



REFLECTIONS

Of The
Sydney Writing Circle

A collection of stories and poems written by the
participants of the
Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton County
Sydney Writing Circle.

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Reflections of the Sydney Writing Circle

FOREWARD

The Sydney Writing Circle continues to flourish this year. Each Tuesday afternoon we meet to share our writings, to engage in writing activities, and to lend encouragement to each other. We enjoy happy, sad and humourous stories and always leave with an uplifted spirit.

The Writing Circle meets each week with the support from the Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton County (ALACBC). Their interest in adult learning is evident in their continued sponsorship of the program.

For the 2008-09 school term, I was privileged to become the facilitator for this group of adults who hail from diverse backgrounds. The experience has become a truly enjoyable one, allowing me the opportunity to explore my own writing ability; I have learned from this group of authors. Thank you for welcoming me into your group.

On behalf of the writing circle I extend thanks for the ongoing support from ALACBC.

Shelley MacDougall

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By

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Reflections of the Sydney Writing Circle

Ken Beaton

I have been a member of the Sydney Writing Circle for the past three years. I find that the time I spend with my fellow writers each Tuesday, to be a most rewarding, helpful and fun experience, as they are all well versed in every aspect of story writing. I learn something every week from each of them. I thank them for that. The two stories presented here, are part of many, inspired by and written, as the result of class projects, and suggested themes, that we have shared this past year.

A LESSON LEARNED

Many years ago growing up in the north end of Sydney, I was one of many neighborhood kids that Played in the old grave yard next to Sacred Heart Church, at the corner of George and Ferry Streets. It was a great place to act out our fantasizes, while imitating our favorite cowboy and Indian, silver screen stars, and other such games. The old graves, some of which were there since the late 1870's, were overgrown with shrubs, bushes, and trees, and had certainly not been maintained over the years. The large lot was enclosed on the two street sides, by a 6-foot wire fence. It was indeed a green oasis away from the closely packed tenement houses, homes, and business in the area. Many were the days we spent in there, without regard for the dead, more through ignorance, than disrespect.

In a lot of areas throughout the site, there were sunken spots where the graves had subsided over the years. The last resting place of those poor souls, now long forgotten, who had passed on many years before any of us were born. These were the places without head stones or markers, probably rotted away or eroded over time, and it made for a difficult walk or run, as we whiled away the days. You had to be careful not to fall or stumble into them, and quite possibly sprain or break your ankle.

Of course this all took place when we were really young, and as we grew and matured into our early teens, those old times of fun and games were quickly lost, as our interests in life expanded. I remember at that time, so many years ago, on a wet, snowy, Christmas Eve, about five of us decided to go to the midnight mass in the old church. Earlier that evening we had been around the neighborhood visiting friends, and some of us in our travels had sipped on a pint of beer or two, but still ended up at the church service.

Seated inside the packed church, as the mass was being celebrated, the heat and the smell of the burning candles started to take a toll. As we sat there, I soon became overcome by the closeness of the large crowd, and I had wished that I hadn't drank any beer earlier that evening. The acrid smell of old hops in the air, didn't make it any easier to sit still, as the parish priest preached his homily about the meaning and significance of Christmas.

We all seemed to leave at the same time to escape the heat, and what must have been an atrocious smell of stale beer. I can imagine now, that those next or around us were truly glad to see us go.

Out on the front steps, and able to get my breath, I felt a lot better. Someone had spotted the large metal fence surrounding the graveyard, had a hole in it, that we could fit through. I don't really remember now whose idea it was to run through the graveyard, to the old Maynard's house, situated next to the far end on Ferry Street. It had stopped snowing by this time, and what was left was the wet, slushy snow on the steps, and on the grounds around the church.

I believe I was the last one to get through the opening, as we hollered and laughed and made our way to the other end of the graveyard. That's when the trouble for me started. As I was heading for the far corner, I slipped and fell flat on my face into one of those old sunken burial plots, now half full of slushy snow and water. I could hear the other guys howling and laughing, in the distance, as I lay there stunned for a minute, when suddenly I felt something like a bony hand, that seemed to grab me by the ankle. Talk about being scared, I didn't know if I had suddenly opened up an old tomb, or was entangled by an old twig from the overgrown dead bushes. My heart was pounding, and I suddenly came to my full senses, as I pulled and pulled, at my trousers to get away from that place forever.

