

*A few moments of cool with Terry Barr, Evan Anderson,
Jean Blaslar, P. Beth O'Sullivan, a new Paper Cuts,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

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"Sexist Me"

I think about things. Thinking is a luxury, I suppose, in that it is usually enjoyable. However, it takes time, and that unencumbered by other more or less mundane activities. I must admit I have been fortunate in that that my life has led to this point where I spend a fair amount of time in the car, thinking, or in front of a computer, thinking, or walking, sitting, standing...thinking. I would hope that we all reach this place in our lives, eventually, but I have no great expectations of this. Most people I know believe that they are thinking, are convinced that what they do with their minds is time well spent. It is taking me a bit of time - I have not yet said, nor do I now admit that I am a great thinker. Just a thinker. And a talker. I talk a lot, when I can, and about whatever is on my mind. Some would say I talk too much. Well, if I do it is because I think a lot and want to discuss what I think about. If this simple equation does not work well, more's the pity.

So I guess that's the end of this conversation. Or is it? Here's something to consider: I'm a writer. I can think about things, and write about the things I think about. And so I write. Despite the leaning-towards-snide comments of friends and perhaps even that niggling voice in the back of your head that you don't come anywhere close to controlling, I do indeed think about what I write. I mull it over, nudge the growling, snapping words around with a sharp stick, toss some back and wait for them to grow up. And I am occasionally troubled. Oh, not to the egotistical point of giving up because I'm never going to be the bard, *l'enfant terrible*, or that son of a bitch author that we all hate because he's just so damned good. Of course, I'm not even sure if I care about everyone else's opinions at all, quite frankly. At least, not all of the time. What I do care about are a few people's opinions. And two of those opinions that I choose to care about are my daughters'. And that troubles me.

I write for them. Stories, novels, poems, essays. Of course not everything I write is intended solely for their audience, nor would they care if it were and yet I still decided to share with you. By this I mean that my daughters may someday read everything I've ever written for public consumption. I want them to read and see something about me that makes them...satisfied. Currently (god, I sound like I'm in a business meeting) they are still too young for some concepts, and the way certain ideas are presented. I can imagine Quentin Tarantino having had this problem, if he has children. Does he? I don't know. And not everything I've written will eventually keep their attention. Even the pieces I've written particularly for them. People have eclectic interests. I write about what interests me, certainly. But at the end of the day, I want my daughters to read my writing - that which they choose - and when they are done, have a moment where they can say to themselves, "Hey. Dad wrote something pretty smart."

So when I write about women, I am careful to do my thinking first. I want my female characters to be true. True in a way that a woman - perhaps my daughter - would finish and say something as simple as "yes." Why? Creative Writing One-Oh-One tells us, "write what you know."

Somerset Maugham says there are three rules to writing a novel, unfortunately no one knows what they are. I say write what you think is true. If you don't know precisely what the truth is, start with the plausible. If you don't know what the plausible is, avoid the cliché, discard the stereotype. Write the fresh.

Here's what brings up all of this in the first place. I have been collaborating on a short play with a friend. The play has two characters - an old man and a young woman. At first blush, they appear to not know each other at all, and when they speak - the man seemingly talking to himself, the woman speaking to someone on a cell-phone. Their dialogue overlaps (in what we hope is a clever fashion) and is coherent and entertaining (again, we hope). My first stab at this non-repartee, however, had the young woman speaking one side of a phone conversation about a man. Epic fail. Why, many have asked, do women only seem to be able, in plays, movies, TV shows, to be speaking about relationships, about men? Frankly, even asking this question is hackneyed. And I don't want it to be. Because I want my words to be true. I want this little play, that no one may ever read, that may never be performed, to be true. For my daughters. And for myself. A smart person said, "Never tell your daughter that she can be anything she wants when she grows up. Of course she can. Saying it implies that she needs to hear it because it's not always true."

So I'm looking at my note from late last night to myself - something I scribbled on a college-ruled sticky note (take that, oh you occasionally unprepared!): "Old Man: Trust" I was somewhat sleepy when I had this "revelation" but I think it means that the whole point of the play, the words that play back and forth between the young woman and him, come back to trust. His story is not about nostalgia, nor about a gruesome event, but about trust. The young woman is not talking to a friend about a man, to some lover about an erstwhile relationship, but rather to a colleague about a male co-worker, or a boss - someone who has betrayed her trust, and now she must decide how to proceed. She is not looking to someone else for advice, nor assistance in achieving her solution. She just wants to talk about it. My wife calls this "validation." Although it's not to be part of our ten-minute-long play, the young woman - my daughters, someday? - will come out on the other side of this situation, perhaps metaphorically bruised, but undefeated and indefatigable. FYI? I like that a lot.

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CAUTION

Win if you can, lose if you must.

“As I Stand Teaching”

by Terry Barr

I fooled myself into believing that in teaching college students, I'd be avoiding the smart asses, the Brian G's of this world.

On the first day of a fall semester almost twenty years ago, I called his name as I did the other twenty-three students. These were our first gropings of getting familiar before we settled into *As I Lay Dying*, *The Odyssey*, and Dante's *Inferno*. First day's roll call usually elicits meek “here's” or simply a raised hand. Our college is private, church-related. Elite, too, in a rural South Carolina kind of way. Many students drive Beamers or Land Rovers. I, on the other end, drive an

Accord DX.

