

*Never has so much been owed by so many
to E. G. Willy, Esta Fischer
a new Best In Show & The Dream Journal.*

The Blotter

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MAGAZINE



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Large, Treasurer
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Development
Brace Boone III.....Marketing
Advisor
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

Advertisers and Subscriptions Contact:

Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Submissions and Editorial Business to:

Jenny Haniver
mermaid@blotterrag.com

Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief
chief@blotterrag.com

919.933.4720 (business hours only!
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"FYI"

Watching the history channel this evening – which I enjoy greatly – a piece came on about the Visigoth sacking of Rome, and the end of the great classical period of human history. August, 410, it was – exactly sixteen hundred years ago next month. The end of a two year long siege of the eternal city resulted in one of the nobles ordering the opening of the gates to Aleric, the barbarians' chieftain. What, the scholars asked, caused the collapse of Roman order? For one thing, starvation; hunger to the point where bands of cannibals roamed the streets at night, and at the games shouted suggestions at the grisly completion of gladiatorial combat that perhaps the meat shouldn't go to waste. Now, one might ask, what were the Romans doing still staging the games? I can't say, other than to speculate that some things go ignobly on right until the very end. Like executive bonuses.

Explosion is notable in its singularity. Collapse – implosion – is rarely one event. The star that feeds on itself, then can no longer be bothered. The sinkhole in Kentucky limestone country that supported endless seeping drips until one day it gives up the ghost and swallows up a barn. The career in pop music that takes years to launch only to quickly become bewilderingly banal. So it goes with the complexities of finance and western culture. Events sketched in 2008 are inked in 2010, in much the same manner as they were a dozen and a half centuries ago. No one cares that their piece of the pie during the boom was part of the arteriosclerosis of the bust. Holy crap, they say, dish me up another slice!

Been discussing this sort of thing with friends via e-mail, and must admit that we are all quite troubled by the flip attitude of the oil barons and their Gulf spill shenanigans. What everyone agrees on is that there is a general disregard for the damage. It appears as if such problems don't affect the oil boys; they are untouched by the numbers thrown out for potential fines and penalties and unmoved by the actual environmental destruction. It often feels like they are still under the impression that if they show no emotion, then that calm will reflect outward like sunshine and everyone will walk calmly away and let them get on with their work, or not. This is a business skill that I have often seen in action. Regrettably, it is considered more valuable within the corporate environment than actual creativity or working knowledge of a task, or experience. Grace under fire, it is flatteringly referred to. In fact, what it really is, is *crapdoodle*. There may be a more appropriate word for it, but I can't presently think of it.

Mostly what it makes me think is how much it fouls up the fishing. Honest. Some of you may not get this, but it's all about fishing. Everything, I mean. Every. Thing.

My apologies, but it's true. And I'm only apologizing for not telling you sooner, that it is all about fishing, I mean, and always has been, because I've known about this for quite some time and might have had the courtesy to let you know. Sorry about that.

Every good thing is related to fishing, from the deep relationships we have with people we've been fishing with to the thrill of pulling something up out of the water – often to our complete surprise. Every desperately pathetic thing, every horror and endless sadness is about fishing as well. All of human joy and pain, our wins and our losses, sanctity and sin-city. Fishing. Don't believe me? Well, it's not the first time. Ask anyone. Ask Noah, Jonah or Peter. Ask Paul, old scales-falling-from-his-eyes, himself. Ask any son of Zebedee, for that matter.

Why, you may well wonder, is this so? Because the world is 2/3

water, and, so I'm told, we know more about the surface of the moon than we do about the bottom of the sea. Or it could be because we're 3/5 water, on average, and our brains are closer to 70%. You see, we're trapped here on the land, and curious about the water of which we are such a part. Something like that.

But I think it's mostly because we like a good fish story.

Most of the great epics of human endeavor and popular culture's most successful celluloid potboilers? I mean behind all of the metaphors and allegories, slow pans and romantic two-shots? Fishing. The many trials of Odysseus floating back and forth across the Adriatic and through the Straits of the Bosphorus are one big fishing story. Huckleberry Finn? Please. Mermaids, dryads, Peter Pan and Captain Hook, the tale of the Little Mermaid, Twenty-thousand Leagues Under the Sea, Sponge-bob, all of them add up to a great water-conflict. "Moby Dick" and "Splash." (talk about your high and low water marks.) "The Poseidon Adventure" and "Titanic." "The Perfect Storm." Even "The Hunt for Red October." Unravel the skein of any of our sagas and myths, our epics and elegies, and our most sublime love poetry and you come back to the human love-hate, what-the-heck relationship with water, and our wonderment of what's just out of sight down there in the wet.

At this juncture, some might question my logic. What about other stories? What about "Gone With The Wind?" And I pose to you that there is something extremely fishy about Scarlett O'Hara and the way she likes but doesn't actually like-like Rhett Butler, and uses Ashley Wilkes as kind of a "Get out of jail free" card with the poker player and sea-captain from Charleston. And isn't Charleston where they invented she-crab soup, the stock of which is made from sherry, and if that wasn't a magical thing delivered by the gods of the sea, I don't know what is.

