times to swat me on the bottom and how soft to swat me. Of course my feelings were hurt, but I wasn't mad at her because she was carrying out orders. I wasn't mad at my father either, because he was not actually doing it. Daddy never laid a hand on me, but all three of us would usually end up crying.

On Saturday night, Daddy would give her a small amount of money and a pack of cigarettes, then drive her across the tracks to a different world, and drop her off at a street corner.
Sunday morning around nine or ten o'clock, he would pick her up and bring her home, thus beginning another week. We moved across town to Louisiana Avenue when I was nine. I never saw Annabelle again, but I never forgot her, either.

JOHNNY GOES TO CONFESSION

The week before my first confession and communion, all my six-year-old friends and I were getting hysterical. We had heard stories about how the wafer could stick to the roof of your mouth. You would gag and get cross-eyed trying to scrape it off with your tongue. Sister Angelle told us about a man that once choked on his wafer with tears running down his cheeks while he was trying to dislodge it. In desperation, he reached in with his finger to help get it, and he was immediately struck down to the floor by a bolt of lightning. His skin started smoking and peeling from his flesh and bones, revealing maggots that were crawling out of his eyeball sockets. He eventually melted into a putrid pool of vile, black liquid. We were terrified, but Edgar Breaux ignored Sister's admonishment. He always removed the wafer from his mouth and discreetly disposed of it. As far as I know he is still alive, but we didn’t want to risk it.

We should have been worried about something else. We all had our starched white shirts and short pants ready, and nobody thought a thing about that. We didn’t realize it at the time, but our striped boxer shorts were going to show through our pants on First Communion morning when we were lined up in the street at 6 AM.

Then, on Sunday, the week before our First Communion, Father O’Malley told us that a very bad movie was coming to town. If any Catholic went to see it, he was going straight to hell; he wasn’t even going to die first. We were living next to the Bailey Theater, and I hung around there all the time. That afternoon, I went to see the posters on the front of the theater. And there it was, held in place by chicken wire, a huge poster of Jane Russell in a low-cut blouse. It was the best thing I had ever seen. I was wondering if I would I go to hell if I sneaked in the movie without paying, or would it not count because I didn’t pay.

For days, all I could think about was going to see that movie. I didn’t know what to do. I was torn between insatiable
curiosity and eternal tormented damnation. Then my plan struck me. I would go to confession with my classmates, then go to the movie, then go to confession again to erase the sin of going to the movie.

So I went to confession during the week with everyone else. Unfortunately, we all had the same standard set of sins that the nuns had given us to confess:

- I didn’t listen to my parents.
- I hit my little brother/sister.
- I had impure thoughts (whatever those were).

We were all embarrassed to tell Father O’Malley the same sins, so Harry stood outside the confessional and sold sins to us for twenty-five cents each. I bought one—‘I killed a dog.’ I now had five sins to confess, the first three and two more.

- I killed a dog.
- I told a lie (sin number 4).

Father was amazed that I had killed a dog, so he gave me three rosaries as penance.

On Saturday afternoon, I went to see The Outlaw with nine cents I found behind the sofa cushions. I must have missed the bad part. Maybe it was when he had fever, and she lay down with him to keep him warm.

On Saturday night, the day before First Communion, I asked Daddy if he was going to confession.

“No,” he said, “why?” I told him I enjoyed it so much I wanted to go again.

He said, “Really?”

I didn’t want a ride to church because I was afraid I would get killed on the way in a horrible carnage and go to hell, so I walked. I made my second confession, and told Father I had been to see that bad movie. He was amazed that I had been so bad, and he gave me several rosaries, six Glory Bes, and many more Hail Marys. He said he hoped this was enough to cleanse my soul, but I should not kill any more dogs or show any further interest in sex.
Chapter 1

It was a quiet evening on the old Tchoupitoulas street wharf. A giant cargo crane stood brooding over a silent city of metal cargo containers, dozing forklifts, and rusty barges. Other than the clinking of metal chains and the soft sigh of the Mississippi as it nuzzled the sleeping barges, the only sounds were the echoing footsteps of a lone security guard as he made his rounds. Oddly, he didn’t seem to notice when a small pickup truck suddenly appeared between two rows of cargo containers and pulled up to one of the gently heaving barges. He also failed to notice the three men who got out and slid a gangplank from the bed of the pickup onto the deck of the barge. He did nothing while the men opened one of the hatches on the barge and wrestled a 25-gallon plastic barrel out of the hold and onto their truck, and he was busy studying his watch when they drove away.

Just a few miles away, the Jetty was rocking. A fortuitous location had saved this famous neighborhood bar from New Orleans' failing economy. The Jetty was the only bright spot in the otherwise dull stretch of empty used car lots, deserted storefronts, and rundown hotels that lined Tulane Avenue. The fortunate aspect of the Jetty's location was that it wasn’t really on Tulane at all, but situated on a tiny island between two neighborhood streets that nearly converged before sliding into the avenue, thus forming a block-long sliver of land that lay alongside Tulane like an old barge beside a dark and sluggish river. This sterling example of city planning had provided the Jetty with an abundance of that most precious of all urban commodities – parking spaces.

When full, the Jetty accommodated about forty people, of whom around a dozen could fit at the bar. The rest distributed themselves among the little tables and video games that lined
the wall, or congregated around the coin-operated pool table in the adjoining room. The pool table was a constant scene of close encounters as patrons squeezed past players on their way to the one small bathroom they all referred to as the head. This wasn’t part of a theme. The walls of the Jetty weren't called bulkheads or the floor referred to as the deck. There wasn't any old hawser or other ships' rigging nailed to the walls, and the present owner of the Jetty wasn't called the Captain. The only nautical thing about the Jetty besides its name was its head.