Still, our students are mainly polite, mainly cowed at first by college, especially when I tell them that, yes, grammar counts on essays and that they can lose up to 30 points per essay if they're not careful.

So I resort to a little intimidation. Who doesn't?

I give extra credit, too, for attending films and campus lectures. I'm really a nice guy. Really.

“Brian G,” I call. He's sitting on the end of the second row, tall, striking in that way Zach from “Saved By the Bell” is.

I hated Zach and forbade my pre-adolescent daughters from watching that show. Not that my forbiddance exactly stopped them. They got my point, though: avoid all “pretty boys.” Like Brian G.

Who, the roll tells me, is a soccer player. A full scholarship boy at a school that costs almost \$40,000 a year to attend. That shouldn't matter, though, and none of it would matter except for the way he responds to my calling his name:

“Yeah, Buddy.”

He draws out the “Yeah.” He might as well have said, “Fuck you.” I look at him for a minute, then nod my head and make a note in the margin of the roll. I like to do this sometimes so that students will wonder, will perhaps reconsider how they respond to me, or how they really should read the assignment next time.

My note next to Brian G's name reads, “Butthole.”

#

One day I'm teaching another class, and as they're finishing a quiz, I look out my second-floor window. There is Brian G walking with another boy. The boy looks ordinary enough, but Brian G wears a skirt and Frye boots. When he comes to class the following day, I ask him in front of the class why he chose a dress for yesterday's occasion.

“Soccer initiation,” he declares, giving me a look that says, “Butthole.”

Another day, after he turns in a blank quiz, I ask him why he didn't read the material, why Vardaman and Darl and Jewell and Dewey Dell hadn't enticed the likes of him. We were talking mainly about Darl's craziness and the fact that the rest of his family jumps on him at the end of Faulkner's novel

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and commit him to the lunatic asylum in Jackson.

"My little brother had to go to the hospital," Brian G says. "They don't know what's wrong with him."

My instinctive empathy is touched. Except that this is Brian G. Still, I say for all to hear,

"I'm sorry to know that. It must be rough for you."

He looks around the room then. The other students are quiet, but I see the looks on their faces. No doubt they believe him. Even when he looks back at me and says,

"Yeah buddy."

#

Our students get three hours to take their final written exams. Some professors sit there the entire time to enforce the Honor Code against cheating. I believe that students are adults; that they need to know we trust them. So I sit in my office, only popping in occasionally to remind them of the time.

Forty-five minutes into the exam, I wander into the classroom to find Brian G and Lindsay B, the blond whose eyes adore him, conferring.

Ignoring Lindsay B, I call Brian G outside. I'm breathing too fast, adrenaline gushing through me:

"What were you talking to Lindsay about? You know there is to be no talking during the exam!"

"I was just asking her the time."

He met my eyes evenly. And then he smiled.

Long ago I was told that most liars can't look you in the eye.

Recently, I learned that most sociopaths can.

"Go back and finish," I say, "and don't let this happen again."

After the exam, I look over Brian G's and Lindsay B's papers. They're just unlike enough to exist in the realm of reasonable doubt. But I have no doubt. I grade Brian

G's paper harder than normal. Harder than I would have had he been anyone but Brian G.

I fail him for the course. But even then, I feel like I've failed at something greater, at not proving what he was: a cheating butthole.

He doesn't protest his grade, but maybe that's because he fails virtually every other subject too.

I know this because I sit on the Admissions Council. When a student is asked to leave the college for academic probation, he or she can reapply for admission after a year.

And so a year after I last see Brian G, I'm sitting in a council meeting when our Provost reads a letter from a student wishing to return to the college.

"Since I've been away this past year," the letter ran, "I've learned a lot about myself. I've learned to appreciate the chance I was given. I've learned to be a better person."

Friendship, loyalty, nostalgia; and the joy and healing power of music...

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Two visitors, whose own music has been muted by regrets over long-ago bad decisions: Chuck McDonough, former grad student, who skipped town after learning things about himself he couldn't face; and Penny Froward, whose attempt to help a friend in danger almost destroyed another woman's life...

A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...



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by Marty Smith



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*all
tomorrow's
parties*

marty smith

The Blotter

The letter went on in this vein for another page. After he finished reading it, our Provost appeared moved:

“He seems like a good kid, like he’s truly remorseful!”

He passed the letter around. Of course, it was signed, Brian G.

We all make choices, and like I said, I chose to teach college to avoid dealing with the smart asses. On this afternoon, I chose again:

“I know him. I had him and failed him. I thought he was cheating, too, but I couldn’t prove it. I don’t think he’s the sort of student we want back.”

A colleague of mine seconded my opinion, and soon others spoke up.

The Provost was convinced. Brian G’s request would be denied.

Do I wonder what ever happened to him? Not really.

Do I think of him at all? Of course.

Do I feel any remorse? Not at all.

Why not?

Because, Brian G, all buttholes are pretty much the same.