And apropos of almost nothing, my sister had a plan a few years back to move to Canada from New Jersey because global warming is going to cause, despite the melting of the ice-caps and the flooding of the coast-lines of the earth, a dearth of potable water and brother (she said to me) that aint good. There were a few holes in her plan, like how did she plan to defend her artesian well in Saskatoon from a lot of heavily armed and thirsty *yahoos* from Los Angeles, which, oh by the way, is originally a desert.

And how is it, then, that no one has latched onto the mysterious fact that almost all of our major religions originate in desert climes, and yet can agree on one thing and one thing only – that fish is pretty darned good eatin'. Don't believe me? Christians – fish OK, even to the extent that Catholics specifically request the seafood special on Fridays. (Note - Lutherans, of which I am one, like this really odd stuff called Lutevisk, to which my namesake in Lake Wobegon will attest. Look it up. The very idea makes me shiver.) Onward! Hindu? No hamburgers, thanks, but fish is OK. Judaism – no pork, Fish OK, hold the shellfish (Aahh! How does one survive summer without a Low-Country shrimp-boil?!) Islam – no pork, fish OK, sans the white wine sauce. My point? Fish could very well be the great peacemaker. Tea Party, Coffee Party. Instead, how about a party boat, a mile offshore over some old wrecks? Who can fuss over while they're rasslin' a big old halibut?

As for me, I don't give a damn about all of the other stuff. It was always about going fishing with Pop and Uncle Dick. There's this lake in north Jersey, and the fall weekends were always so crisp that it crackled when you walked through the grass, down the hill to the dock. But that's a story for another time.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

I think we've done a pretty good job keeping the potty-mouth to a minimum, don't you? And enough is as good as a feast, I always say.

An excerpt from the 2010 Laine Cunningham Novel Award winner “Wakan”

by E. G. Willy

“Sleeping on Horseback”

We had ridden long and were still far from the inn;
My eyes grew dim; for a moment I fell asleep.
Under my right arm the whip still dangled;
In my left hand the reins for an instant slackened.
Suddenly I woke and turned to question my groom.
“We have gone a hundred paces since you fell asleep.”
Body and spirit for a while had changed place;
Swift and slow had turned to their contraries.
For these few steps that my horse had carried me
Had taken in my dream countless aeons of time!
True indeed is that saying of Wise Men
A hundred years are but a moment of sleep.”
Po Chu-i 822 AD

Walter slept in the barn on the alfalfa. There were a couple of barn cats in there, Sioux cats of no pedigree, small, never going to be any larger on a diet of barn mice and scraps. Above in the hay storage, there was a family of barn owls. Walter could hear them up there, restless, ruffling, ready to sweep across the Dakota prairie once the dark came in. In a stall floored with old railroad ties, his horse Lucky moved about uneasily, breathing deep, long gulps of air. Outside, the reservation were dogs barking, and Lucky felt unsure with-

out Walter next to him. Though Walter had named him Lucky, he was *sunka wakan*, the way the Sicunga thought, making a horse a dog, a dog a horse.

Walter was on his back on the stacked bales of alfalfa, the whirl of bourbon pushing his blood fast, his face flush. The alfalfa prickled through the old wool blanket, reminded him of how he used to ride from farm to farm, finding wayfarer’s cover in the barn. Walter woke and slept, thinking about his wife, Eve, his daughter, Susan, her twin daughters. Then there were his sons, Rod and Clyde, run as far off as they could once they were of age. And Jay, the son who died. And Eve, who in blaming herself for Jay’s death, blamed everyone.

Walter rolled over, said, “Goddamn and hell.”

Lucky stirred, stood up, shook his mane, let out a sigh that pulsed against the wooden walls of his stall. A pair of coy-

otes began to sing far away. Walter listened to the corn whispering his name, the kitting of the coyotes as they moved along the edge of the cottonwood forest, wondered how many farmers had heard their names out there. To the east, the Missouri flowed purple black, tricky slow, a pulse of prairie blood that lunged at the casual bather, carried him downstream in its heavy arms.

It took Walter some time to get back to sleep. And then he dreamt of the Argonne a half a century earlier. Walter had been there in his dream many times over the years, and he knew it would always end the same. Mary Dark Thunder would appear on the Allied front, the light of dawn behind her, slight, her face expressionless except for her purple-black eyes as she watched the young men at war. Walter looked over his back in his dream and he could see a sea of soldiers, their arms raised, shouting. And when Walter turned away, they would disappear, and



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he would be on the lacrosse field in Pipestone, seventeen years old, fifty six summers ago now. The Pipestone sky was red like the stone. And the young Sioux warriors were yelping, showing off to the crowd. And Walter saw Mary clear as ever, her hair black, coarse, oiled, teeth straight but the one snagged eyetooth. And Walter smelled her breath, sweet as fresh pulled grass. Then he returned to the war, and he was holding Mary in his arms, praying, saying *"Lena yuha hoyewaye. I have these that I am sending through my voice."* And the "these" were Mary Dark Thunder and everything she was made of.

Walter woke at dawn. His back ached right at the point where the weight of the tree had forced him from his saddle the year previous, broken his back and left him useless in bed for six months, then another six of hobbling about. His mouth was dry, and his eyes hurt when he focused. Walter said, "Goddamn."

Leonard Poor Bear came to the barn door. "How you doing, Walter?"

