

*Endless Spring... Anne Trooper Holbrook, Janie Harvey Garner,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

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"Truth - or what we make of it"

There is a scene in the excellent John Irving novel "The World According To Garp" in which the main character - a writer by trade and temperament - is explaining his theory of storytelling to his wife. He has related a story of his youth to his children, and his wife calls bullshit on him. No, she effectively says, that isn't how it happened. Wait, what? is the mood of his response. Are you sure? And she defines the misstep - a detail that has morphed since he first told her the story. Oh, well, he must admit, you're right. That was something I added in.

Two things that must be noted here before we continue, like Garp, telling this story. One is that his wife doesn't actually know the truth of his childhood yarn - she wasn't there. Secondly, she does him the courtesy of not interrupting him during the telling, nor does she call him out while the children are there - she waits until the kids are in bed and they are alone.

Still, I'm troubled by the logic of their discussion each time I read it. It rings so real to me that I want to pull my hair out in frustration for him. Garp tells his wife that she is correct, that the story has been changed. She wants to know why, so he tells her the story again - this time the truth of what happened. We readers are given the new and changed bits, and Garp's wife exclaims that she doesn't understand why he didn't tell the kids the truth - this version was just as entertaining as the bedtime story. Oh? he asks. And what did she prefer about this version? She explains to him which details were more honest, believable. Hmm. Because that didn't happen either. A frustrated (but understanding - after all, he is a writer) wife now has three versions of the same story in her head.

But, like (fictional) Navy lieutenant Tom Cruise demands of Marine colonel Jack Nicholson, she still wants the truth. What really happened? So Garp finally tells the story without embellishment. The wife listens, and is now both understanding and disappointed. Understanding, because her husband is a writer. Disappointed in that he is right. The story, she now sees, was adjusted by the storyteller for the audience. It required tweaking in order to have the impact on her sons that it did. She comprehends that the story was meant for an audience. And it wasn't as important that it be true to the actual events, being factual, but that it was true to the needs of the listeners, and in the end, to us.

That said, here's a couple of things I've been thinking about: Firstly - the movie "Hidalgo," released a while back by Disney. In case you're not familiar with it, it's about a guy who rides horses in long distance races. Really long, like five hundred miles and more. He's got a drinking problem, is in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and his reputation is questioned by some folks from out of town, who challenge him to ride in a very long race, across the Arabian desert. He takes the challenge, not so much to save his reputation, but because he has inner demons that need exorcising. Long story short, he wins the race and is able to come to grips with his problems. Good movie, nearly a tear-jerker in its build-up to the victory. A horse-rider buddy movie, if you will. I liked it.

But, of course, there's a problem - there's always a problem. Supposedly, Disney marketed Hidalgo as being "based on a true story."

Now I don't care what the Disney marketing team was trying to do - confound its audience with a detail it thought was important to sell tickets or what. The rider was a real person, the horse, an actual mustang whose descendants live on a ranch in Oklahoma. And while the rider was a real person, his story didn't check out. He lied about his distance-racing exploits. So, all of the people who loved the movie now hate it because it's not true. They feel betrayed by the Disney company, in the same way they feel betrayed by anyone who pulls the wool over their eyes.

Now I don't want to wander too far afield, but I suspect that pop-culture lies are the same as other lies, in some people's perspective. They conjure up the same emotions as finding out that a President didn't tell them all of the truth about something. Of course, to paraphrase Jack Nicholson's retort to Mr. Cruise, "You can't handle (understand, recognize,) the truth!!" Politicians are not in a practical position to give every American a short course in law, economics, foreign and domestic policy and military strategy, so they have to do what they were elected to do, which is represent, and hope that they don't get certain questions and when they do, they have to dance around them. The world is a strange, dangerous and corrupt place, and we don't know, as they used to say back when I worked at IBM, the SMS: the Secret Management Shit. But that's a subject for another day. Here's my theory, though. I think people don't like being fooled, or being taken for the fools that they actually are, because it hurts their feelings. Finding out that George Washington didn't cut down a cherry tree pisses them off. They don't like discovering that there are plausibly complex conspiracy theories, and they also don't like Occam's Razor giving them simple answers, either. People don't like being treated like children, and they simultaneously don't enjoy the difficulty of being an adult. So they want movies about actual events to be documentaries? No, of course not. Documentaries are boring. Do they want biographies to be fun? You bet. And everything from buying the popcorn to credits rolling should be a linear-plot-line action-adventure, with some romance, if you please.

Secondly, and I apologize for taking so long to get to this - there are three non-fiction books published for every fiction book. For reasons that I cannot fathom, if you take everything I already said at face value. I suppose one way of looking at this statistic is that there are three more things that you need to read for every thing you are just playing with reading. Because, of course, non-fiction is truth and fiction is lies, lies, lies, and a waste of time. And yes, if you want to understand the definition of the word "bloviate," you should be reading Trump's book about his skill at spending money, and not Robert Penn Warren's *All The King's Men*, because in the interest of saving time why bother to differentiate between bad and good writing?

And herein lies my tangential conclusion. What is truth? Can fiction be truthful? But I can see by the glaze in your eyes that I've overstayed my welcome. And if you're not paying attention anyhow, what difference does it make? And by paying attention, I mean that if you think Jack met and fell in love with Rose on Titanic, and saved her from a life of pre-suffrage suffering, well, then, hmmm.