It was a night I'll never forget. As I made my way to Maynard's house on Ferry Street, all the other fellows were there, and having a great old time, and laughing and hooting about running through the graveyard at such a late hour. I was soaking wet, and had torn pants, and my ankle was throbbing and bleeding. The gang began laughing even louder, when I told them what had happened, and that I had to go home to get dry, and to have my leg looked after. They all said I was so white looking, that they thought I had seen a ghost.

When I arrived home and related the story to my mother, she was wild. I changed into dry clothing, and as my mother bathed my bruised and bleeding ankle, she remarked that it looked like deep scrapes from someone's fingernails. She made the repairs as best as she could, and although I was in a warm house, I still felt cold.

When I think about it, I never went back to that graveyard to see if I had disturbed anything, or if there were just old plant shafts or branches sticking from the ground where I had fallen.

As I drive by that corner lot to this day, I will never forget that particular night, and what may or may not have happened. I learned my lesson the hard way. Today the lots in there are in immaculate condition, with a caretaker cutting the bushes and the grass, and keeping the place the way it should always have been. And yes that fence has been repaired.

Was it a hand that grabbed my ankle, or an old twisted root system? I'll never know. This I do know, let the dead lie in peace in their final resting place. It's the least we can do for them out of respect for the hard times, back in those early days, that they endured while on this earth.

Kenneth J. Beaton

October 25th. 2008

THE BRIGHTER SIDE OF DARKNESS

It was a dreary, overcast day, in late October, as Marguerite MacKinnon and her neighbor, Amy Leforte, made their way to mass at St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church. Both being devout Catholics, they tried to attend the mass on a daily basis. As they approached the church in the chilly afternoon air, they could almost feel the warmth beaming through the tall stained glass windows from the lights within.

Entering through the large doors, the warmth and brightness enveloped them, and Amy exclaimed to Marguerite, "Isn't it wonderful to enter God's house and be met with such aura of holiness, and the sweet smell of burning candles?"

As Marguerite nodded in agreement, they both blessed themselves and made their way to the waiting pews. They sat in the same place daily, just in front of old Rory MacNeil, a large man of Scottish extraction, long since retired from the Sydney Steel plant. Both women said hello to Rory and knelt down to say their prayers. In the next few minutes, other parishioners entered the church and were seated.

The two women prayed in silence, awaiting the arrival of the priest and the altar boy to begin the mass, when they noticed that someone was turning out some of the ceiling lights, on the side isles, leading up to the altar. Continuing to pray, they wondered why old Father Macinnis would bother to turn down the lights at this time of day. Just then, another parishioner, who attended mass daily, but arriving a little late today, passed by their seats, and was seated just five rows ahead of them. It was old Milton Burke, a one-time bookkeeper, now also retired.

"Did you see that?" an exasperated Rory asked in his Scottish brogue accent. The two women turned and were met with the full force of his tirade on what had just taken place.

"Everyday in preparation for the mass, the priest or the altar boy, turn on the lights in the church from the panel in the vestry, and when old man Burke enters the church, he shuts down two or three sets of the lights from the back control panel on the wall behind us. Look just over there." As he pointed, we both could make out the wooden cabinet door, that was recessed into the wall behind us.

"And," he continued, "If he arrives before they turn on the lights, he takes it upon himself to turn on just the ones he seems to think are sufficient for lighting the church, hararrummph, foolishness I say."

"Well why don't you ask him what he thinks he's doing?" Inquired Amy, "I mean, it's not like he's paying the church power bill. Why, I'm going to ask him myself, the next time he does that."

Just then the priest, and the altar boy, entered from the vestry, and the mass began. During the service, Amy prayed for both Milton and Rory and herself, and asked God in her prayers

to forgive her and Rory for talking about poor Milton, and she dismissed the thought of asking him what his intentions were in turning off some of the lights.

On subsequent afternoons, both Amy and Marguerite became more aware of the dimmed lights at the late afternoon service. But in order to keep peace, and not to cause any controversy, just kept it to themselves. Then one day, as the old priest was sitting beside the altar, as the readings were being read by one of the lectors of the parish, Father Macinnis jumped from his seat as if awakened by a bad dream, and went back into the vestry, where the master switch was located, and turned on all the lights in the church to their brightest splendor.

" My God," whispered Amy, " What a difference; I can actually see the print in the daily missal now."

" I can't agree more." answered Marguerite. There are no dark shadows in here anymore."

With the inside of the church all lit up, the trio could see old man Burke squirming in his seat. The women didn't say another word, and all old Rory did was crack a wry smile.