On this particular evening, with their two-ways spitting and hissing at their sides, two of the Crescent City's finest, still in uniform, stood at the far end of the bar discussing last night’s Saints game. Archie, the bartender, stood across the bar from them washing a mountain of glassware that had piled up during the football game. Susie, the night bartender, was an avid fan and didn't hold with washing glasses during a game. Archie didn't mind doing Susie's dirty dishes, though. He liked to wash glasses while he watched over his customers. He especially liked to polish the glasses with his bar towel. At the moment he was washing beer mugs. He didn't polish beer mugs; these he would grab six at a time, slop through the suds and rinses, and shove in the freezer. The conversation about the Saints game centered on the two policemen but occasionally rolled down the length of the bar as other patrons interrupted their own discussions or reverie to contribute their opinions. Someone standing in the middle of this bar would hear last night's football game suddenly flow past him and then retreat again as little pools of lesser topics re-emerged.

This evening, Lt. Benard Jason LaRue occupied that center position. He sat on one of the six ragged, red vinyl bar stools that the Jetty owned. He was a large man with wavy copper hair, cool green eyes, and large, very white teeth. LaRue had a noisy two-way, too, but he usually left it in his car. He also had a set of uniforms hanging in his back closet at home, but he hadn't worn them since he made detective ten years ago. All the
regulars in the bar knew he was a city detective. Working a special fraud unit assigned to bad-check writers, he spent his days updating his database and running reports.

LaRue liked this bar. It was cool and cheery and, best of all, the circumstances of the average Jetty patron made him feel successful by comparison. Today he felt great. He was sitting between a regular who had made a career of looking for work and a ragged, half-starved, depressed looking individual with long, dirty, stringy brown hair.

“Arch.”

“Coming right up, Lieutenant.” Archie put down his bar towel and opened the little freezer. He reached in behind the beer mugs and pulled out a tall cold glass for LaRue. Archie kept his tea, which he brewed fresh every morning, steeping in an old stoneware pickle crock he had stolen from his sister's house two years ago. The disappearance of the old jug had puzzled and angered the old woman for months afterwards. Archie carefully filled LaRue's frozen glass with cracked ice and, using a dipper so as not to disturb the leaves and un-dissolved sugar in the bottom of the crock, filled it with pitch black tea. He replaced the damp bar towel that covered the crock and garnished the glass with a slice of orange.

“Here you are, Lieutenant. How's old Spit doing?” LaRue accepted the cold glass from Archie, removed the garnish and took a long sip. “He's fat as ever, Arch. How's your sister managing?”

“She's managing to be mean as ever. What about you? Are you ready for carnival?”

“I'm dreading it, Arch.”

“Aw, Lieutenant, it's the best time of year! You ought to get out and catch some parades this year!” He leaned over the bar and winked. LaRue could see tiny beads of sweat on Archie's shiny bald pate. “You know what I always do?”

LaRue shook his head.
“I go to that carnival supply place in Metairie and buy about a hundred bucks worth of beads, doubloons and cups. All those good-looking babes from out of town go crazy for those Mardi Gras throws. When I go to parades, I bring along a bag full of really nice ones. You know those real long strands of beads, the kind the Krew members hold out to chicks to get them to show their tits? I bring a lot of those, plus a lot of plastic cups, doubloons and other silly crap. Then, whenever I notice some babe not catching a lot, I say, ‘here, darlin,’ and drape a few strands of cheap beads on her. They love it, Lieutenant. I always get at least a little kiss.”

Archie kissed the air between him and LaRue by way of demonstration. “Works like a charm every time!” He grinned at LaRue and then moved down the bar to fill another customer’s glass.

LaRue smiled into his tea. He and Archie had a lot in common. They both had troublesome sisters and a fondness for cats and ice tea. LaRue only had Spit, but Archie lived with a whole houseful of felines. He claimed he kept them as protection from his sister. She was allergic to cats.

“Hey, Lieutenant!” LaRue looked up to see Officer Kettle's grinning face peering around the backs of the other patrons.

“Yeah, Kettle?” he said, hoping that Kettle wasn't going to ask him down to that end of the bar.

“Just how many passes did old outlaw intercept last night? Me and Cokeland can't remember.”

“Don't know, Kettle,” LaRue reluctantly admitted, “ I didn't catch the game.”

Kettle and his partner regarded Larue's confession with frank astonishment. “Gawd, Lieutenant, I'm sure sorry you missed it. There wasn't a death in the family, I hope?”

“No, just a little trouble with a computer I'd like to mangle.”
Moe, the perennial unemployed regular on his left, hooked his kid-sized black cowboy boots in the lower rung of the bar stool and stood up so he could see over the young lady sitting next to him.

“Hey, Kettle! Susie told me you was in here trying to show your dick to some poor lady during the game last night.” Moe turned grinning toward LaRue as the whole bar erupted in raucous laughter. LaRue felt a blush of embarrassment suffuse his face. Kettle didn't seem to be offended. In fact, he seemed to be laughing just as hard as everyone else. As it happened, Kettle had a habit of exhibiting his genitalia in the Jetty. Without warning, he would just unbutton his fly and let his small, white, flaccid penis hang out. Usually, no one in the bar seemed especially upset or interested in Kettle's peculiar behavior, but now Kettle's exhibitionism had suddenly become a topic of conversation. The plump young lady next to Moe crumpled up her napkin and threw it at Kettle to gain his attention.

“Hey, you, Joe! How come you be showing your dick to folks you don't know when your best friends ain’t got a look yet?”

“Well, Penny,” Kettle's partner Cokeland said, “you were standing right down there by the door last night. Why didn't you take a look?”

“Because you can't see something that small from the other end of the bar!” Penny informed him, and the entire bar erupted in laughter.
“ART IS NOT A FORM OF PROPAGANDA; IT IS A FORM OF TRUTH.”

“When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man’s concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses, for art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment. The artist, however faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state. . .