“June 18, 2015”

by Evan Anderson

Got the girlfriend and kid out of the house by 8:30 and walked two blocks to the store. I wanted bacon. The two old ladies who work the register were outside talking. I said good morning and one said hello while the other went back inside. They looked preoccupied. I must have interrupted the conversation.

I went to the back of the store where they kept the bacon and three men were blocking the aisle. They were working – switching out lights or something. Wires hanging all over the place and debris on the floor. For a moment I thought I’d skip it. I didn’t want to get in the way. I was afraid. But I walked all the way there and it seemed stupid not to get bacon just because these men were in my way.

I got a few other items and went to the register. I’m waiting behind a man that smells like cigarettes. He buys a carton of Cherokees. While waiting, I see this young, strong, country looking fella enter the store. Jeans and a grey tee-shirt one size

too small. Mesh ball cap. He’s brown from the sun and a bit grimy. He must be a laborer of some kind. Probably construction. I notice his right arm, tattooed and bulging. He could knock me out with one punch. He looked violent. A few seconds later another one comes through the door just like him. They have to be friends. He could kick my ass too.

Walking home I think about working out. I should do more push ups. I should eat less. What if I need to go up against a guy like that one day? I should give myself a fighting chance. Doesn’t make any sense not to.

At home I make a bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich. There’s a glass of juice left over from the night before. I pour gin into it. Breakfast is ready.



Best In Show

by Phil Juliano



"Home Again"

by Jean Blasiar

As usual after work I was at the computer in my bedroom checking the day's messages.

Several minutes later I realized that the fountain outside had stopped running. Then I heard the opening and closing of the front door.

"Jenny, you left the fountain on again."

I heard about things like this happening but not to me.

If memory served me, he would now be checking the mail, then... coming upstairs.

I tiptoed to the window and saw his car in the driveway. I was not hallucinating.

"There you are."

And there he was, all six feet of him, looking slightly grayer, thinner, and very different.

He ripped off his tie, then opened the closet.

"Where are my...?"

During this entire time I never once thought that he might be violent. He stared at me as if trying to remember who I was.

"Michael... you don't live

here any more."

He searched my face for clues. "That's ridiculous."

"I won't comment on that. But you have a new home. Do you remember?"

A long silence while he watched me for some sign of recognition.

"Would you like me to call Barbara?" I could tell from the look on his face that he didn't know Barbara. "Your wife?"

Very calmly, he sat down in the recliner across the room, the same chair that he used to sit in for hours and read while I worked on the computer. Then we would go downstairs together for dinner, or we would stay upstairs before dinner and make love. I shook that image off.

He was staring at the bed.

"Barbara will worry," I said, and reached for my phone. "I don't have the number."

He looked blankly at me.

"Never mind," I said. "I'll call information." But before I could reach Information, he got up

and left the room. Not long after that, I heard the front door open and close.

Had he really been here?



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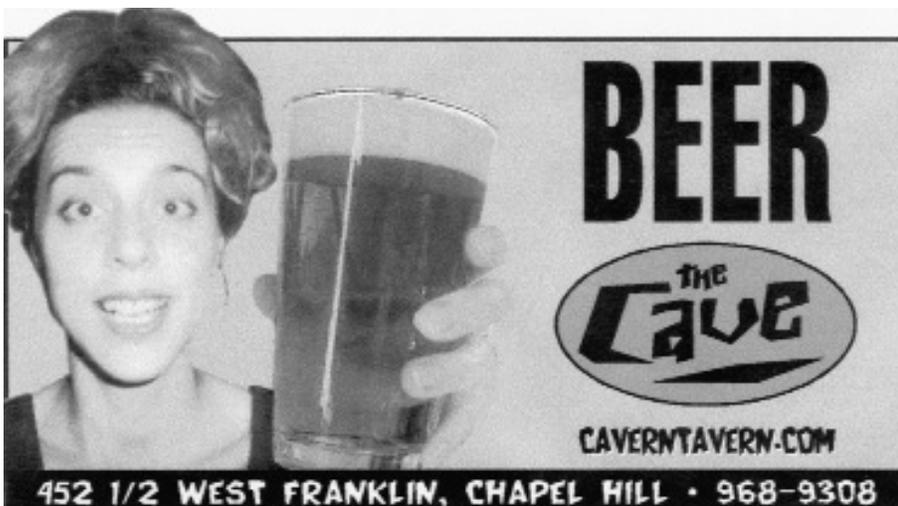
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A Sad Dream

I recently dreamt that I was looking through a pile of paperback books, all rather large and thin with black covers. They were books that I'd written and published and apparently they were all graphic novels. I opened one to see a large drawing of the exterior of a home at night with two figures with human bodies and rabbit heads hugging. The scene was sad for some reason and as I closed the book I realized that I'd lived through the bulk of my life already, these books being my body of work. I was suddenly struck with a wave of sadness and woke up sobbing.