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CAUTION

*Coffee gives me the strength
to drink more coffee*

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"Fish, Gold, Rum, Drugs"

by Anne Trooper-Holbrook

Guy LaPorte had seen a little weather on the Inside Passage. In eighteen years of commercial fishing, hadn't he warned dozens of weekend yachters, moored on Nettle Island, not to let the innocent name fool them? He'd seen the Queen Charlotte Strait, the Hecate Strait, and the Strait of Georgia - all dismal bodies of water - turn lethal in a crossing. So when his fishing vessel, the Susie Q, encountered a sudden storm just south of Desolation Sound, he wasn't surprised. He also knew it would be the last time he'd see rough waters, because he was going to anchor and dock this life as soon as he got back to the island.

At forty-two, Guy was about to change careers and become a grandfather. That his teenage son, North, barely admitted being the father of the baby his girlfriend was carrying mattered little to Guy. He saw becoming a grandfather as a new start in life, a place to right wrongs. Though he couldn't think of too many

wrongs. He'd been a decent father, raising North, mostly on his own, living on the Susie Q when his ex wife, Minnie, had thrown them both out because her Goddess told her so. He'd done his best when he'd been married to that chameleon of a woman with her crystals and charms. He didn't see his cheating on her as a wrongdoing, just a matter of self-preservation. This new start was his chance to finally do what he was meant to do, give up fishing and be a restaurant owner and chef.

Guy had done all right for himself as a fisherman. He adored his Susie Q, though the boat was thrust upon him much like his wife had been. When he'd gotten Minnie pregnant, her dad, who owned two hundred and eighty apartment units somewhere out in Western Washington, had bought the fishing boat for him and set the wedding date. An evangelical Christian, Alfred Brice wasn't going to see his daughter have a baby out of wedlock. Guy wanted

to use the money to buy The Tipsy Turtle and turn it into a more high-end bar and grill, but Alfred had it in his head that Guy could manage a fishing business, but not a restaurant. He was almost as bad as Guy's own father, but by comparison, Alfred was a gust of wind, Guy's father, a full frontal storm system.

The fishing life had its advantages. He always looked forward to leaving Nettle every spring for the Alaskan fishing season, taking a breather from his ex-wife, girlfriend, the closeness of a small community where everybody knew your business but nobody had your back. But what he loved more was making Cedar-Planked salmon or fresh Mexican Ceviche, Duck a l'Orange, or Croquenbouche, a French pastry that resembled a cream puff castle. The shelves in the cabin of his forty-four foot troller were lined with dozens of dog-eared and stained cookbooks.

When he found out about the grandchild he was going to have, the pieces of his imagined life started to come together. One day at Ralph's Bar, Paul, the owner, pulled a beer for him, on the house. It was four in the afternoon and there were only a few hardcore regulars in the place

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already too far gone to care about bar-side gossip, but Paul lowered his voice. "Cora and I are moving down to Seattle. We've had enough. Putting Ralph's up for sale." By we, he meant Cora. She was always complaining about the island, and no one liked her. Keeping a nervous eye on the kitchen door, Paul leaned closer to Guy. He was a small man with a suffering, pale, almost blue tint to his face, as if he never left the bar. "You've always wanted your own place. That's why I'm telling you before it goes on the market. But this has to be between you and me." They could hear Cora - voice cold as ice cubes - rattling around the kitchen, scolding one of the newer waitresses. "You'd have to get your act together, Guy. I'm only considering this if you stop the drinking and get serious."

Guy could have taken offense. Who was Paul Rousseau to tell him how to live his life? Especially when he cowed down to his wife the way he did, but Guy let it slide at the thought of owning Ralph's.

"How much?"

"Hundred grand."

Guy finished his beer. "Guess

I could ask Victor Lundgren at the marina what I could get for the Susie Q."

"Then go see what you can get for a small business loan."

Guy nodded, and to show Paul how serious he was about the offer, he didn't even stay for happy hour.

As he walked to the door, he imagined tearing down the tired nautical décor of fishnet trim, pirate flags, and dark panel walls, giving the place a bright coat of paint and turning it into an upscale restaurant filled with the upscale islanders who owned most of the waterfront homes, and within a year's time, he predicted, he'd be one of them.

Later that week, he found out how much he could get for his boat. That, plus his savings and a business loan still left him short ten thousand dollars. He should have saved more and spent less at Ralph's and his other favorite bars on the island, The Tipsy Turtle, Cedar's Saloon, and the Nettle Island Hotel. He bought a bottle of bourbon, went back to his boat and got drunk.

On a sunny day in early winter, a line was thrown his way. Guy was on deck sitting in his beach chair with a yellow legal

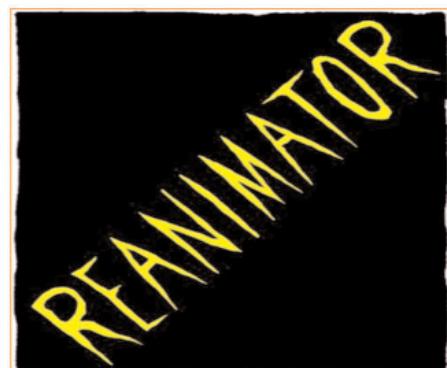
pad, trying to crunch numbers again, distracted by a Great Northern Raven stalking the boat, croaking in a shrill pitch as if mocking him, "You'll never make it! You'll never make it!" He was searching around for a full beer can to hurl at the bird, when he saw a young man on the dock below, looking up at him.

"You Guy LaPorte?"

"Last time I checked."

"Mind if I come on board your boat." Guy recognized the Canadian lilt.

Once on deck, the young man shook hands with Guy and introduced himself as J.P. He didn't look much older than North, and Guy wondered if that's who he was really looking for, though he was more clean cut than any of North's friends would be, wearing an expensive



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looking wool jacket.