President John F Kennedy (May 29, 1917-November 22, 1963), US president from 1961 until his assassination in 1963, shortly before his death, excerpt from his speech at the groundbreaking ceremony for Robert Frost Library at Amherst College.
ED: Obscenity has become so casually universal as placeholders that we forget that each of those words originally conveyed real meaning. Each line of this poem, layered with the disappointments and disasters of a lifetime, recreates that real meaning for the ‘f’ word — verbal obscenity negated by the truer obscenity of soul-deep pain.

THE F WORD
JIM CHANDLER

Forgiving father fades
Freedom field fenced
Frowning flowers fail to ferment
Foghorns flounder in the fray
Furniture of form is featureless
Feeble frame fractures
Fierce foul feast on flesh
Furnace fires flare
Ferocious fear fills
Fingers fold into fists
Furious fights of futility
Feetless, faceless, faithless
Fuck
OHASHI LESSONS
JEANNE SAKURAI

Discovered during the 1928 archeological excavations at Hsiao-t’un (long known as the Ruins of Yin), the Shang dynasty capital for 273 years, the earliest documented chopsticks were made of bronze, and date back to around 1200 BC. The proper use of chopsticks is an indication of cultural status. In this poem, Ohashi (chopstick) lessons illuminate the lifelong relationship between a daughter and her mother.

At 8

Look, momma, look!
Balanced on the end of my pink chopsticks
A rice mountain proving to the cook
I had the will and the wits:
Look, momma, look!

At 18

Look, momma, look!
A single grain of rice
Poised between beautiful ivory bones
Not just a toss of the dice
But masterful skill dutifully honed:
Look, momma, look!

At 80

Look, momma, look!
Perfect portion for you
On my sticks just your lips to part,
Not to fall on your shawl anew,
Moistened with the tears of my heart:
Please look, momma, look. . .
INTREPRETIVE TRANSLATION: Katei Blueclay. In ancient times, the Kyothæ Tribe of Indigenous Peoples were sacred claymakers, making, using, and trading the sacred blue clay in spirit jars and other items, throughout the world. Kyothæ pots were very strong – almost unbreakable. Kyothæ oral history starts with “the One World, when the world was One, before the World was Broken,” and includes many stories of the Changing Times, “when the land rose and moved like leaves on the water.” Many Native American tribes remember the Kyothæ as the Blueclay People, who called all people Kin. When the Europeans returned to the North American Continent long after the World was Broken, the Kyothæ led the Fourteen Tribes into Silence and Shadow, to protect the body and spirit of the tribes. During this centuries-long period of assimilation, the grandmothers carefully kept the sacred knowledge alive: blue clay was not forgot. Now another dangerous Changing Time is upon us, and the Kyothæ come forth from Silence and Shadow, for the good of the tribe and for the protection of the Kin.
Here I am again by the kitchen sink
  warm steam rising into the air
  the fragrance of dish detergent filling my nostrils
  thinking of the next chore on my list

There’s a stalwart tree beside my window
  tall and full, strong and healthy
  steady and faithful through all the seasons
  mutely serving the needs of our household

I remember looking for a seedling for this special spot in the yard
  not too big, not too small, not too fussy
  but just right—sound familiar to those who love nursery rhymes?
  and finding one that was perfect for our western exposure

Through the years our tree has stood in its assigned place
  clothing itself to reflect each passing season
  dressing according to an internal clock,
  a clock that ticked day in and day out

Out-stretched limbs welcome fresh life as spring wakes our tree—
  tender, green leaves appearing unbidden on its welcoming arms
  eager buds popping open at the command of an invisible life force
  blossoms emerge, filled with delicious scents and juicy nectar for busy bees

Suddenly our tree, covered with bright green leaves,
  is filtering the fierce summer sun outside my window
  providing a place of refuge for the backyard wildlife
  bravely battling the elements of drought and storms

But today, I wonder at subtle changes in the tree—
  are the leaves looking a bit listless—a bit dry?
  is that a hint of red and orange peeking through the green?
do I see fallen leaves on the walkway?

Looking up from my sink of steaming water, called back into the moment
I realize that this year there will be no green haven beside my window
no more buds, no more blossoms, no more tree.
Its battles are over, and I have lost a friend.
THE CREATIVE PROCESS
KATEI BLUECLAY, ED.

The thing that all creative artists have in common is that they all have a creative process, whether they’ve recognized and defined it or not. These processes take many different forms, but most of them can be placed in one of three categories: 1] goal-oriented, objective problem solving, 2] random inspiration (out of the nowhere into the here), or 3] a combination of the two.

Creative artist Miguel Timm, Mad Scientist, is an inventor of safety equipment. He starts with a problem, and works toward finding a solution. Sometimes the problem is work-related, i.e. a safety or environmental issue in the oil fields, and the problem is brought to his attention by events or people involved in those events. Sometimes a problem occurs to him when his mind is wandering or when he is sleeping [inspiration].

Creative artist Will James, songwriter/musician, usually works by random inspiration. He says that music plays in his head all of the time; he just has to write it down. However, sometimes he has to write a song for a special occasion, like a wedding or some other event. In those cases, he first listens to the internal music, but if he hears nothing appropriate, he does a goal-oriented solution, using what he knows about the people and the occasion – and gets it done.

Creative artist Maggie Church, a writer and storyteller, says she just listens, and repeats what she hears, in the voice that goes with the story. Sometimes she doesn’t hear it all, and then she has to kind of “figure it out,” using her age and experience to fill in the blank spaces.

All three say they use trial and error experimentation. When Miguel gets stumped, he lets go of the problem. Then, he says, the answer usually just comes to him, out of the air. Miguel’s explanation, that all ideas exist out there somewhere, and sometimes you can grab them— or they can grab you— is an
example sometimes used to describe the universal consciousness, which is the same thing as the collective unconscious.

We have all had the experience of consciously thinking about a problem, being unable to come up with a solution, then waking in the middle of the night with that “aha!” feeling of solution found. Psychologists have explained for years that this process shows how the conscious and unconscious minds work together. Our minds, they postulated, are like gigantic icebergs. The conscious mind is the part we see; the unconscious part is hidden beneath the waves. The unconscious mind never forgets and it never sleeps; it keeps on working and when we release control, as in going to sleep, it has the opportunity to attract our attention and provide the answer we need.