K. C. R. - Atl., GA



Paper Cuts - books you should have read...

by Martin K. Smith

Will / Bill Oliver (Outskirts Press, 2014)

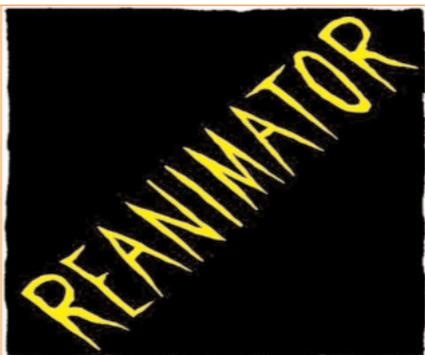
I feel an urge to tread delicately with this review because, many years ago, the author and I were A Couple. He read my own novel¹ and said kind things about it, for which I'm doubly grateful: because of our history; and because he's a retired teacher of English and literature – i.e., when he says good things about a work, you figure that He Knows Whereof He Speaks. Any criticism might feel, to the part of my psyche that books guilt trips at the slightest provocation, like a betrayal of some kind or other. Thus my main “critical” comment will be one he could have just as easily lobbed back at my book: it may be a little overstuffed. I can't put my

finger on any specific places, but it feels like there are scenes that don't need as full a description, situations and dialogues that could be unlengthened. It is his first novel (as mine was the first where I really felt like I was on my game); and in the joy and fun of your first, you want to put in everything you know. (By the way: he's still single, and still quite date-able. I always wish my exes well and hope they find good love lives.)

Will is a coming-of-age novel. Will Whiteside, just out of seventh grade, lives in the small East Carolina town of Riverton, in 1961. He's a gentle, introspective soul, just beginning to wonder about who he is and where he wants his life to go. He likes noticing things about nature; praises from teachers; learning piano with Miss Florence Carnegie, who had “studied at a conservatory up North somewhere and was considered the best piano teacher in the county,” and who lives with her “spinster sister,” retired elementary-school teacher

Miss Jane. His father, an optometrist, doesn't see much use in piano lessons. His parents don't always get along. His paternal grandmother, “Maman,” determined to maintain and improve the family's Social Position, is always after him to befriend the “right kind” of boys and girls. Relatives, friends, teachers: all have expectations or desires or opinions about him, all cross-grained through and against one another.

“Elegiac” is a descriptive turn that comes to mind. The book carries the aura of the shaded, somnolent, quiet life of a small Carolina town fifty-some years ago, a feeling that rings true; the same way Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* feels like it holds the true spirit of rural Nebraska across the turn of the last century. The ways they worked, worshiped, taught, held parties, cooked and ate, did business; everyday small details of customs and practices now fading in our past like old black-and-white photos from *LIFE* Magazine, form the world Will makes his way through. The attitudes of the time, on things like politics, race, sexuality, are shown in the same everyday way, seen purely through Will's experience as he tries to understand them. Mr. Whiteside



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doesn't want his son to do college at UNC because it's "a communist institution." *"It's the scene of communist activities...It's a danger to our society for you to get any of those ideas."* He disagrees with the Supreme Court on integration; but also warns against saying "nigger:" *"Don't ever use that word, Will. Only lowlifes and white-trash people use that word,"* adding that his black patients are better at paying their bills than some of the country-club types Maman idolizes. Once Will gets his driver's license, he's allowed to take the family's cleaning lady home from work – dutifully segregated to the back seat. He doesn't see the point.

"It's okay with me if you sit in the front with me."

"Will, if I didn't know you better, I'd think you was crazy. I'd think you'd worry about what white

folks would think of you and what they might do to you. I know for sure I don't want colored folks to see me sitting up there like I'm special, either."

The social upheavals of the time happen offstage; and the changes they bring to Riverton's ways seem small, gradual and not marked by a whole lot of fuss.

"Prom night is late this year all over the county. I think they had to decide how to handle policy for integrated couples," said Luke. "...the school board took its time about making any decisions about proms, or whether to have them at all. I understand that faculty members are being cautious about anything that might happen at the prom itself, like black boys asking for dances with white girls and what trouble that might make."

Not to say there isn't pain and conflict, though. The fact that Miss Carnegie won't let Will play

Poulenc, because she doesn't approve of Atonality, is the least of his worries. He's hurt by his father's coldnesses and his parents' quarrels; by the tension between not wanting to hurt Maman and wanting to be with friends he likes but she doesn't approve of; by feeling unable to challenge the adults' casually mean opinions on things like Vietnam and racism, lest he bring down condescensions and humiliations on his head. He learns a family secret he wasn't supposed to know, angering his parents. A classmate commits suicide, for reasons never discerned. Another gets pregnant and is whisked away for an abortion, never to be seen or heard from again. A good friend dies in a car crash. And in what may have been meant as the book's pivotal sequence, Will is sent to Savannah to visit one Dr. Edward Rossi, a prominent colleague of his



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father's. Dr. Rossi turns out to be gay. He totally mis-reads Will's inclinations; and on the last night of his visit, rapes him. Then, not long after his return, he overhears something:

As he was about to enter the kitchen, where his mom and dad were already at the table, he stopped short on the other side of the door as he heard his mom say "I don't think he would do something like that."

"I think he would," said Robert

"Then why did you let him go?" asked Cathy.

Immediately, it seemed, in the short time before he opened the door to enter the kitchen, the world went blank. He had breakfast, pretending not to have heard the snippet of conversation and the question not answered. He said nothing at the table. Robert and Cathy said nothing.