"J.P.? That stand for something?" Guy asked.

"Not today. I'll get right to the point, Sir, I have a small business proposition for you."

"Sir? Well, here then, have a seat." Guy waved him into the beach chair under the wind chime he'd made from seashells and a shark's jawbone that hung from the cabin and clinked in the wind. As J.P. sat down, the Raven flew off, and right there Guy saw J.P. as a harbinger of good news.

"I have a sweet deal for you," J.P. started in, while Guy set another chair beside him.

"Can I get you a beer?"

"No, thanks." He looked around. The Marina was quiet in the middle of the day; the only people were up by the gas docks and wouldn't be able to hear them from there. "I've been looking for someone to carry weed across the border by boat."

"Oh, yeah? How is it my name come up?"

"You fit the bill, so to speak; a fisherman that's been working for a long time. Someone who goes up to Alaska every spring."

"You sure know enough about me."

J.P. glanced up at the wind chime, then back at Guy. "All you'd have to do is make the trip north and instead of returning with fish, you'd return with one hundred thirty-five pounds of BC Bud. It's that simple."

"Simple huh?"

"I'm sure you're wondering what's in it for you."

"You got that right."

"You'd be paid \$5,000 your first trip. You do good, the second trip we double the amount, and so forth."

That was all Guy really needed to hear.

"Let me tell you a little bit about what we're selling." J.P. filled Guy in on the high-grade hydroponically grown BC Bud, but never having been much of a pot smoker—the stuff made him paranoid—Guy wasn't too impressed. He liked J.P., though, a straight shooter, good businessperson, the kind of kid he'd want working for him in his restaurant.

"You can count me in, J.P. How 'bout that drink with me now. I'm gonna' a grandfather."

J.P. looked up at the wind chime again.

"It won't fall," Guy said.

"That baby's been rocked through plenty of storms."

"It's kind of spooky, eh?"

Thinking about a tough drug dealer being afraid of a wind chime, made Guy laugh. "You must be a city kid. Vancouver?" J.P. didn't answer him but finally took the beer Guy kept trying to hand him.

Without making it too obvious to his hard drinking girlfriend, Jean Iverson, Guy tried to cut back on his own drinking. He knew she'd see the money as somehow tainted, so he had to keep the BC trip a secret. Jean was the mother of his son's pregnant girlfriend. Just after he'd returned from his last fishing trip, she had walloped him with the news. "The quiet little fuck! Didn't you teach him anything?" She'd been curled up on her couch, eating popcorn. He'd been away for two months and all he could think about was getting her naked. As if she could read him, she had thrown her plastic bowl of popcorn at his head, just clipping his ear. Good thing it hadn't been the bottle of beer she was holding.

"Hey, you can't pin this on me. It's not that bad. So what? We're gonna' have a baby."

"We're not havin' a baby! Those two kids are. No, wait, North isn't sure he wants it, so just my kid is havin' a baby."

"I mean, we're gonna' be grandparents."

"You're shittin' me. You want to be a fuckin' grandfather? I'm only thirty-six. I'm not ready to be a grandmother!" She didn't look or act like any grandmother he knew either. Wisecracking,

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quick tempered, flaming blonde hair, green eyes, tight jeans, and red spiked-heels. She was more like a rapid fireworks display.

Hoping she was done throwing things, he'd sat down next to her. "You're just mad because the same thing happened to you, and Charlie left. But I'm still here, Baby. Francie will have a good support system."

"Did you really just say that? Save the psychobabble for your crystal-squeezin' ex-wife. Matter of fact why don't you just go back to her?"

"Cause you give better blow jobs."

"Fuck you," she'd said, but then burst out laughing. Next thing, his arms were around her, she was beneath him, and they'd rolled to the floor.

She'd never admit it, but they were good together. She wouldn't marry him, even though he'd asked a dozen times, had been faithful to her like he'd been to no other woman, and he'd had the chance with plenty, as they sidled up to him at Cedar's or Ralph's. He'd always been able to make the women laugh. Even those rich bikini-clad yachters would do the dance for him up on their decks, but he'd have none of it. Only Jean had a hold on his heart and regions below. He'd always wanted to have a baby with her, but she'd gotten her tubes tied right after delivering Francie. Maybe she'd tied the tubes on marriage as well, but once they had a grandchild, it'd be as good as being married, and once he got his restaurant off the ground and didn't have to go up to Alaska every year, she might change her mind.

A few months before leaving the island, Guy found North hitchhiking —or more like standing—not far from the village, like a roadside dog waiting for a handout, understanding he probably won't get one.

"What happened to your car?" Guy asked, as North got in the truck.

"Fuel pump went."

All North had on to keep warm was a thin nylon jacket. He rubbed his hands together and blew on them. He was a small kid, never reaching Guy's height or weight. Guy fiddled with the heater controls. "Where you living at these days?"

"Minnie's."

"Heard a rumor you got kicked out of school for drinkin'."

"I guess that's true."

Guy lit a cigarette as he drove, and shared it with North who took it into his shaking hands.

"You don't own gloves?"

"Lost 'em."

"Well, I got an idea how we can fix your car and any other problems you think you got." And Guy spilled out his plans as he drove across the island past icy meadows and storm-swept beaches. North stared out the window. A flock of swans, wintering on the island, with white feathers and black bills stood grazing on the grasses at the edge of a stone colored pond.

"Trumpeters." North perked up. His son had an interest in birds since he was a small boy, an interest he hid once he went to school so the other boys wouldn't tease him.

"You listenin'?"

North nodded his head but kept his eyes on the birds until they looked like nothing more than tall weeds in the distance.