"Thirsty."
 "You and the horse."
 "Yep."

"You lie there. I got this."
 Walter followed Leonard outside. Leonard had Lucky tied on the hitch. The appaloosa was drinking a long bucket of water. Walter filled his cup from the well, drank, filled his cup again.

"I had some dreams last night," said Walter.
 "Yeah, you were drinking a lot," said Leonard.

The two men sat on the porch and talked farm. Walter told Leonard they had new times coming up, and the sunflower farmer had to watch out.

Leonard nodded, said, "You know, you shouldn't be out here. I guess I ought to tell you that."

"You going to stop me?"
 Leonard registered the statement, sucked a lip. "I think I told you already," he said, his voice going up in question, the Brule way, making a question of something already said, just so Walter would feel comfortable, like maybe Walter had forgotten and Leonard wanted to make sure Walter knew he was think-

ing of him. "Mary's up Alazda way."
 "You did. But you didn't give an address."

"I don't recall if I did or not."
 "You didn't."
 "We got the rest of the bacon going," said Leonard.
 "Well, that sounds damn fine."
 "You're the one who brought it."
 "Still sounds fine."

Inside it was just Leonard and his boys. The men hadn't shown up to work. And Leonard's wife was gone already to the processing plant in Pierre.

"You thinking of hunting today, Walter?" asked Leonard.
 "Me and the boys can come out with you. Got things set up here. Even though fall's moving in, we got a little time now."

Walter sat down at the table, a busted up old portable card table with spindly metal legs that folded in. "Pour that bourbon in the coffee. We'll finish it off right."

Though the boys were not yet sixteen, Leonard poured them a taste in their coffees.

"This stuff'll kill you," said Leonard to the boys.



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"It just might," agreed Walter.

The boys were shy, looked sideways at each other, unsure Walter should see them drinking.

When the bourbon was finished, Walter and Leonard went back to the hitch, washed and saddled Lucky. The big appaloosa was thick in the withers, spotted more than a proper horse should be.

"Everyone says he's got the blood of a circus horse," said Leonard as he patted Lucky's rump. "I see something there."

"Goddamn treasure," said Walter.

Walter slipped the ringed bit into Lucky's mouth. Lucky was a soft-mouthed horse, and the bit was more like a bad habit. Walter could guide the horse with just his feet. Walter looked at Leonard, said, "I hate to put this damn thing in."

Leonard nodded, began to pull on the cinch. Lucky filled his lungs with air and barreled out his chest so the cinch held tight on its rings.

"Come on, you old snot."

"He's a hard breather," warned Walter. "He'll make you work like hell for that saddle."

"Just like Houdini. Son of a bitch."

"Look at his damned face," noted Walter.

Leonard looked at Lucky's head. The horse was gazing into the distance, concentrating.

"That tricky son of a gun," said Walter.

"You let that air out," ordered Leonard.

"Give him a moment. Even a horse can't hold his breath forever."

Lucky exhaled, and Leonard pulled the cinch in tight.

"Tell me when you want to sell him," offered Leonard. "Or maybe we can work a trade. Good horse like this, you don't see his kind much around."

Walter nodded, pulled himself up on Lucky's back, checked the range rifle. "Thanks a million, Leonard. I appreciate it."

Leonard handed Walter a piece of paper. It was yellow, pulled from a receipt from the hardware store in Chamberlain. "That's got her place on it. She won't own a phone. So I say you should probably just show up. She'll know you're coming if

you're on your horse on account the word'll get there first."

"I suppose it will."

"You be safe, Walter," said Leonard.

"Yep."

"I mean it."

"You don't got to worry about me."

"I damned mean it," said Leonard, his voice going up. It was Leonard that found Walter the last time, riding off in the badlands, Walter's voice barely a whisper, all broke up, Lucky heading him east on a slow pace. And Leonard felt bad about it, a little bit embarrassed. He kept his respect though. Leonard knew what Walter was made of. And Walter didn't have to prove himself. Walter had big *wakan* when he was a younger man. And now that had changed. The new *wakan* was deeper. It pulled at a guy, set him down, reminded him of what he used to be.

Walter nodded, gave Lucky a kick. Walter knew if he turned, he'd see Leonard looking at him, worried.

Walter said "Get up."

And Lucky's steeled shoes said "*Waska, Waska, Waska, Waska*" on the slurred highway.

Walter went southwest for the morning, eight miles, going fast on the road. Lucky was fresh, strode hard in the morning cool. The reservation wasn't large, not much more than a consideration by the government. When Walter was young, it looked like the biggest place in the world, but now it was shrunken and easily conquered.



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And the roads weren't much good, just a lot of gravel and stretches of slurry, a place where a car could drive without bucking down to its axles. The year before the government had turned out the tribe, flooded the town of Lower Brule, houses, farms. And the promised recompense was slow in coming.

Walter went south towards Reliance, thinking he'd go by Kennebec, Presho, and Kadoka, then north by Rapid City, up to Belle Fourche, make a good long ride of it.