Since the theory of genetic memory has been proven, and transgenerational inheritance of learned behaviors/memories has been accepted, neuropsych academics tentatively place those memories and behaviors in the unconscious mind, which means that we have access to memories and behaviors that we ourselves have not experience — racial memories [human race, that is] of things we as individuals have never learned, passed down from our ancestors as part of the collective unconscious that we all share. Synthesizing those memories and behaviors with the ones we have actually experienced might explain some of the solutions we see as “inspired.”

But other theories exist. Carl Jung postulated a collective unconscious: inborn unconscious psychic material common to humankind, accumulated by the experience of all preceding generations. Racial consciousness is another term for the same thing, meaning a kind of collective subconscious that we all, as humans, share, and people can sometimes tune in, consciously or unconsciously, in some unknown way.

The fact is that, like a lot of other “facts,” we don’t really know how we do what we do. However, we do know that creative thinking is necessary to the creative process. We also know that
for many people, critical events can stimulate very creative thinking. As Samuel Johnson the lexicographer said, “When a man knows he is to be hanged . . . it concentrates his mind wonderfully.” This seems to indicate that creative thinking is impacted strongly by focusing on a problem or question that is important to the thinker.

Neuroscientists and psychologists say that creative thinking is a process of synthesis—putting old things, or disparate things, together in a new way or to produce something new, to develop ideas, processes, or products that are unique and useful. Before we can create/produce something, we have to first have an idea about that something. Both the idea and the finished product can be characterized as creative art.

The creative process can be compared to building a house. First you make a plan. You might have to educate yourself about a lot of different things. You make your lists and other preparations. Then you gather the tools and materials and organize them to facilitate use. Then you lay the foundation. Then you build up to the roof, putting in all of the necessary parts as you go. Then you put the roof on. Voila! You’ve got a house. It might sound difficult and almost impossible, but, remember, our grandparents built houses all of the time.

The single most important thing to remember about the creative process is that it produces something new— an idea, a process, an object, a product. Goal-oriented, objective problem solving is something we all do every day. We need an answer, or an object, or a method, or a solution, and we figure it out. That’s creative thinking. What makes creative art is the originality of the answer, object, method, or solution we figure out. The creative process in this method is setting a goal, asking a question, and working at it until you have obtained the answers and figured out what you need to do to accomplish your goal. “Working” is the operative word: the creative process requires diligent work. Creative people are the people who don’t give up until they reach their goal. That is the real miracle in the creative process.
At the last minute,
on my way out of the front door,
    I remember the drink I left on the counter.

At the last minute,
on my way down the drive,
    I remember to set the alarm.

At the last minute,
before reaching the highway,
    I remember I need to gas up the car.

At the last minute,
before leaving the car to proceed to my appointment,
    I remember to use the lint roller.

At the last minute,
before the doctor comes,
    I remember I wrote notes for the discussion we'll have.

At the last minute,
before leaving with prescription in hand,
    I remember to ask, "is this really necessary?"

At the last minute,
before turning in the script,
    I consign myself to the reality that I'm old enough to
    start needing doctors and prescriptions,
    to address the wear and tear, I've put upon my body
    over 30 years dedicated to military service —all those
    last minute exercises and missions,

    And I wonder,
Where did the time go?
   What will I do, and where will I be,
   at that last minute of life?

Will I be ready? Or, will I,
   at the last minute,
   before leaving this world,
   remember another task?
TWO ARTISTS AT WORK

KATEI BLUECLAY

Shadow Dancing
in the dark
moving back and forth across the yard
carrying sticks and pebbles
pieces of wood
bits of string
strips of old bark,
places them gently
one at a time
deep in the water
flat on the stone,
moves back to review
back in to adjust,
adds another one or two.
Contemplation.
Silent thought.
Yes, he’s through.

Moves off toward the standing stair
where bearded William the sculptor lairs
stands quietly until Peace
finds Patience waiting there,
then together
they ghost across the lawn
to stand silent
at the new installation
peering into the water
looking at the stone:
one graying man
one golden dog

After awhile, the two rest
quietly, back on the stair,
watching the stars,
thinking of clay
dreaming of water,
two artists at work.
ED: Chaos, unconfined, form following function, multiple meanings deeply layered –
there are no easy signposts in this poem– disordered state, unformed matter, infinite
space, all immediately recognizable in 8 little lines. The deliberate absence of
punctuation underlines the concepts inherent in chaos theory – all data in infinite
correlation– and makes it easy for the discerning reader to manipulate the meaning, to
subsume the state being defined and redefined in every line.

---

DARK ENERGY
JOHN HAYDEL

instantly out of the void
nothingness became everything
gravity pulled molecules into planets
the molecules came alive
contemplating themselves
they learned to love and be loved
for a short time
before dissolving into entropy
I write this statement about creativity and art-making as a mature artist.  I have been making things for more than 50 years, having begun in earnest as an adolescent.  While much of what I think about creativity has changed over that period of time, there are a few threads that have not so much changed as simply grown and deepened – matured.

The work of art-making is the overriding influencer of my way of living, thinking, and feeling.  Being an artist has led me to question everything: process, technique, assumptions, authority, information, relationship, dominance, subordination, pattern, motivation, validation, self, and even reality. I feel very strongly that art arises out of seeking and questioning, but the long-term work of art-making is sustained by a persistent dissatisfaction with pat answers and formulas.  Artists must learn to live with the discomfort of not knowing what will happen as a result of experimentation, whether with ideas or with technique.  Learning to live and thrive with this kind of disequilibrium is a prerequisite to true creativity.  Otherwise, one is practicing a craft or executing a formula that has become stable and predictable.  There’s nothing wrong with that, but it mustn’t be confused with the act of creation.