He left the table without saying goodbye. On his walk to school he felt emptied, exhausted, not there.

And after his high-school graduation, Maman has an announce-

ment:

"...my son Robert...has just received this morning a nomination for honors in the National Association of Eye Care Physicians...nominated by his friend Dr. Rossi in Savannah! We will all go to his induction ceremony in Washington, D.C., next spring."

His father would not look Will in the eye.

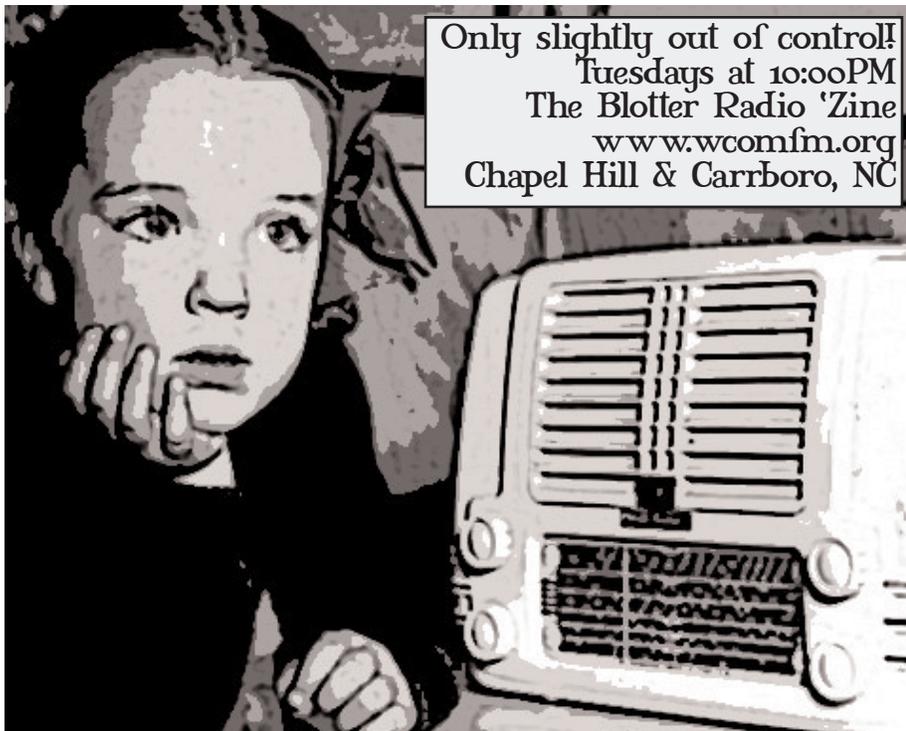
Will felt used and disgusted. He turned from his family and walked to the back of the gym...

Now this is the sort of plot event that would centerpiece a TV Movie-Of-The-Week; but here it doesn't come until late in the book, is described in the same tone as the rest of Will's experiences, and isn't referenced in many scenes besides the ones I've quoted. The psychological aftereffects – Will's aloneness and shame; his depression and withdrawal from friends and activities; thoughts of crashing the car he's driving, into a bridge pier – seem to blend into the texture of his daily life.

(This leads me to digress

briefly on the absence of Sex in the story. Though the book follows Will from ages 13 to 17, he doesn't seem to have much in the way of sexual interest or desire, even though he does notice how one of his friends has an attractive physique. If he indulges in any typical hand-on-boy-parts pleasure, it's never mentioned. Times do change, though, and everyone does develop differently, so I'm willing to believe that this could have been the experience of a youth in a small Carolina town half a century ago, when a copy of *Playboy*, secretly found and secretly shared, was the only porn a young guy might ever see.)

There's all sorts of ways you can describe a coming-of-age novel, one of which is, the story of a young person learning about his / her own heart and mind. Learning becomes the most prominent thing in Will's life. Much of the novel is filled with his schoolday experiences. There are teachers like Miss Swillman, in 8th grade, for whom the term "draconian" would be an understatement, whose educational and crowd-control methods would nowadays bring squadrons of helicopter parents with a carpet-bombing of lawsuits, but whose students learn self-discipline as a matter of survival. There's Mrs. Pooler for French, "a short, dumpy woman with short-cut brown hair worn in bangs," who "assumed what she thought was a foreign, cosmopolitan air that didn't fool many peo-



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ple;” but she introduces Will to Poulenc’s music. There’s Mrs. Loftin for biology, and most especially Mrs. Wilkes for English, both of whom show Will what learning can be like when taught by someone who truly loves their subject. She gets him reading the likes of Frost, Faulkner, Hemingway and Steinbeck. She reads the class William Cullen Bryant’s “Thanatopsis” the day after their classmate’s suicide. The joy of learning, and teaching, how language and literature work, is perhaps the largest thing helping to heal Will’s psyche as the book concludes, with him heading off to college and hopes of a teaching career. Then again, every passage, even the ones that could be slimmed down, feels to me as if it holds some small word or phrase in the story of his self-discovery. Like this exchange with his Uncle Horace, over a simmering pot of Brunswick stew:

“Well, there’s ways you’re getting lucky twelve years of education and more, but I don’t think I’d cater going to school. I stopped in the sixth grade. Too many rules for me,” said Horace.