"You want in on this? I could take you along as my deckhand. We give up drinking. Keep the money between us."

"Me and you? We get fucked up every time we're together."

"That's what family's for, right?"

"I got a job. Just now. In town. I don't want to be messed up in this thing. Maybe you shouldn't either. Sounds dangerous."

"I've made up my mind. How 'bout you? Decide about the baby yet?"

North shrugged then said, "I guess. She wants to have it."

"Excellent. I knew you'd come around."

"I can't even vote yet, or drink. Legally."

"How old are you now?"

"Seventeen."

"You're old enough."

"Francie's only sixteen."

"Girls mature quicker. So they say. I wasn't much older when I had you. I still remember the day you popped out, like it was yesterday."

"Minnie says you were fucked up when I was born."

"She say that?"

"Not in those exact words."

"Well..." He sucked his cigarette hard. "I may have gotten a little drunk, but who could blame me? She was in labor for two days. I needed somethin' to take the edge off. Then she wanted me to videotape the whole thing, but I had trouble keepin' the damn camera

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straight, and all I got were a couple a shots of my feet, her purple face, and the nurses screamin' at me to get the hell out of the way."

North shook his head, smiling.

"Yeah, I don't think she ever forgave me for that one."

What Guy couldn't forgive or forget was how his parents never came to see his new baby boy wrapped in the blue hospital blanket. His mother probably wanted to, but his father wouldn't have let her. They never did meet his son.

The road dipped near the water, then away again, then up over the rise near the turn to Minnie's house, the house on the beach that had once been Guy's. "We ought a celebrate my new fortune," Guy said.

"Better just let me out here."

"Here? Here is nowhere." He parked next to the Madrone trees that clung to the bluff like wild red snakes extending their

heads over the rocky shore towards sunlight, finished his cigarette and tossed it out the window. Lit up anew. "Sure I can't make you a nice steamin' bowl of rice and crab, couple a cold ones? No need to get wasted."

"No, thanks."

"Got it. Hey, you'll be a great dad. I did all right with you, didn't I?"

North stood outside the car but hesitated before closing the door. "Running bud; you could go to prison, or worse."

"This is Washington, my friend. They got stores on the mainland sell it now. They even make candy out of it for sick people. Candy."

"Still illegal to bring it across the border."

"No riskier than fishing, and the money's a sure thing. Two trips. Four, tops. Before you know it, we'll all be employed at Guy's.

"That what you're gonna' call it?"

"Maybe."

"That's not much of an improvement over Ralph's."

"See there? You made a little

joke. Things ain't so bad. Point is you'll always have a job an a place to live. Guaranteed. Francie too. She can bring the baby around."

North nodded. His son had three expressions, worried, shy, and serious. Rarely did these expressions make it onto Guy's face. Except for his kid's dark hair and eyes, North was nothing like him, Guy's mother maybe, or his sister, Adella, though they were long gone.

When spring arrived and it was time for him to head up to BC, Guy decided to take only one bottle of Royal Canadian with him. He'd nurse half on the way up, and half on the way back, and by the time he returned to the island, he'd be sober. Once he owned the restaurant outright, he'd let himself drink beer and wine, maybe just stay off the hard stuff.

On the day he left the island, the warm air was pungent with gasoline, tar, seaweed, and fish, the skies a promising blue. A raucous Belted Kingfisher dive-bombed into the water from its perch on the mast of a



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moored sailboat and came up with a prize of shining silver fish in its bill. A flock of bufflehead ducks fled north, skittering along the surface on swift wing-beats. To Guy, these were all signs of an auspicious trip ahead.

Another sign was Francie had gone into labor. He secretly hoped she'd have a boy. He'd do a better job this time. She could still be in labor when he got back, the way these things went. Either way, he had to stay on schedule.

He'd been instructed to have his boat rigged for fishing, even though there would be no fish on this trip. When Jean asked him why he'd come back in four days, he'd tell her, engine trouble.

It was all-routine as usual, heading north across the Haro Strait and Boundary Pass. As often is the case, no one was at the Canadian customs station at South Pender Island. Guy carried a Nexus Card and two passports, as he was of dual citizenship. His mother had been Métis, and he favored her with his brown pebble skin and wild black hair. They'd lived in Calgary until he was six, when his father got a job as an aircraft worker on Whidbey Island. At Pender, he reported in on one of the three phones to speak with an agent and notify them of his arrival and customary run up to the Alaskan fishing

grounds. He then headed through the Tricomiali Channel to the Strait Of Georgia into Canada's southern inside passage. Guy saw himself as heading out on an adventure not unlike the gold seekers who paraded up to the Klondike in 1898, or the rumrunners of prohibition times who smuggled along the same watery corridor; entrepreneurs really. He fancied himself as a sort of unsung hero, risking his life for his grandchild and his restaurant.

He usually had more company than he wished for, a flotilla of nature loving kayakers, cruise ships, the mammoth Washington State and BC Ferries, yachts, tug-boats, sailboats, other trollers, gill-netters, Jet-Skies, all trying to cram though the constricted arteries of the Strait of Georgia. It was early in the season though, and by the second day of his journey, his surroundings grew quieter and more beautiful with spectacular glacial cliffs, teeming waterfalls, and Canada's snow peaked mountain range stretching in the distance. All that beauty had been lost on Vancouver, the British explorer. Guy had read a book about him during the rainy winter months in one of the overstuffed chairs at the Nettle Island Library. Incessantly complaining to the crew aboard his HMS Discovery about the desolate wilderness, and precipices, Vancouver was only interested in finding the elusive Northwest Passage. That, and anything else the pigheaded captain was looking for, Guy thought, he was never going to find it out here.