When I am in the studio, I spend a lot of time listening and staring.  I listen for the ideas and thoughts that arise out of contemplative silence, and I stare at blank pieces of paper or canvases watching shapes and colors emerge.  Words are often
precursors to images for me, especially in the form of poetry and metaphorical language. Images seem to arise somewhat spontaneously from my working with words, although I am often not aware of the direct connection between them until long after the work is complete. Their relationship is symbolic or metaphorical, not literal.

Art is a means of exploring edges, the unknown, and what is most meaningful to us as human beings. Much of my work is an exploration of the ways we interpret experience and the obvious differences between those interpretations and direct experience itself. That gap, so small and fleeting that we don’t even know it’s there, is in reality a vast and profound space. I often work with the tension of opposites arising from this apparent dichotomy and the layers of meaning we pile onto direct perception. I’m interested in how those layers of meaning are assembled as well as the source of meanings we conjecture. This is expressed through color, texture, varied materials, as well as the juxtaposition of abstraction with realism, color with black-and-white, and opacity with transparency.

When I was an emerging artist, I once told one of my teachers that I wondered whether artists were simply vehicles for some creative force. It was that listening activity that prompted this speculation. Now, as a mature artist, I still listen intently in the studio, but I am convinced we are more than mere vehicles. There is nothing passive about being an artist. Art-making is all about choice, selection, editing, and formation. The key is never to let the skills developed over years of making choices become a substitute for the heart of creativity: seeking without always knowing the object of the search.
Dr. Rebecca Riley

BIRD OF PARADISE

Watercolor 22 x 30
Dr. Rebecca Riley                               LIFE GOES ON & ON
Serigraph, monotype, and block print.  22 x 30
When we think of ‘trompe l’oeil, we usually think of murals, but in Lonestar Montgomery’s ceramic classes, trompe l’oeil takes on new dimensions. Artist William Cherry showed ACAJ how he created his trompe l’oeil project.

Can you pick the trompe l’oeil hammer? Is it (a) or (b)? Or both?

   Form into a slab, suitable for carving.

2. Carve two blanks.
3. Finely carve the handle.

4. Rough out hammer head
5. Add detail.
7. Add detail.
10. Wood grain, check.
Hammer heads, check.
The final version? A ceramic hammer that looks real enough to hang pictures, and feels like a real hammer, too. Art that fools the eye – and the hand!
Art holds a mirror up to Nature, they say, and its purpose is to widen and better the world vision of the viewers. When we look at a painting, we are supposed to see more than a simple image, more than just a copy of whatever the artist happened to have in his or her field of vision at any given time. The painting is supposed to evoke feelings, thoughts, memories, make connections, point up an idea, stir us up a little – or a lot.

Karen McKibben’s paintings do all of that. Using a variety of techniques, including a masterful use of color, McKibben produces evocative works in a range of styles, with a wide range of subjects. She has an “eye,” and the technical skill to allow us to see through her eye to something more than a simple image.

“the purpose . . . was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.”

William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 2
RUSTY OLD TRUCK

This old truck, abandoned, celebrated in luscious colors against a bright blue sky, tells multiple stories to its viewers. The dead past yet glows in memory. The blue sky promises a still bright future. *This* past, parked safely on an old trailer, is being *kept* by someone.
AUTUMN IN CENTRAL PARK

What do you see, in autumn, in Central Park?
MARDI GRAS

A swirl of royal colors, hints of forms in formless effusion – the joy, confusion, constant motion, over-the-topness of Mardi Gras come bursting through the canvas here.
SNOWY BLUE WINTER

What is there about blue, and cold, and alone – no human figures in this winter landscape. . .Bare trees, snow, and open water should evoke loneliness, but what we find is serene hope, acceptance, and peace.
SOFT WINTER CHICKADEE

Harbinger of spring – warm blues, bright berries, bright-eyed, fat little bird! Winter is a natural part of the cycle of life, and in winter, we know, are the seeds of every spring.
In the dead of winter, the church stands foursquare, itself a message of life and renewal, the cemetery gates open, and all of grief hidden beneath a blanket of snow. The soft, warm light on the horizon adds to the feeling of natural peace.
There are a lot of interesting theories out there about why people collect various things. Collecting appears to be a universal pattern, beginning in infancy and continuing throughout life (“that’s mine!”). It is obvious to us that collecting is a basic human need, a survival mechanism.

Maslow (1943) categorized human drives in terms of the needs that people are motivated to achieve, beginning with the things most essential for physical survival and moving up to self-actualization, which is when people achieve their full potential, including creative activities. Psychologists categorize needs in terms of basic physiological needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfillment needs, characterizing only physiological needs as survival needs per se, but, in fact, they are all survival drives. They act together to ensure first the survival of the individual (physiological needs), then the survival of the group (belongingness, love, esteem), then the survival of the race [all humankind] (through creative action).

The drive to collect can be first identified with hunting and gathering – getting food. But as we have moved farther away from subsistence survival in an uncontrolled dangerous world, our drive to collect has turned down other avenues. Collecting assuages our inborn need to hunt and gather. It provides security through the acquisition of knowledge and of physical objects in the same way that knapping arrowheads and making tools provided security to ancient man.

And it’s fun.

People who collect clocks and watches are called horologists, from the word horology, the study of time. They are also called timekeepers, which is an interesting thought. Some of them
say they collect clocks and watches because they are obsessed with time; some say it’s the idea of all of the little parts working together perfectly, the whole idea of technology starting with nuts and bolts, tiny springs, capstans. Some say it’s because they are beautiful, unusual, surprising – thought making.

This particular private collection of timepieces is concentrated around size, unusual shapes, and secrets.