At noon he came to the farm where his father had set a man's leg a few years after they'd killed Sitting Bull. The farmhouse was broken down, just as it was back then, a building under constant defeat, the home of Laverne Bleu, a tribal policeman until he got shot at a few too many times. The Bleus were French Lakota, all with green eyes, skin like deer hide, people who belonged nowhere in the hierarchy of reservation full bloods or the invading whites. Walter remembered that Laverne was showing a carcinoma on his face when they arrived. Walter's dad saw there wasn't much time

left for the man, told him he'd be back to check on him when summer ended. There was no charge for Laverne's leg on account it was a family with six kids, all good Episcopalians, skinny as all hell. When Walter and his father left the farm, his father told Walter, "Laverne's had a bad run. It ain't our right to complicate things worse. Him and his family go free of charge." And that was how it went till Laverne passed on. No charge, Walter's dad checking on him, making sure things were right.

Walter waited at the house. Laverne's grandson, Marty, came out. He was walking slow, not as old as Walter, but slowed up plenty now.

"*Hau tanhansi,*" said Marty.

Walter said, "*Hau.*" Waited a long time before he got the name. "You're a Bleu."

"I am."

Marty nodded. "Thought you might come by my way. Never seen you out here but I thought it. Don't know how I knew but I did."

"I met your dad once."

"That's true." Then, "Come on down off your horse.

We'll have some lunch."

Marty didn't speak much after that. Walter told him how his father had set Laverne's leg. He didn't mention the free part. Everyone on the reservation knew it anyhow. They ate some macaroni and cheese. Marty said he got a lot of it in the service and came to love the stuff. Then they went out and checked on Lucky. It was a long inspection, and Walter could see Marty liked the horse, though Marty didn't say it. He gave Lucky a lot of looking around, especially the big, solid rump.

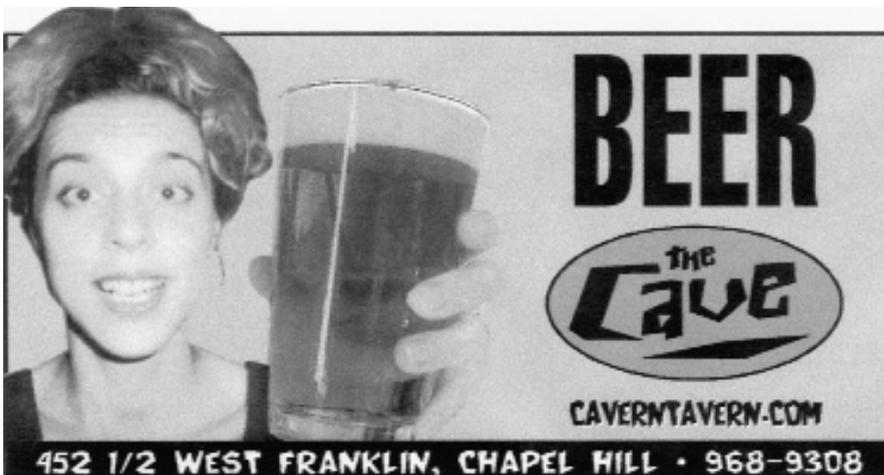
Walter stayed another hour after lunch, waiting out the sun. He watered Lucky, gave him a little grain. Marty got talkative when he saw Walter was fixing on leaving, spoke a lot about the corn, mostly the dent corn, how it made good grain for livestock. Walter could talk corn as good as any farmer. He told Marty they had new times coming up, and the sunflower and corn farmer had to watch out. Marty took the news with expressionless concern. He wrote down Walter's advice on the change in crops in a book he used for farm notes, said he'd check what the banks were saying.

Then Marty said, "I got something for you, Mr. Wright."

He went in the house, returned a moment later with the *igmu* fur.

Walter held the fur between his thumb and his forefinger, gave it a rub.

"My dad trapped it a while ago. Thought maybe you'd like it. It might bring you some luck. Or maybe it gets cold in the morning, you put it around



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your neck.”

“That’s a helluva a nice gift, Marty.”

“It ain’t payment for what your dad did for my grandpa, but I figure it’s something.”

“I appreciate it, Marty.”

“You go safe, Mr. Wright.”

“I know it ain’t right to say something twice if you said it right the first time,” said Walter. “But this is a helluva nice gift.”

Marty smiled softly, said, “I thought you’d like it.”

By seven they were off the reservation. And Walter started feeling the hard pull, his legs freezing up, not used to the time in the saddle, shoulders hurting, back aching right at that same place where the tree broke it. Walter dismounted Lucky and walked. It was their second day, when horse and rider start to show, not up to a third day yet. They could stop at two and never do the third. “The hardening day” as Walter’s dad used to put it.

Walter came up on a rise, saw a cut in the prairie where the rain had run right through the ancient bentonite bed. It would be soft at that cut, dry higher up, and have plenty of water for the horse. Walter took to the the fence with his fencing pliers. He couldn’t say how much fence he’d put up with that tool. It was countless now, but the pliers hardly the showed the wear, and Walter wished he could be like those pliers, never getting old. Walter rewired the fence, pulled it tight so it looked better than

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how he found it. He fished out the last of the grain, set it on the ground. The big appaloosa snorted, pushed the grain around. Walter didn’t bother to light a fire. He hunkered against Lucky’s saddle and ate the cold macaroni and cheese Marty had wrapped up for him in wax paper.