Guy didn't see why the pot

growers went to all the trouble to grow pot indoors, when the coastal range islands of British Columbia with their microclimate of long, hot, wet summers were perfect for growing weed. He hadn't paid too much attention to his lesson PJ gave him on BC Bud, and ultimately didn't care as long as he was profiting.

By nightfall he had successfully reached the pickup point, just north of Desolation Sound, off some gloomy island he could just imagine, a long-abandoned First Nation Village with garbage left behind by campers and strewn around by bears. He knew the Coast Salish people, over two hundred years ago, had reserved some of the islands for their dead. They hoisted the bodies in red cedar boxes up into the boughs of trees where they must have caught and swayed in the wind. There was a Sliammon legend he'd heard from another fisherman about a small island where they placed the bodies of their children who hadn't survived the winter. It was the only island that wasn't forested by steeped spruce and fir trees or any other immense evergreens. The only plants able to grow there where dwarfed bushes and shrubs. It was known as Dead Child's Island. Not much spooked Guy, but that story did. He was more interested in the ways in which these people fed whole communities as they wintered along the inside passage. He thought of the Coast Salish as the original sustainable farmers. The lurid names given to the places up and down the coast of both countries, Small Pox Bay, Massacre bay, Grief Point, tell

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the story of what happened to them.

Guy anchored where the water wasn't too deep. For dinner, he had anchovy stuffed French bread, tossed greens, and pasta with his own puttanesca sauce. He always ate better than his fishing compatriots with their cans of Dinty Moore Stew, Corn Flakes, dehydrated potatoes, Campbell's soup, peanut butter and jelly, cup cakes, Twinkies, frozen pizzas, and hotdogs. He wished he had a bottle of Cabernet, thought he should have allowed himself that. After dinner, he sat in his beach chair and took a nap under a nice rum colored sky.

As planned, at 1:00 a.m. he flashed his running lights, not unlike the rumrunners who wired car headlights to batteries on their boats, to communicate during prohibition. The Bayliner speedboat carrying the 135 pounds of high-grade BC Bud appeared from the ragged coast and pulled along side the Susie Q, dimming its lights. Guy had been told to keep his own lights low. There were two of them, kids again, on the flashy red and black Bayliner, neither of which was J.P. Guy had a couple of lines in his hands. He tossed one to the punk in front and the other to the one near the stern when something out of the shadow lunged at his extended hand. "Jesus, fuckin', Christ!" Guy shouted. They had a dog with them in their boat, a mostly black wolf-like looking dog with slanted eyes.

"Zorro," one of them reprimanded.

Zorro stared at Guy and

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growled at him as if he'd like to chew him up and shit him out. Guy placed his hand over his heart which was pumping like it was about to erupt, stood back a ways, even though he was pretty sure the damn dog couldn't leap high enough to get on board his boat.

As soon as they were tied up, the two of them worked silently tossing black hockey bags from Bayliner, to troller. One was Asian, close cropped hair, mean tattoo along his outer bicep, but otherwise looked like a nervous twitchy schoolboy with small wire-rimmed glasses. The other, white, maybe a little older, was wearing khakis and a light blue windbreaker. He looked more like a tourist or yacht owner than any kind of drug trafficker, Guy thought. Except unlike the yacht owner with his shit eating grin or the tourist with his brainless smile, this kid had a permanently peeved look about him. He told Guy there would be someone to meet him once he was back on Nettle. If he wasn't back in 72 hours, they'd come looking for him. "Don't fuck this up. They'll be consequences," he said.

"No problem. I've encountered some pretty dangerous waters in my time, if ya know what I mean?" Guy was talking but only half heard his own words. He was thinking about the consequences. Was that a threat? He noticed a bulge in the pocket of the white kid's windbreaker. Did these guys carry guns?

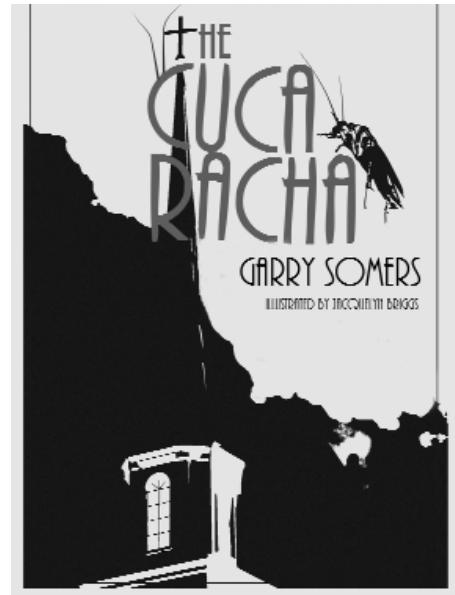
"Hide it down below." The Asian one said and turned away. They untied the ropes from their cleats and took off as if they'd

left a ticking bomb on board Guy's boat. The whole exchange made him feel uneasy for the first time since he'd met J.P.

He moved the twelve hockey bags down into the hold, where his fish would normally be, and covered them with a plastic tarp. He pulled up anchor, left the inlet, and headed home. That was it, he thought. He wished he had a way to contact North, tell him everything had gone smoothly, nothing to worry about. In celebration of his substitute cargo below, he finished off his bottle of Royal Canadian.

The strait was flat as a deck when he headed south. He'd listened to the weather the night before; winds predicted up to thirty but there were no storm warnings. However, two hours later, a northeast wind was kicking forty knots and rain pelted the cabin like gunshots. He knew he was in for it, but he'd seen worse. He'd survived one storm in the middle of the Hecate

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Strait, where winds blew up to eighty knots, with fifty-foot waves.