Skeleton watches or clocks are those whose workings are visible. They vary in size and shape, but basically they have two see-through sides. The most common is ball-shaped. This Omega is banded in brass, with a neck chain and dangle. The crystal ball allows one to see the jeweled workings through the back. The long chain has a small coin fastener that reads Napoleon Empereur. This Omega is dated 1882.
Another type of skeletal ball has a flattened shape. It, too, is plain metal, but the crystals are faceted. It is much smaller than the Omega, and is worn with a pin that can attach to a lapel or scarf.

Yet another version of the skeleton is square. This one, in gold, has larger crystals, with a smaller banding. It, too, is worn around the neck. These are hand-wound and handset, and it is necessary to wind them daily. After winding, one can watch the moving parts. It is difficult to get good pictures of these small watches, but a close look might produce sight of the “jewels” in the works.
Gubelin makes some beautiful ball watches, like this one in green and gold. The green bands are guilloché work with enamel.

Bucherer used guilloché with red enamel and gold for this exquisite necklace watch. A lady could wear the pendant as a simple piece of jewelry, with the watch turned to the inside, and no one would ever know that she was a slave to time. . .
Schwob created this beautiful bow pin and watch that is worn on the shoulder. The use of guilloché and enamel produces a sense of depth that is 3-D-like. The roses seem to float above the blue background. Note that all of these are hanging upside down, to make it easy for the wearer to actually use the watches to tell the time.

This older pin watch is in rose gold, with a tinted crystal. Rose gold is a gold and copper alloy which was very popular in the 19th Century. It is marked Aertime. It is believed that the shape is a modified Star of David.
Sometimes a collector chooses a watch for what comes with it. This gold watch came attached to an English Women’s Institute “For Home and Country” badge from 1915-1940’s, approximately. The “For Home and Country” slogan was adopted when the WI opened in Britain in 1915 to promote the war effort. The maple leaf references the original founding in Canada in 1897. The Tudor rose is the traditional heraldic emblem of England.

The older watches, both necklace and pin, are key set and key wound, like this one, in gold. This kind of watchcase is called a “demi-hunter,” meaning that it has a small window in the front cover for convenience. This pin watch is meant to be worn with the watch face to the inside.
Secrets are very popular with collectors. This interesting piece masquerades as a perfume bottle necklace, something that was popular in the 1920’s and 1930’s. The top and bottom slide apart to display a very small timepiece. It is gold, with a long chain and a long dangle.

One of our favorites was made by Gotham. At first glance, it’s a lovely cameo locket, in excellent shape. It’s silver, and has a watch pocket chain instead of a necklace or pin. Our collector believes it was used as a watch fob, or as a lady’s pocket watch. In a pocket, it would have had more protection from possible damage.
Of course, when we turn it over, we see the watch. But that’s not all. Remembering the locket idea, we open it –

and it definitely looks like we could put a picture in there. Then our collector shows us the real secret - a hand-drawn portrait. . .
Our collector has a favorite, too. This is an extremely rare little jewel called a buttonhole watch, made around the 1890's, sold in Italy by Donadio. When inserted into the lapel buttonhole, the visible dial is \( \frac{1}{4} \)" across. It is gunmetal, and the watch rim has very small black diamonds running around it.

The larger part is placed inside the lapel, and the small watch face goes through the buttonhole. With the number 12 up, a gentleman can simply lift his lapel a little and check the time. Of course, he has to really be able to see, with that \( \frac{1}{4} \)" dial.
In case you were wondering, we did some size comparison pictures for you.
Our collector says that if you’re going to collect, you should first gather as much information as you can. Some of these little watches cost a lot of money – so you should be sure of what you’re getting. As we know, when there is a large market for scarce items, there are always people out there doing their best to provide what’s wanted, and many of them are excellent at faking up antiques and collectibles. He says that one of the best ways to start a collection is at garage sales and nonprofit resale shops.

Another important thing to remember is that if you are going to collect old wind-up watches, you have to wind them every day. If you don’t, they stop working. “If you’re going to collect watches,” he says, “You’d better have some time on your hands. . .”
This special section is devoted to information designed to improve the quality of our lives.

To comment or query any of the following, please email us at acajsponsor@gmail.com.
STAYIN’ ALIVE

According to researchers who have demonstrated the positive effects of mental and physical activity on aging brains, it is essential to continue acquiring knowledge throughout our lives. We need to exercise our brains just like we exercise our bodies. The way we do that is to stuff our brains with new information and experiences. The more disparate ideas, objects, experience, knowledge, information, understanding, a person acquires, the more apt that person is to remain mentally alert and to think creatively.

That’s because creative thinking, according to neuroscientists and other experts, is the making of serendipitous connections between sometimes widely disparate ideas, objects, experience, knowledge, information, understanding, to create something new. Sometimes we make these connections by linear movement, one thought leading directly to the next until we reach our goal, and sometimes we make incredible leaps from one thought to the next and to the solution we’re seeking. Sometimes, we bounce ideas off of each other, working synergistically to create a whole that is larger than the sum of its parts. Something you say triggers my thought; I respond and you acquire an unexpected insight.

Thinking creatively allows us to live creatively, which keeps the body and spirit alive and growing, and it enhances personal experiences. We all have problems; we all can learn special problem-solving techniques, but if we don’t have the ammunition, the wide variety of information and experience that contribute to creativity, we are less likely to arrive at optimum solutions.

The ambience, the flavor, the totality of the effect of personal experience—all contribute greatly to creative thought and creative living. The internet is a great source of information, but it cannot provide the special effects of direct personal experience. Nor can the internet provide the synergistic effect of human interaction, social contact, and individual cooperation. We
are often more stimulated by contact with another inquiring mind than we are by finding something on the internet.

So, as elders, we need a venue that we can use to keep our brains alive. It should be convenient, accessible, and reasonably low-cost. It should provide a wide range of experiences and information. It should be safe. It should be interesting, informative, and fun, and it should provide us with lots of opportunity for stimulating social interaction.

Sound good? Read on. . .