Night came quick. And Walter had the *igmu* fur around his shoulders. Walter was divided on how he should wear it. Though Walter didn’t put a lot of store in hunting cats, he understood the gift. And he felt guilty for liking it. He thought of the day he went hunting for bobcat with Leonard Poor Bear and Jens Rasmussen. Before they went out, Walter told them it was a bad idea, that the cat was *wamakaskan*, the living of everything living, and by right a cousin, and a hunter doesn’t kill a fellow hunter. But Leonard had insisted, saying it was the cat that was killing his chickens. And Jens agreed, saying a man must watch out for his own living first. And Walter went along out of the habit of hunting with his friends. The *igmu* took them on a long,

circuitous chase, and then, as dusk and hunger were setting in, led them back to its den, mauling and hollering all the way. Walter shot his rifle in the air when they reached the creek, set the cat up, hoping to scare him off. But Leonard and Jens shot straight as the *igmu* crossed the water and killed it dead right there. Later, when they found the two-week old cubs, the men called each other names, got stinking drunk, argued it was no good to hunt the *wamaskakan oyate*. And Walter told Leonard and Jens they were full of horse-shit for taking him on that hunt.

“Not thinking so good now,” Walter told Lucky. He felt the wind blowing across the prairie. He rose, laid out his bed roll, his legs almost too stiff to move. He set Lucky to graze. The big horse began pulling at the weathered prairie grass, big, hungry Lucky, never complaining, a real *sunka wakan*.

Walter fell asleep. Woke. It was still early evening. Shadows were flying across the prairie, Waziya, Eya, Cici, the demons that whispered from the North, flying in on the wind.

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Walter coughed, wiped his face.

“Goddamn.”

He put his hand on his head, right where he imagined it wasn't working so good anymore, the place where he felt the mushy flight of memories.

Walter thought of the first day he saw Mary. She was across the field in a group of Sioux girls. Mary had the darkest eyes he'd seen on an Indian girl, purple at the edges, black in the center, so dark that it troubled him. And the way she looked at Walter, he was sure she could see right into him. That was the day of the big lacrosse game. And Walter's father had him by his coat, a big, worn hand dug into his shoulder. They had ridden all day to get to the game. And now there was disappointment because the excitement of going to the game was more than the game itself.

Walter rubbed his head. He knew at this part in his memory his father would say, “*Mary coco yelo.*” *Mary's pretty.*

He would lie with Mary

nine years later. And he would remember that night better than any, her earthy smell, Walter inside her, his world changing forever.

Walter told Mary, “*Ecani tawicuwatun ktelo.*” *I will have a wife soon.*

“*Ecani hignawatun kte ktso,*” said Mary Dark Thunder. *I will have a husband soon.*

The moon was strong that night. And the summer night was warm. Mary was sitting on her dress, had it covering the broken corn stalks. “You'll still want me, Walter, in a day from now, in two days from now?”

Walter put his hands on his legs, studied them. He knew he should look up but couldn't. Mary's beauty was too much to examine. The curve of her thigh, the small, round breasts, the line of her neck, he saw this all at once though he was not looking at her. “You're teasing me.”

“No, I'm serious as what you said a minute ago. Say you'll still want me in just a day.”

“You mean love you.”

“I do.”

Walter pulled his hands off his legs, said slowly, “In just a day I'll still love you.”

“And in a thousand years.”

“In a thousand years.”

“Do you promise?”

Walter's gaze rested on Mary's brown feet.

“Yes.”

“Swear by the moon.”

“I swear by the moon.”

“That's a big promise, Walter.”

“I know. I mean it.”

Mary sat up, pulled her blouse against her chest, one breast exposed.

“Okay, now we have to be sure.”

“Of what?”

“Your promise.”

“I am sure.”

“You are?”

“I am. I've promised.”

Walter felt discomfort, sensed something was coming next, and knew that he would have nothing to say. He did not know about women yet. This was his first step. And Walter was unsure.

Mary stood. “*Walter, wana iblable ktso.*” *I'm leaving now, Walter.*

“Leaving?”

“You said a thousand years, Walter. So that means I can go now without worrying.”

“But that doesn't mean you have to leave. It means you should stay.”

“I have to go now, Walter. They'll come looking for me.”

“Let them look,” said Walter. “I don't care if they see.”

“Walter, you just promised. It shouldn't matter if I'm

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leaving.”

“Mary, please don’t go.”

“I have to, Walter.”

And then Walter slept.
And all night long he could smell
the prairie, the soft grass.

Walter came upon the town by eight. The grocery store was one of the old depot kind that housed a soda fountain in the back. It had fishing gear, sandwiches, grain, hardware, farm supplies, sandwiches, dry goods, fresh vegetables. There was a hitch for horses, as the owners, old folks like Walter, weren’t about to recognize the the big towns were changing things.

Walter found the ammunition for the range rifle, a Winchester ‘03. The young man helping him said, “We don’t see much of this caliber anymore, sir. You must have quite a gun. Real old.”

“Yep.” Walter didn’t feel like conversing much, thinking about the time he’d used the gun on the bobcat. If he hadn’t fired, the cat wouldn’t have sat up, and Jens and Leonard Poor Bear

wouldn’t have had a shot. Walter put his hand to his neck, realized he still had the fur on.

“I have to ring that up separate,” said the young man. “Government tracks this stuff now.”