While he battened down the boat, making sure the hull was tight, dropping down his antennas, lightning hit the Susie Q with such force; he was knocked off his feet. "The fuck!" He shouted out, his words sucked into the wind.

He smashed his head on the deck and instinctively reached up to feel how bad he'd been hurt, but he was doused by rain and waves, and couldn't tell the difference between what was the oily water and what was blood. When he was able to stand up and orient himself he saw that the lightning had struck his control station. It had zapped and burned all of his electrical equipment: compass, radio, depth finder, starting a fire along the wire bundle that ran down to the engine compartment. He grabbed his fire extinguisher mounted to the bulk head, pulled the pin and

started spraying low, following the flames through each compartment, all the way to his engine. He realized that the lightning that hit the control panel had grounded itself out through his engine through the propeller and back to the sea.

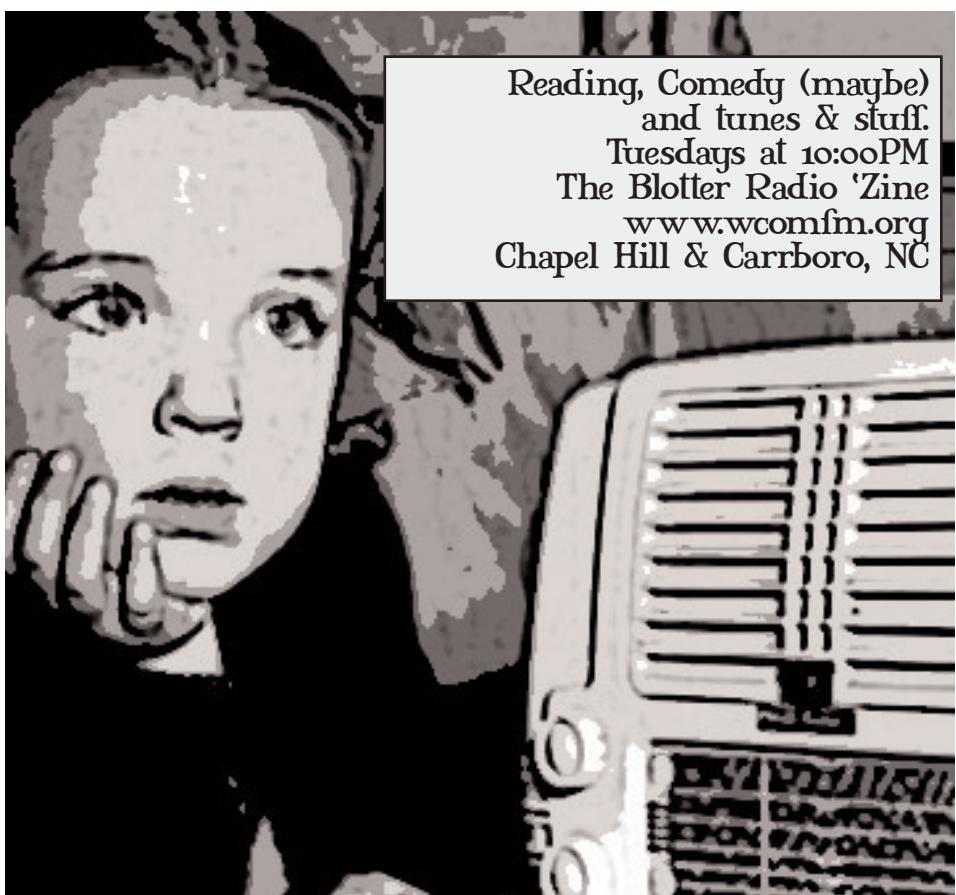
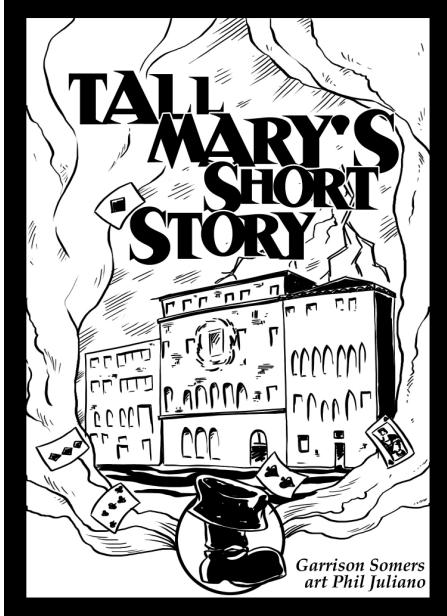
Besides his engine, he'd lost his short-range radio, lights, bilge pump, and the Susie Q was being thrashed around like a toy boat on a dark sea. He thought about shooting off a flare, but remembered the bud. He couldn't draw attention, still he couldn't risk running into another ship, so he rigged up his emergency flashlight and put it on the control tower where it flashed red. Then he grabbed his hat with a brim light attached from his toolbox and went down into the hull to make sure water wasn't getting in. His head hurt, and he

thought he must have twisted his arm when he'd fallen because that ached like hell. He was too old for this crap. Fortunately the storm blew over as fast as it had come up, otherwise he'd have been a dead man.