THE BEST DEAL IN TOWN

At $35/year, Lonestar-Montgomery’s ALL Program for people aged fifty and over is unquestionably the best deal in town– and there’s something for everybody. The annual $35 membership fee entitles participants to take Academy for Lifelong Learning courses free of charge at The Woodlands campus, and to use the services of LSC-Montgomery, including the Extended Learning Center, the library, internet access and theater activities.

The program provides stimulating classes and seminars, social activities, skills development, and opportunities for personal growth, all at convenient times for seniors. Most classes are seminar type– meeting one time, one to two hours in length. Some meet more often, on a regular schedule. No prior education is required; there are no tests, no grades, and no textbooks.

Classes are loosely organized under clusters, and a topic sampling includes social activities [day trips, game days, nature walks, plays, musicals, concerts, luncheons, movies]; personal growth [book clubs, spiritual discussions, political discussions, health and fitness lessons]; useful seminars [hobbies and crafts, art appreciation, art, drawing, painting, finance, aging issues,
history]; and skills development [basic computer, monthly consult-a-tech, internet, writing, genealogy].

Did we say “something for everybody?” The online course catalog lists Lonestar-Montgomery ALL classes under the following headings:

- Arts & Crafts
- Computer & Technology
- Culinary Arts, Food & Cooking
- Financial & Legal
- Fun & Recreation
- Gardening
- Genealogy
- Health, Fitness & Nutrition
- History
- Languages
- Movies, Music & Theater
- Philosophy
- Political & Community Affairs
- Reading & Writing
- Religion & Spirituality
- Safety
- Science & Nature
- Senior Issues

Member benefits include:

- Free or low-cost [supply fees, usually] lectures, workshops and seminars
- Day trips to local nature and historical sites – 1-day group events
- Access to select college fitness centers
- Advance notice of art shows with artist receptions
- Discount pricing on plays, concerts and musicals
- Discounts on some community education courses
- Access to college libraries and computer labs
- Campus ID cards
• A class each semester—Hidden Benefits of ALL—detailling benefits, including free Microsoft Office 365 software and cloud space, use of campus facilities, discounts and freebies you can get with your student card and/or student email

**ACAJ**, this professionally-edited journal, is an outgrowth of the ALL Program; many of the authors contributing to this premiere issue of **ALL CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL** are being published for the first time after taking ALL writing classes at Lonestar-Montgomery, some of them in order to accomplish a lifelong dream.

ALL participants have a lot of positive things to say about the program, ranging from gleeful listings of new skills and new friends, to just plain having affordable fun. “This program saved my life,” one student said. “My husband agrees. I was so depressed I don’t know what I would have done. Life seemed so empty – but it’s not like that anymore. It’s a great program.”

Registration is required for participation. For more information, including registration and schedules, go online to:

[http://www.lonestar.edu/all-montgomery.htm](http://www.lonestar.edu/all-montgomery.htm)


An open house is held at the beginning of each semester, so participants can meet instructors, learn first-hand about interesting courses, and register.
Free Books at gutenberg.org – download free eBooks in various formats or read online. Project Gutenberg, a volunteer effort founded in 1971 by Michael S. Hart and the oldest digital library, provides free access to more than 50,000 items in the public domain, some of which are being sold on Amazon by pirates. Fact and fiction; novels, poetry, short stories and drama; arts and crafts; cookbooks; reference works; issues of periodicals; audibles; music notation files – all in the public domain, which means not currently under copyright. Search the collection of over 50,000 titles, by author, titles, subject, or genre. Or just enter the period, i.e., “1920’s,” and pick out interesting titles. The “READ ONLINE” option lets you sample books before downloading. Lost your old copies of ASTOUNDING? Interested in 1850’s fashions as chronicled in GODEY’S LADY’S BOOK? Prefer reading romances without graphic sex scenes– or mysteries without all of the gore? Check out gutenberg.org.

A SAMPLE OF FREE GUTENBERG BOOKS WE’VE READ AND LIKED:

Frances Hodgson Burnette
A Secret Garden; A Little Princess; Little Lord Fauntleroy; His Grace of Osmond

Jeffery Farnol
The Money Moon, a Romance; The Chronicles of the Imp; Our Admiraible Betty

Rudyard Kipling
Plain Tales From the Hills – and many others

R. A. Lafferty
Sodom and Gomorrah, Texas

H. Beam Piper
Murder in the Gunroom
Oscar Wilde The Canterville Ghost [also a movie]; Lady Windermere’s Fan

The Importance of Being Earnest

P. G. Wodehouse My Man Jeeves, and many others

Mysteries: some Agatha Christie; Arthur Conan Doyle; G.K. Chesterton (Father Brown); Anna Catherine Green; Maurice LeBlanc (Arsene Lupin); Mary Roberts Rinehart, and many more

Science fiction/fantasy: Poul Andersen; Ray Bradbury; Phillip K. Dick; Lester Del Ray; Robert E. Howard; Evelyn E. Smith; Edgar Rice Burroughs; H. G. Wells; old zines

FREE SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY: Baen Books’ Free Library allows free downloads of complete books by top-ranking authors. Among our favorites: David Drake’s With the Lightnings (Lt. Leary); Sharon Lee & Steve Miller’s Agent of Change (Liaden Universe); Sarah Hoyt’s Draw One in the Dark (Shifter); David Weber’s On Basilisk Station (Honor Harrington); and the annual Free Short Stories collections, where you’ll find some great Wen Spencer tales as well as Lee & Miller short stories. http://www.baen.com/categories/free-library.html

WORTH PAYING FOR:

BAEN BOOKS: SciFi Fantasy. Baen’s home page features new books, a short story and usually a scholarly article to read online, access to the Baen Free Radio Hour, podcasts, and a monthly contest. Check out Advance Reader Copies and Monthly Baen Bundles. http://www.baen.com/home

Dorothy Gilman’s books. The Mrs. Pollifax series is the most well known, but Thale’s Folly and A Nun in the Closet are among her best. The plots are layered; the characters, especially Miss L’Hommedieu in Thale’s Folly, are unforgettable; the story is there, and the books flow.
Winifred Watson: *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*, a lovely comedy set in 1930; see also the movie starring Frances McDormand.