“I don’t mind the rules,” said Will. “What I don’t like is that I feel I’m wasting time with teachers who aren’t good.”

“Wasting time?” asked Horace. “What else are you going to do with it?”

Will couldn’t answer that one.

¹ *All Tomorrow’s Parties*, available at www.wileequixote.com



“Where I Live After Detention”

by P. Beth O’Sullivan

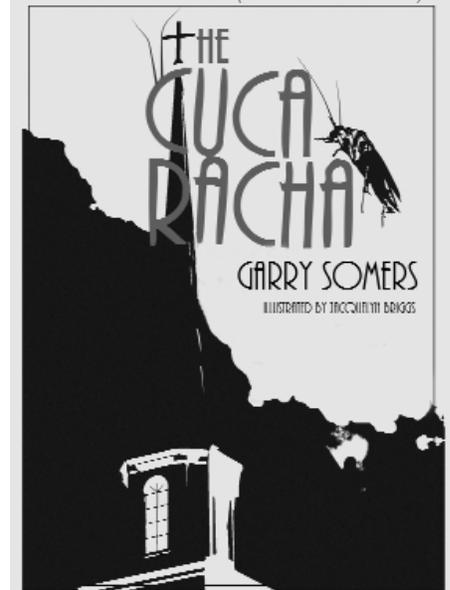
I was born on the day Evel Knievel crashed his motorcycle on a trial run of his jump over a tank of man-eating sharks in Sunny Florida. The man who might be my father was holding me in the hospital room and dropped me when he saw the news pictures of the crash on TV announcing that Evel had broken his 35th bone, giving Evel the Guinness book of world records for most broken bones in a single body. I’ll never know whether or not Shackle, my maybe-quasi-daddy, dropped me because he was worried about Evel, or because he was so happy about the world record. That’s how I came to be named Fate Evel O’Malley. Because I’m not a boy, teachers taking attendance always asked, “Faith?” And I had no choice but to tell them the truth, “No, Fate.” I don’t know how daddy got the name Shackle and I no longer try to find out.

Anyway, despite that drop on the floor where my slow descent was stopped by the collision of a used bedpan with my head, I never had a headache until high school and then it was only because things in my life went from bad to worst. Mum was always losing her keys and stuff and that turned out to be just practice for not remembering to take me with her when I was six and she left Shackle. So we kind of grew up alone together, me and Shackle. Only he forgot to grow up. In high school, when he disappeared, I started living in room 006 where they try to teach my boyfriend, Chi, auto mechanics. It’s not exactly a room but a whole separate building

next door to the high school through a tunnel because Auto Mechanics 202, 307 and 509 are, like me, special needs courses and need a garage.

So every day after detention, I go meet Chi in room 006. He’s always staying late to help Mr. Tork clean up. I slip into the office at the back while Chi and Mr. Tork have too much fun cleaning up with the rags. I unlock the window. It’s the ideal place for me to live. Tork never checks the window after he’s done everything possible with the rags because he’s too anxious to get over to the Riptide Arms, a bar nestled between The Blessed Mother Shelter and a Dinkin’ Donut dive, on the backside of Main Street where everything’s always falling into the river. That’s what I figure happened to Shackle, he went out the back door of Riptide Arms one night to pee and fell over the cliff

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and tumbled down the water falls that go on forever like a waterfall stuck between two facing mirrors.

Tork can't wait to get over to the Riptide and stick his who-who into any hole he can find. I know because I used to go to the Riptide to scrape Shackle off the floor and there was Tork, slow dancing with Annabelle or Clarabelle or I'm-abelle who all must have bought their I.D.s from the same dealer I got mine from. That's one thing Ballville is stinking with. It used to have a rubber ball factory but now has the highest gross national production of underage girls of any town in the country.

I was born with the soul of a spy and that's another thing that makes Room 006 the perfect address for a girl like me. With the alibi, Evel Fate: 006, I can fool all of my enemies because its true and

also I'll never forget who I'm supposed to be. So I stash my worldly belongings into my locker and then late at night I crawl through the window in Tork's office, wander through the empty halls of the high school and retrieve my knapsack and bedroll from my locker. There's only one night security guard and he usually sleeps with the T.V. on by the front door. It never occurred to any official at the high school that one of their prisoners would *want* to stay at school any longer than they absolutely had to, so no one is looking too hard for me.

With all that empty space to myself, I'm happy for the first time in my life. The floors shine with polish and the air is clean because there's no one exhaling deadly carbon dioxide that I have to breathe in too much of during the day. And I get to practice my spy skills by spying on the vestiges my peers have left behind. On Floor Two East, I smell the remains of the perfume bomb Persephony envelops herself in every morning before school, and on the first floor, I can hear the ghost of Winky's voice complain that Dick's GPA had just shot up to 2.7 threatening Winky's position as valedictorian. The residue from the morning's stampede, as I walk

down the halls alone at night, sounds like the alluring drums of angels.