The hard rain turned to a soft spring rain. He was still in a fix. He'd been blown off course and had no idea where he was, somewhere between Lund and Texada island. There would be no anchoring. These were some of the deepest waters in the world, and some of the most treacherous with tidal rapids and narrow passageways fringed with the teeth of dangerous shoals. Not a place you wanted your boat to be unhinged and freewheeling. At least when he reported to Jean that he'd come back because of engine trouble, it wouldn't be a complete lie. He wished to God

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he'd invested in a satellite phone, hadn't wanted to spend the money, and he never took to having a cell phone, wasn't even sure he could get reception way out between nowhere and nowhere. He thought of those gold rushers, mad for gold, just going after the promise and dream of a better life. They traveled without radios, GPS or EPIRBs. Even Vancouver, that whiner, all he had were his charts and compasses. Handy though, these modern devices, Guy thought. If he didn't show up on Nettle at some point around the designated time, the dealers said they'd come after him, and probably not with any thoughts of rescue. 'Don't fuck this up,' the mean one had said. You're a fuck up. The voice of his dad came to him from years past. And there was the problem with the Border Patrol. He needed help, but not from them, not with the contraband he had down in his hold. "Goddamn it!" he yelled out. "I'm fuckin' screwed." He was sweating even though it was cold. His wet clothes felt clawing, so he threw off his jacket and peeled off his shirt. His arm hurt, his

head, and now his chest. He was starting to shake all over. You're not much, are you? This time it was Minnie's dad's voice. Something he'd said to Guy on Guy's wedding day.

Guy needed a drink. He was shaking hard. He'd finished that last bottle, and there was nothing else on board. Dumb fuck, he thought, why hadn't he taken an extra? Dumb fuck, his father said. There was the bud. They used bud medicinally in Canada. Legally. He'd read about it in the Nettle Island News. Maybe it could help the pain in his chest, stop the shakes. He didn't see any water when he was in the engine compartment, so he went back up on deck, opened a hatch and dropped into the hold. He adjusted his brim light to see better, unzipped one of the hockey bags and took out his rigging knife. The bud was vacuum packed in thick plastic and duct tape. He made a small slit as if gutting a fish. He'd only take enough for one joint, no need to over do it, especially if this stuff was as potent as he was told it was. The dealers wouldn't notice the slit he'd made. Just sampling

the product, he laughed to himself. When he had a small amount in the palm of his trembling hand, he left the open package, and returned to the forward cabin and searched for the first aide kit where he was pretty sure Bobby Brule, who'd been his deckhand last year, had left some rolling papers.

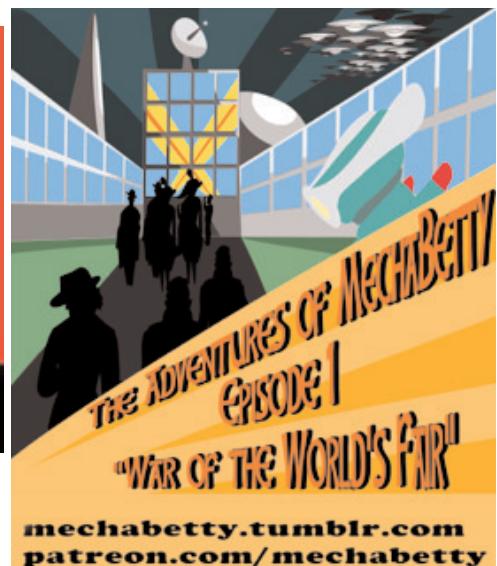
On deck, he sat in his beach chair that he'd righted after the storm had stopped blowing, smoked the joint he'd rolled too full so that it looked more like a fat Jamaican spliff, and took long drags that made him cough and burn. It had been years. He ignored the discomfort until he relaxed into the nice buzz coming on, and thought about hot-wiring the motor, but realized he didn't have enough good wire on the ship to salvage it. He tried to remember how much was in the toolbox. He used to have a roll of bright green, but what gauge was it? He couldn't remember. He thought the BC Bud was working, because his chest felt better. "Calmin' the fuck down." He said out loud. "I'm pretty ingenious after all,



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Dad."

Don't speak to the dead, son, his mother's voice came to him. She had some superstitious belief about that.

"I'm not. He's speakin' to me." He remembered his younger sister, Adella, her long brown legs, running in the tall grass. Those same slim legs, dangling, when he took her down from the barn rafters, and he kept screaming her name, only it was too late, he was speaking to the dead.

He tried getting up, but the boat was spinning. Or was it? He was so high. He fell back into the chair, but then he felt like he had swallowed helium and had to hold onto the beach chair so that he wouldn't float away.

His father spoke again. You're nothin' goin' nowhere.

"Fuckin' mean sonofabitch." The sensation of floating scared Guy, but strangely his father didn't. "Least I never laid a hand on my kid, or worse."

Nothin'. Never will be.

"I got a good son."

"Loser."

"I'm gonna' be a grandfather. You here that!"

Please don't yell. You'll just provoke him.

"Remember how I could

make you laugh, Mom? I was the only one could make you laugh."

Don't speak to the dead, son.

That's right. It's bad luck. He wouldn't say one more word out loud. They might all go away, even Adella who was hanging from the canopy of the boat. He was reminded of the dead children on Dead Child's Island, shuddered, and tried not to look at her again.

He had to get himself out of this mess. Get his boat going, get that delivery back to the island. North would be worried. He tried to stand up again and go back to the controls to see if it was really as bad as he thought it was, but instead of floating up and away, he was struck down to the deck for the second time, something hard hitting his chest. He was flat out on the boat floor, like a fish that fell from a net; only he wasn't flopping around, he lay still, waterlogged and cold. He drifted, didn't know for how long. Minutes? Hours? He

thought maybe the drug dealers had returned and shot him, that's why he was lying on the deck of his boat with a hole in his chest, but then he saw a light, a ship light, and realized they hadn't gotten there yet. He heard a dog bark in the distance. He was sure of it. The dealers had a dog. Zorro. The Border Patrol had dogs. The dealers might kill him. They'd think he'd run off with their goods or see he got into them. The BP might save him, but send him to jail. At least he'd be alive. He saw the red pulsing light and remembered his flashlight up on the stern, and

then the other light getting closer. It was the Coast Guard. Of course, they'd have seen his flashing light.