There was a staccato burst of laughter. Walter turned, saw a couple of teenagers creating noise in the fishing gear aisle. Walter recognized the breed: town dudes down for a day of kicking around, showing how much country they still had in them. They’d probably been out all night, intoxicated from three percent beer. They watched as Walter placed the ammunition in his barn jacket. Then one young man jabbed the other, pointed out the *igmu* fur like it was the damned funniest thing he’d ever seen. His pal laughed, though it was false laughter, and Walter could sense no good in it.

Walter picked up a loaf of bread, some salted meat, a pack of sliced cheddar cheese, a bag of oats for Lucky. He came across Sue Buldrun and her husband Lewis in the grain aisle. They were counting pennies, deciding on what to spend, speaking soft. Walter had arranged their loan in 1951 when Lewis got out prison.

He was off the reservation for good now, yet incarceration was his last defining point, and the prison still hung around Lewis, made him hard to read.

“*Hau tanhansi*”

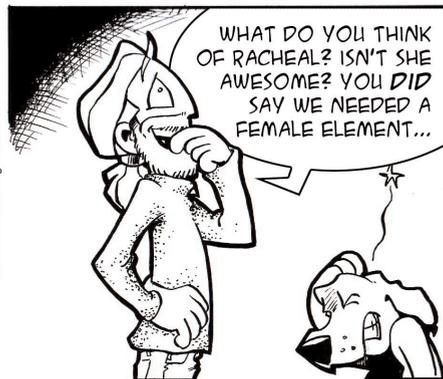
“*Hau hankansi.*”

“*Han sicesi.*”

The Sicangu couple waited, eyes down. They didn’t recognize Walter and were only being polite. A white man speaking Lakota, most of them were gone now. Not since the war had life been like that. So they would be careful. Then there was the inevitable talk of corn, the cold coming up soon, Sue and Lewis, not looking much at Walter, smiling softly, deferent. And then Sue saw it was Walter, smiled quickly, touched her husband’s arm lightly. Lewis nodded his head just a bit to show his wife he saw it was Walter.

The drunken teenagers stood at the end of the aisle, watched. The Sicangu spoke softer now, almost so you couldn’t hear them at all. The government flood was just a few months gone, and it was best a person kept his voice down. You could never tell the ones that still wanted the Sioux forever removed from the lands. And the flood,

Best In Show



by Phil Juliano

though it had only been on reservation land, made them all the more angry, as if it had never been reservation land in the first place.

Walter glanced at the young men, began to worry about leaving Lucky too long, said, "I got a horse waiting."

"You take care, Walter," said Lewis.

"Will do."

Sue and Lewis watched him go.

Lewis said, "*He tuwa lila ole yelo.*" *He's looking for something.*

Sue thought about this for a second, then added, "*Onuniyata un ksto.*" *He's wandering around.*

Walter watered Lucky and set up his kit. Lucky could smell the oats, was a little jumpy. The horse and rider started back easy down the road.

There wasn't much traffic, a truck every now and then. The wind was blowing from the west, picking up off the Black Hills, shooting across the prairie to the east. Walter rolled a Bull Durham cigarette, smoked it halfway down. The morning sun was cool, muted behind the high clouds. It was a good day to be on a horse. Walter whistled. Lucky started to trot. Walter thought of holding him back, then gave him his rein. The old horse could feel it too. The life was coming back into both of them. The prairie was breathing soft and natural. And it was a fine morning.

The young men from the market came upon Walter and Lucky two miles from town. They were driving a dusted up Buick, still drunk. Steve, the youngest, leant out the door, slapped the hot metal, and made a whooping noise like he'd seen the Indians do in the movies.

His buddy, Alan, said, "Hey, old timer, where you headed?"

Walter kept riding, ignoring. He saw no sense in engaging drunks, had a lifetime of experience with their type.

"Half breed, you listening?" asked Alan. He was crouched over the wheel, face shiny, dark hair, eyes flashing. He reminded Walter of Dean Koontz, how his old soddy dad used to hang Dean from the pig rack when he was bad, upside down. It terrified Walter and his brother good because only slaughtered pigs were put up on the rack. Putting a kid up there, it didn't ring right. And Walter's dad said someday Dean would become his father and they'd better all watch out.

Walter turned in the saddle so he could keep an eye on the car.

"We're talking to you, chief," said Steve.

"That so?"

"Yeah, where you getting on with that thing around your neck?" asked Alan. "What's that? Some kind of fur?"

Walter gave Lucky a kick. The old horse refused, pulled his head back, then over to the inwards, facing up like the strongest horse in the corral.

"Hey, prairie skeeter," added Steve, "what you doing with that horse? Ain't you heard of cars?"

Walter wondered how these two guys had him mistaken for an Indian. Stupid town kids. Or stupid farm kids. Or just plain stupid.

Steve tried again, "You trying to ignore us?"

"Yeah, last half-breed that didn't listen," added Alan, "well..."

"We had to straighten it out," said Steve, then hurled his half-empty beer bottle at Walter. It was a poor shot. The bottle struck Lucky behind the eye.

Alan cried, "Bingo!"

Lucky jerked his head, stiffened, though kept walking, waiting on Walter's orders. Soon it would swell around the eye, begin to weep a curd of lymphatic fluid and blood, but for the moment it was just a dull horse pain, no worse than Lucky had taken from the horses in the paddock.