About a year ago, when Shackle disappeared, I waited a week. I knew what was coming next, unpaid rent, social services moving in and running my life, so I gathered up some clothes, a towel, my toothbrush, my school book and my cure- all box of baking -soda that doubles as toothpaste and rids the world of odors. I made myself a bedroll out of blankets and pillows, and tied it with the lasso that Shackle made when he got it in his head to become a cowboy one week and then stashed under the sink after he broke all the light bulbs and we started living in the dark at night. I just locked the door and left it all to the cockroaches. When I got to the corner of Dead Man's Hollow Circle, I thought better of it and went back and plugged up the drain of the kitchen sink with all the chewed up gum Shackle left behind in the bottom of the trashcan and left the water running as a courtesy to the landlord so he'd discover we'd left and wouldn't lose too much rent on our account.

Sometimes Chi comes with me afterhours to school. Chi has a blue belt, yellow belt, black belt and



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a belt he wears too low on his hips that has a scorpion that's encased in a plastic bubble on his buckle. Why he'd want to wear a scorpion that close to his anatomy, especially that close to his who-who, I'll never know, even if it is dead.

I feel safe with Chi and all his belts. No one messes with me anymore. Some people go from rags to riches but me and Chi go from rags to rags. We crawl in through the window and then sneak up to the art room and do it on a pile of rags that smell of turpentine. Now, all I have to do is go into the art room and smell the turpentine and Pavlov and Chi's spirits enter me and right then and there I experience major physiological changes in my body and I can't concentrate on the directions and so I flunked art. The only person to ever flunk art at Hinterham High: yet another world record that I've set.

My guidance counselor keeps saying I have to start thinking about my future. There are few things that I have to be thankful for and one of them is that I don't have Counselor Jeez's IQ. With a life like mine, if I thought about the past I'd kill myself and/ or Counselor Jeez, if I thought about the present, I'd lose my mind and so what's left but the

future? I think about it a lot, I'm gaining survival skills, learning how to live in large empty free spaces and I also stole the "DISCARDED" stamp from the library which is very lucrative as I am now able to sell library books. I only steal books that haven't been taken out since 1968, the year Evel Knievel crashed at the Caesar's Palace fountains in Lost Vegas, so I'm doing the library a favor by relieving them of obsolete books. Between the stamp and these skill sets, I figure I'm better off than most of the Hinterham student body and all of its football team.

Last week, five weeks before graduation, I went to the art room with Chi. After we did it, we were lying on our backs and looking at the ceiling and Chi turned to me and kissed me again. "Let's get married," he said. Graduation night, what do you say? I've got a good job lined up teaching karate, then aunt Kate would let you live with us and you could stop living at Hinterham High."

I thought it was real sweet but it gave me hives to think about. I've fallen in love with all this empty space and with being alone with the space and the night. I don't think I could ever live any other way again.

For the first time in my life, the emptiness on the inside and the emptiness on the outside match up with each other.

I kissed Chi and walked him down to the window and he jumped out and then threw me a kiss from the other side of the window and that is exactly how I will remember him. His black hair slicked back with art wax, the greasy window-pane that made his wave and the kiss blown from the other side of the window look romantic, as if it was through rain in the movies.

I spread out my blankets for a mattress behind Tork's desk after I shoved the rolling chair out of the way, and put the sheets over them and brushed my teeth in the rusty water of the deep sink. I kind of wished Chi had stayed; he did have a way of making me feel better whenever I started to think.

All of a sudden, I hear a key in the front door. I shimmied on the floor a few inches so I could just barely see the front door around the edge on the desk and hold my breath trying not to breath. After about fifteen attempts at getting the key to turn, while I cursed myself because I'd actually have had time to escape, Tork's body fell into the room along with a geometric swath



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of moonlight and Luzy Ludd, who had both of her legs wrapped around one of Tork's legs so he had to drag his leg, with her attached, across the room until they fell onto the long seat that had been removed from a van and stood against a wall next to the thick column of an automotive lift that held up, at this very moment, Chi's Aunt Kate's purple Chevy. I'd never be able to have sex with that thing hanging over me, I mean I'd keep expecting it to crash into my face, maybe PTSD because of my face's last encounter with a bedpan, but no way, and I'd say the same thing about having sex with Tork anywhere, even at the Sprayon motel in Hinterville next to Hinterland. I saw Tork and Luzy rip off each other's pants and then I didn't know what to do. I shut my eyes tight. And I don't know how it happened, maybe squeezing my eyes shut also squeezed all the air inside my body out of me but, cursing the Slim Jims I'd had for dinner, I burped.

All of a sudden, a bank of bright lights is shining in the room and Tork is standing in the middle of the room with a revolver pointing straight at me with his pants still around his ankles. Luzy was trying to cover herself up with her hands and I was wrapped in my sheet. "Oh, it's you," he says. Still holding the revolver with three fingers, he pulled his pants up. The revolver is pointed at a long air hose that's lying across the floor. Tork looks from me to Luzy and back to me. "Hey, Fatey, wanna' join us?" He asked, pointing the end of the revolver towards the disembodied van seat, carelessly, as if it were a nod of his head.