Elizabeth Cadell: light romances and a few good mysteries by a superb writer. *The Lark Shall Sing*, one of her best, is available on Kindle for under $9.

**Sharon Lee & Steve Miller’s Liaden** series, available at Baen Books. *Best of Show* to this series.

Elizabeth Moon, Texas author, all-time favorite *Remnant Population*, should be read by everybody over the age of 50. Although this is “science fiction,” it is much more than that – and readers will soon find themselves swept into a wonderful, internally consistent, real story about an old woman who I’m sure was born wearing purple. . .

**David Drakes’ Lt. Leary series.** Read one and you’ll want to read them all.

Georgette Heyer: the creator of Regency novels, long before formula writing was invented. *The Grand Sophy* is one of her best, along with *These Old Shades* and *Devil’s Cub*.

Jennifer Crusie and Bob Mayer: *Agnes and the Hitman*.

D. E. Stevenson - [http://www.orderofbooks.com/authors/de-stevenson/](http://www.orderofbooks.com/authors/de-stevenson/) *Summerhills*, paperback, is listed on Amazon at $499.51– but the Kindle prices for her books are around $9.

Lois McMaster Bujold’s *Vorkosigan* series. Read *Shards of Honor* first. The only one not worth buying is the last one (Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen), which seems to be polemic PC – and is inconsistent with all of the previous characterization. Gentleman Jole reads well, if you haven’t read the others; otherwise it seems kind of like Deus Ex Machina—“who was that masked man?” This last one breaks the series’ internal consistency; that automatic suspension of disbelief is destroyed by Jole, which would have been a great book had
Bujold used other characters than the ones she had already so clearly drawn.

Christianna Brand: Nanny McPhee: Based on the Collected Tales of Nurse Matilda (also movie)

Terry Pratchett – Only You Can Save Mankind – a “children’s” book for adults. Monstrous Regiment, a Discworld novel. And Pratchett’s scandalously funny takeoffs of the modern world in most of the Discworld novels are not to be missed.

Josephine Tey: Brat Farrar, an all-time favorite

Gary Paulsen: Hatchet, an award-winning contemporary survival story. Buy it for your grandchildren, and read it first.

Majorie Allingham, Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers – for mystery fans with minds

Consider: Amazon’s prime with Kindle unlimited: Prime costs $99/year, we understand. Customer service says that If you download 11 free Kindle books that would have cost $9 each, you’ve broken even. If you read 10 or more free books a month, and the books average $2.99 each, you’ve come out ahead. Check it out and figure the costs. But if you buy it, be sure to use it.

LENDING: Some eBooks come with lending capability; the authors would like you to share them. This is one way of getting new readers who will then buy other books they’ve written.

LIBRARY: Your local library is one of your greatest resources, not only for eBooks, but also for other kinds of information and events. Check it out!
If you are interested in submitting work for possible inclusion in the next volume of ACAJ, please note the following requirements:

Contributors to ACAJ must be, at the time of submission, registered in the ACADEMY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING Program at Lonestar Montgomery.

Submitted work can have been produced at any time in the past or present, and does not have to be related to any particular ALL class. Reworking your proposed submission through one or more of ALL’s writing classes might be helpful to eliminate spelling and grammar errors, but you are not required to do that.

Written work should be submitted in Helvetica, font size 14, single-spaced, paragraph indentation 5 spaces, no extra lines between paragraphs. Margins are standard 1 inch all sides. Do not hit enter at the end of each line; set your font size and margins and just type.

Submissions are subject to professional editing standards as applied by our editors.

Contributors who wish to submit their artifacts, i.e. paintings, sculptures, etc., must submit jpgs of the work(s) via email, and verify their right to authorize publication of the images. ACAJ may then assist in the creation of images of the works if the images do not meet publication requirements.

Contributors must sign and return ACAJ’s Publication Release, giving ACAJ irrevocable right to publish the work(s) or images of the work(s), but the contributor retains all rights to the work or works (copyrights).

If you would like to be the subject of an ACAJ interview, please email us information about you and your field of interests. If you
would like to write a factual article for ACAJ, please send a query letter with details of the proposed article and your qualifications.

If you would like to suggest a topic or an individual or group as the subject of an article in ACAJ, please email us general information about that.

EMAIL YOUR SUBMISSIONS WITH COMPLETE CONTACT INFORMATION TO: acajsponsor@gmail.com

MEDIA:

If you would like to interview one of our contributors to this volume of ACAJ and would like us to assist you to contact the contributor, please email us with details and we will do our best to help you with that. Please put “Media Request” in the subject line to facilitate rapid response.

EMAIL YOUR MEDIA REQUESTS TO: acajsponsor@gmail.com
See Table of Contents. Each author listed retains all copyright to the printed words and images, with the following exceptions.

Copyrights of images in the following are held by Blueclay Tribal Association and ACAJ, jointly:

Letters From Home
The Mermaid’s Kiss
Oh, Oh, I’m Gonna Get it Now
Mrs. Hisser’s Cautionary Tale
Evil Winds of Autumn
Ole Moses
Blue Clay Bides
Artists at Work
Use & Beauty: Marking Time

Copyrights of images in the following are held by the listed individual or group, and reproduced by permission:

Kathryn Lane: Awake & Dreaming – Kathryn Lane, Pen-L Publishing, Alamo Bay Press, or assigns
China Was Different – Beth Antal
McKibben’s Eye – Karen McKibben
Trompe L’Oeil – W. T. Cherry III
On Creativity and Artists’ Work – Dr. Rebecca Riley

Copyrights of articles produced and/or written by editorial staff are held by ACAJ and Blueclay Tribal Association, jointly, with the exception of:

What’s Your Story? Christine Susany, Contributing Editor

For further information: acajsponsor@gmail.com.