Walter said, "Whoa."

And Lucky, the issue of a hundred generations of circus horses mixed with the endurance of the appaloosa, stopped, waited, trusting implicitly in Walter's directions.

"Eat that, old man," said Steve.

"Prairie skeeter," added Alan, then hit the gas. The car hurtled forward. The Buick, valves pinging, cast a cloud of blue smoke. Then came the inevitable teenage laughter, the honk of a horn, an obscene gesture made through the window.

Walter dismounted, checked the wound. It was a

The Blotter

good bump. Walter patted Lucky's neck, ran his hand over his withers. "Shitasses," he told the horse.

Lucky pulled on his bit, nodded.

Walter put his fingers under the halter, scratched. "Good old horse," said Walter. "Good old guy."

Lucky shook his head as if in that motion he could wave off the pain.

Walter put his foot in the stirrup, pulled himself up.

"Come on, *kola*. Let's get a move on."

The young couple outside of Vivian let Walter use the shower in the basement. It was just cold water, but good enough. Walter shaved, cleaned up, got invited inside for coffee. The farmers were Norwegian. And Walter ate a regular scandinavian lunch of pickled herring and flat bread. The couple were excited to see a man on a horse. It had been a few years now since someone had ridden up their drive. They walked with Walter all the way to the end of the drive, waving, wishing him luck. Walter liked the couple, wished he could be just like them, remembered how he and Eve had been like that, good people on a good farm before Jay passed.

Walter made a detour in town, bought a new clean shirt on Railway Street. The woman at the counter said, "You going to wear it out of here?"

Walter still had the new shirt on, the tag showing.

"I believe I will."

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"We don't get much folks out here on horses," observed the woman.

Walter registered the type, the town busy body. Most likely she'd call the police once he was out of the store. An old man riding around in town, maybe they'd heard about him on the news.

Walter followed Highway 16, thinking he didn't know Vivian so well. It was platted in 1907, just a few lots on Main Street, all mud back then, but good enough for a railroad station. Now he had it mixed up. The town was turning back to prairie, the youth disappearing, the road signs peeling, like his two sons, run far off as possible from the Dakotas. Fifty years of growth, even through the drouth of '39 and now the slow decline into decay.

Walter kept north. He clicked off the crops: sunflower, dent corn, flax, alfalfa, grass hay. He loved the lie of the crops, the smell of sulfur to treat the insects, the ripple of the corn in the wind. He could watch it all day.

The return of the Buick was announced by a wisp of dust on the road, then a rolling cloud as the distance diminished. Lucky recognized the vehicle, stopped.

"Goddamn," said Walter.

Alan wasn't driving so well. He swerved, readjusted the trajectory of the car, and the Buick pulled up sharp, the body torqued, covering both lanes.

Walter and Lucky sat quiet.

The young men were frowning. They'd had time to drink more beer and plan a new device. And the beer and the fast driving made them all the more angry. It was all about getting the message correct, like the Sioux over at Pine Ridge who came up dead in the ditch, no one around, every few months a dead man. There was never any investigation, no proof to go on, just bohunks killing Indians.

"Hey, prairie skeeter," said Alan. "We got to thinking, you weren't so agreeable to us back there."

"Listen boys..." began Walter.

"No, old man, you listen to us. We didn't like how you ignored us back there," said Steve. "How you thought you were too good to talk to us."

"Yeah, you got some explaining to do," said Alan.

"Whole lot of explaining," agreed Steve.

And then Alan and Steve were opening the doors, moving quickly.

"Well, here we go," said Walter. He turned in the saddle, lifted the range rifle, sighted.



The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.. If nothing else, we'd love to read them We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterrag.com

Why do some of my dreams have the resilience of a well-told story, and others hint at the madness I sometimes suspect resides just beneath the surface of my consciousness? I can latch onto something from so many years ago with the clarity of a knife's edge, but last evening is dull and cluttered, without form. Here, an uncle's haircut, the sound of a Mendelsohn piano sonata played on the hi-fi, the type of fauna in the dining-room fishtank, the perfume of a rib-roast after coming in from a touch football game, her voice gently ordering us to wash our hands with the green bar of Octagon. There: was I sitting on the couch? What kind

of coffee did I brew for you? Did your mother call or was that someone from church? I feel like leaning against the doorjamb with the dizzy flood of the past, and worry that there is no present to levee like sandbags against that siren-song tide.

DWS- cyberspace



Quickly George got **The Blotter** from the desk, but it was no help, the puddle grew bigger all the time.

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"SIBS"

We think it goes on forever:
Toys we fought over,
Who took that truck forty years ago,
Hid it behind the dresser,
The doily hanging down dragging dust.
The Mickey Mouse lamp crashing.
Hey Mom! He did it! She did it!

The term paper you pieced together:
My leftover notes, your random thoughts.
Parents, teachers puzzled over us.
Who had brains, who had charm,
Who had the highest average,
Who failed biochemistry.
Who was the favorite: the oldest? the youngest?

The night you waited up late,
Mom and Dad asleep upstairs.
My prom date stood in the doorway,
Rain pounded on the porch.
The cat made off with my corsage
While coffee boiled over,
Sticky brown stains on the floor.