I thought I could blackmail him but it turned out Luzy was six-

teen and I had nothing on him and in the end I was the only one in trouble because I said no to Tork's idea and Luzy disappeared before the police came and Tork lied and said he was alone and only picking up his papers on his way home, and the last time I was in a conversation with Officer Ludd, Luzy's dad, I was in a stolen Cadillac trying to convince him that I'd found it over in Hinterville by the lake, abandoned with the keys in it, and I was driving around trying to find its owner. I was also wearing a toga because Tork had grabbed all of my clothes and stuffed them in the knapsack and confiscated them. I didn't bother saying anything. I just wanted to get the hell out of town.

I'm real sorry to skip bond on all that money Chi and Kate put up for me. But they needed to learn a few lessons about the real world and what people are capable of when they're desperate, I mean before Chi runs into someone really desperate who could kill him, he needed to learn this, so I might have actually saved his life.

Last night I broke into room 006 for the last time and retrieved my stuff. Tork was too lazy to do anything with it all. It was just kind of scattered all over the office floor. So I have my clothes and my bedroll and my "Discarded" stamp and that's all I need.

It's still possible to ride long distances in an empty freight car. The only difference between today and the famed days of the hobos is that today, as often as not you're going to be riding next to a train car carrying hazardous waste so it's a little more dangerous than it used to be. Still, I love all that empty space in the boxcar and I sleep well. So far I haven't seen anyone else.

I'm headed for St. Louis, and I plan to stop here and there in towns so small that their technology hasn't grown beyond the bionic yo-yos so I don't set off any alarms when I take books out of the library that the librarian didn't notice were leaving. I'll stay in large empty spaces. I'm just saving the resources of the world so we don't all die. They'll thank me some day. And empty buildings have become the best friends I've ever had. I'd hate to have them feel as useless as Persephone and her perfume always were. I can't think of a worse fate. So I give a *raison d'être* to all the buildings I stay in. It's a mutual agreement.

I don't want to end up like mum and Shackles, disappeared, no one knowing or caring if I ever lived. I want to be somebody. I'm going to change my name to Christopher Columbus and go out there and discover America. It doesn't matter that no one will know exactly that it's me they're remembering, when they speak about Christopher Columbus, because I'll know.

I've got hold of an old wagon and I'll sell the books when I get to St. Louis. It's a start in life.



CONTRIBUTORS:

Dr. Terry Barr writes, My essays have appeared recently in Red Truck Review, Turk's Head Review, Full Grown People, Graze, Grounded Magazine, Blue Bonnet Review, and are forthcoming in Hippocampus and Deep South. My essay Neither the Season, Nor the Time was nominated for this year's Pushcart Prize by Belle Reve Literary Review. I teach Creative Nonfiction, Southern Film, and Food and Literature at Presbyterian College, and live in Greenville, SC, with my wife, Nilly, and our daughters, Pari and Layla.

Evan Anderson writes, "Mr. Anderson has a day job. In his spare time he likes to write and make crude drawings." Here's one now:



Pasadena's **Jean Blasiar** writes, "Please visit my website, www.jeanblasiar.com, for a complete listing of my books (10 middle grades), plays (one of my plays was optioned by 20th Century Fox for a pilot), productions (President, MGR for ten years) and awards. Recent activity includes:

Finalist: Beverly Hills Screenwriting Festival (stage, 2014)

Finalist: Bay Area Playwriting Festival (2015)

Finalist: ISA's Fast Track Mentoring Program (2015)

Production: THE HEIRS, Daytona Playhouse (2014)

Production: 8 At 8, Santa Cruz Actors Theatre (2015)

Finalist: Tennessee Williams One Act Play Festival (2014)

First Prize: The Little Theatre of Alexandria One Act Play Competition (2014)

Finalist: new TV series (TBA)

Martin K. Smith is our *capo di tutti capi*, has a novel out for your enjoyment (see our ad!), is putting together The Blotter's Fall Benefit at Slims in Raleigh, NC, supervises the playful scamps at The Blotter Radio 'Zine on Tuesday nights, and is working on an album of songs written and performed by him. Leave a message, he'll get back to you as soon as possible.

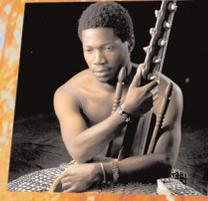
P. Beth O'Sullivan studied writing with a fellowship at the Boston University Creative Writing Program with Leslie Epstein. She has been a finalist for a grant from The Artists Foundation and been a Judge for the Arlington Arts Council. She has published book reviews in *The Boston Herald* and stories in *236 Magazine*, *Tower Journal*, *Belle Reve Literary Journal*, *99 Pine Street*, *After Happy Hour Review* and *Bird's Thumb*. The support of two patrons enables her to write fiction in Paris for part of the year. She advocates for others to similarly support individual artists. It was just such patronship that enabled *To Kill A Mockingbird* to be written.

Phil Juliano lives, loves, works and plays in Minneapolis, MN, which is already battenning down the hatches for winter.

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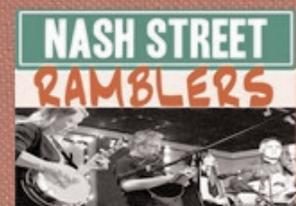
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