The pain in his chest was widening, and a frightening headache had come on. This was bad medicine, he thought. The Canucks should have thought twice about legalizing it. He was cold and shaking miserably, frozen to the deck, and where was his jacket? Why wasn't he wearing a shirt? His vision blurred, the awful headache. He needed a drink. That was all this was, but then he felt like his lungs were being crushed and his throat was closing. He shut his eyes. Just hold on, he told himself. Breathing is simple stuff.

The boat was rocking on the swells, and Guy listened to the soughing wind, the tinkling of his shark wind chime, and another sound, which surprised him, his own weeping.

When he opened his eyes, the headache was gone, he could breathe again, and the light had drawn closer, shining brightly over the length of his body. He was sure it was the Coast Guard. He was in high spirits now, so happy to see that light spreading out like wings, that a pool of euphoric gratitude and warmth came over him and he cried out, "Thanks for saving me, Man! I'm gonna' be a grandfather!" ♦



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"Narcan – Judgey McJudgeyPants"

by Janie Harvey Garner, RN

Narcan is being sold over the counter with education in many places now. You can hear the screams of the self-righteous and uninformed from a million miles away. I am going to assume that any person who reads this and is completely scandalized by my attempt to educate about narcan is simply uninformed and requires tutoring. Because I don't want to assume that you think 'Those Damn Junkies Ought To Die'

Well, then.

As a former ER Nurse, I love me some narcan. It can turn an essentially dead person into a swinging, puking whirlwind of life in a moment. Heroin overdose? *Have 0.4 mg of This Party is OVER!* And hopefully you got it fast enough that we have saved your brain. So you can live to go to rehab someday. This is because all people are precious, and I want all of them to live for as long as they can. I am a grieving parent, myself (pedestrian

accident) so I am firmly wired into the community who have lost their children due to drug overdose. I wish there had been a vial of Narcan sitting there when my friends found their kids down. Seriously.

Narcan does need to be sold with education, especially because of the half-life. We all know they can obtund again in 20-30 minutes. Or an hour. They still have to come to the hospital, and they need to know that. However, we cannot control that. We can only give them this one precious second chance at life. Yes, there are side effects associated with Narcan, but none of them are as serious as dead in 3 minutes. We can usually fix the other ones.

And now we are giving it to the police as well! This is wonderful! The police usually get to scenes much faster than the ambulance, and they can inject it and save that person, who may go on to change

lives for the better someday.

Maybe they will speak at your kids school about the dangers of drugs, and convince your kid to never try heroin WHEN it is offered to them. Because it will be offered to them. And if you think it won't, come visit me and I will take you to an extremely affluent area of St Louis where kids are dying in record numbers from heroin overdoses. Good kids. Smart kids.

And if you think that this will not save anyone, Let me direct you to this Time Magazine article about a 2013 study, and the use of Narcan in the community since 1996. (<http://healthland.time.com/2013/02/05/wider-use-of-antidote-could-lower-overdose-deaths-from-by-nearly-50/>)

Sick people do not deserve to die because you disagree with their choices, Judgey McJudgeyPants. ♦

Best In Show



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

Being a "woman of a certain age" I have to get up during the night to pee. I often have a dream before I wake that I call "The Impossible Toilet". It has many variations, but always the same problem. There's never a way to successfully use the facilities.

It usually involves opening a door to a stall or a room, and finding a solid chair or a shower, but no toilet. One time the entire bathroom floor was on fire.

The dreams can be short or much longer, depending on the urgency I suppose. In one dream I was on an indoor running track. I had to dodge runners to get to the doors that could be seen on the other side of the track. I opened one door after another to find that all units were occupied.

Sometimes the floors are covered in filth, sometimes the bowl is overflowing, sometimes there are no doors and a crowd of people is watching.

Thankfully I always decide that I can not use these toilets and I wake up.

Anne B. - cyberspace

CONTRIBUTORS:

Anne Trooper Holbrook writes, " My fiction has appeared in PRISM international, received honorable mention in The Ledge Fiction Award, short-listed for the Fish Short Story Prize, and been finalist in many contests, most recently the 2014 Rick DeMarinis Short Fiction Contest and the 2015 SLS Disquiet International literary Program Graywolf Prize for best novel excerpt of an emerging writer."

Janie Harvey Garner is the founder of the nursing group **Show Me Your Stethoscope**, and a powerful and passionate nurse blogger. SMYS is a Nursing Empowerment organization with nearly 700,000 members, designed to be a platform from which nurses can advocate for themselves. This group was formed when Janie Garner, RN from Missouri asked nurses from far and wide on social media to show her their stethoscopes. While SMYS began because of nurses rallying around one of their own, it has greatly evolved. SMYS is a unique, supportive environment for health care providers that provides a strong, united voice for health care providers on issues such as patient advocacy and policy change; Supports their personal and professional needs; And creates philanthropic opportunities for members. For more information, please visit www.SMYSOfficial.com

Phil Juliano of Minneapolis, MN, is a good Blotterfriend. Follow his adventures on philjulianoillustration.com

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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 Foward, 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



(publisher & book reviewer, "The Blotter Magazine;" contributor to the "Urban Hiker;" former host of "New Frontiers" and "Laugh Tracks" on WXDU - FM, Duke University Radio)

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