We still remember the day thirty years ago
We turned on the garden hose,
Mowed down Mom's rosebushes.
You said it was my fault.
Dad gave us detention:
No talking, no television.
Our secret knocks between the walls.

We think it goes on forever:
Love hate still in competition,
Dad once our jailer now failing,
Mom non compos mentis,
And you and I fifty years later
Eyeing each other, the oldest, the youngest.
Who will clean up after?

Two by
Esta Fischer

"MY LIFE"

I keep three black suits in the closet in St. Louis .
Mostly go home for funerals these days.
The family's lived a long time. They didn't drop
like the proverbial flies. Instead they stretched
it out: cancer, dementia, diabetes.
Now I just pack a blouse and stockings.
I wear black pumps and Grandma's pearls
on the flight.

Years past, I'd go home for the usual:
Thanksgiving, Christmas, Fourth of July.
My mother couldn't understand
why I didn't spend the summer. She called New York
the cement jungle. She'd read it in a book.
I tried to explain
my job only gave two weeks vacation
but she mistakenly thought I was still in school,
which I could understand. After all, I changed my major
three times and got my B.A. two years late,
then went to graduate school,
all that to end up editing the Women's page
of a small magazine.

Maybe I should have stayed up at Smith,
taken one of those town jobs. I could have done
a lot of interesting things:
Postal clerk, dog breeder, baker of organic bread.
Some of my friends still live there.
Angie throws pots for a little shop
frequented mostly by parents visiting their college kids.
Cory teaches yoga, and Samantha
weaves baskets in an institution
somewhere in the state of Massachusetts .

Back in St. Louis they think I'm on that path
they talk about as if it were The Way:
school-job-apartment-career-pension-retirement-death.
Marriage has become optional, ditto kids.

What's left of the family
thinks I've got a glamour glossy magazine job
and live that New York life of late-night bars and taxis.
Instead I carry groceries and Chinese take-out
to my third-floor walk-up. The Laundromat
is seven blocks away.

My mother wanted me to stay in St. Louis,
take a teaching course at the State U.
and marry John M. Jones whose father
owned a tractor repair business. I sometimes
wonder if my life would have been better, but then I think
it all comes down to those same three black suits
in the closet in St. Louis .

CONTRIBUTORS

E. G. Willy is a writer and educator from the SF Bay Area. His works have appeared in magazines, journals, and publications in the US, Canada, and Great Britain. He has also produced poetry and spoken word pieces for public and college radio across the US.

Esta Fischer of Jamaica, NY, writes poetry, prose fiction, stage plays and screenplays. She has a Master of Arts in Creative Writing from Boston University. When she's not busy writing, she bakes cookies.

Phil Juliano hails from Asheville, NC, which is about as comfortable a place as you can hope to find in the middle of July.

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Final
Tid-Bits: Had a terrific
time at The Blotter's
Benefit night at The Cave on
Franklin Street in Chapel Hill.
Many thanks to Mouse and *The Cave*
folks, including Red who explained to
me that I was about an hour and a half
early and let me sit and listen to the
great music from Truckstop Coffee and
Have Gun Will Travel. Also, thanks to
Scott, Shannon, and the rest of *Gasoline*
Stove, who I recommend highly - visit
them on their Myspace site -
www.myspace.com/thegasolinestove, and
on Facebook - gasoline.stove, and look
for their new CD available June 1.
We're going to do a little reading from
our Laine Cunningham Novel Award
winners soon - check out our website for
details. Visit your local independent
bookstore, they have air-conditioning
and plenty of things to read when
you're sitting poolside, or out on the
sand - I don't want to hear any of
you saying, "I'm bored."
Got it? Good!

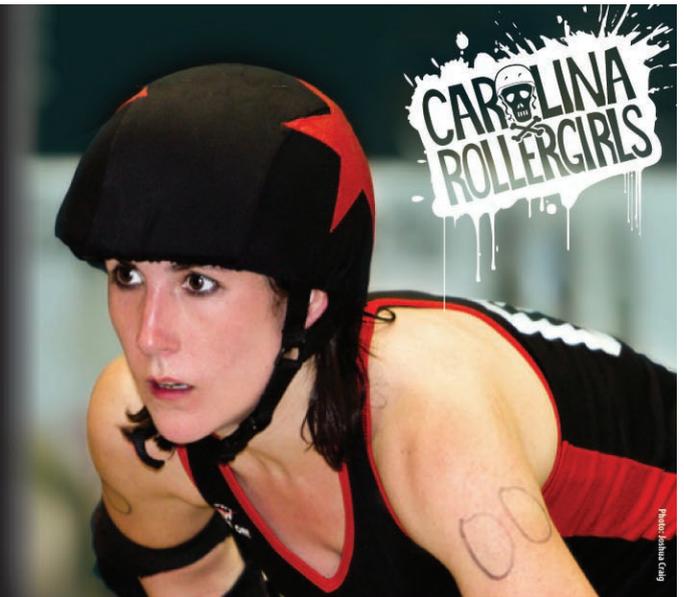
Roller Derby

Doors 5:30 PM | Game 1: 6:00 pm | Game 2: 7:30 pm

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All earnings benefit water protection in the Eno River Basin.



Illustration by Kimberly Ridge