On departing the church after the mass had ended, Milton brushed by Rory on the outside steps and exclaimed, " I can't understand those people in there. They are burning more electricity in the church, than it would take to run the electric arc furnace at the Sydney Steel Plant." With that remark he made his way up the street in a huff.

As the weeks passed, and the daylight got shorter, the two women along with Rory and Milton, continued to attend daily mass, and the lighting within the church was never mentioned again. Soon Christmas Eve was upon the parishioners at St. Stephen's, and as customary, each year in a special evening mass at 6' o'clock, Father Macinnis would put on a pageant with the help of the children in the parish, that would re-enact the birth of the child Jesus. Attending mass that night, were Amy and Marguerite, and of course Rory and Milton, and just about everyone else in the parish, as the church was packed to overflowing.

As the service got underway and the lights were dimmed, this time by the ushers, the senior choir began singing the traditional Christmas Carols, and the whole church took on a most wondrous atmosphere. The children performed their pageant with enthusiasm in the beautiful tranquil setting, with just the lights over the altar, the altar candles, and the small white lights, that adorned the four fir trees, surrounding the recreated stable.

When the pageant had finished, Father Macinnis gave the instructions to leave on, only the lights above the altar, the Christmas decorations, and the tree lights, for the Christmas mass.

When the mass had ended, and all the interior lights were turned back on, the choir broke into song again, with the remaining Christmas carols, and the large congregation began to make its way outside. On the outside steps, Rory, Amy, and Marguerite, spotted Milton on his way home, and they all noticed the smile on his face and the twinkle in his eyes.

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" Merry Christmas to you all!" exclaimed Milton, " Wasn't it marvelous to experience the true meaning and feeling of that most glorious night? Father Macinnis, and the children, couldn't have re-created it any better."

They all agreed, and acknowledged his Christmas greeting, and as they made their way to their homes in the quiet evening air, Rory remarked to the two women.

" Well, he finally got his wish with the lights being turned off, and you know, in that setting, it was truly marvelous. Merry Christmas."

Kenneth J. Beaton



Valerie Bird

A long forgotten 19th century novelist and politician, Buliver Lytton, wrote the following words in a play called Richelieu: the pen is mightier than the sword. The fact that few know about the man, but most of us are familiar with the quotation proves his point. The man is forgotten, the words live on.

Language is the most powerful tool in our armory, it is used for good and evil and everything in between. Without it we could not communicate effectively. It is, therefore, often important to be precise in using the right words to relate to our fellow men. Writing my thoughts, I find, forces me to think. I don't know why, but it seems to me that we are a little more careful with the written word than the spoken one. So my reasons for being part of this writing circle are: a really enjoyable two hour session with my fellow members exchanging our written thoughts and exercising my mind to keep it alive in my old age.

THE GHOST CAR AND THE RUGBY PLAYER

This is a true story. It happened on October 31st in the 1950s, following a Rugby match in a village in Wales. Canadians love their hockey, the English treasure soccer which they prefer to call football, but the Welsh consider rugby their national game.

This had been a particularly good game. The teams were evenly matched and though Owen Jones' team had won, it was a cliff-hanger to the very end. The victors felt entitled to celebrate in the Green Dragon, which served the best beer in the area. Owen celebrated well, if perhaps not too wisely, and was so absorbed in telling the pretty barmaid about the finer points of the game that he missed the bus taking the team back home to Llandudno. The other members of the team were in no condition to notice Owens' absence. Now the pub was closing and it dawned to Owen that he faced a twelve-mile walk home. His natural optimism, the euphoria of victory and the influence of several pints of the best, let him believe that a passing car would pick him up on the road.

It was a dark night, overcast but mild. He had been walking for some time but no car had passed in either direction. Only some night sounds kept Owen company: the screech of an owl, the barking of a fox, and the rustling of leaves in the breeze. And then he thought he heard a sound behind him. He sensed it rather than heard it and couldn't quite place it. He turned round and there behind him, he couldn't judge how far, he saw two faint lights. They were on the same level, parallel with each other, perhaps 30 cm off the ground, and a distance of 120 cm separating them. Owen was no more superstitious than other Welshmen, which doesn't say much, for the Welsh are known to be fay, with powers of premonition -- a little bit spooky. He was tired and still not quite sober, not thinking very clearly. The thing, whatever it was, was moving very slowly toward him and Owen decided to ignore it and walk on until it caught up with him. And shortly it did. To his delight and astonishment it was a car.

A car driving very slowly, without a sound, without headlights with only the parking lights breaking the dark. Still in a post-alcoholic daze, Owen reasoned that the driver had seen him, did not want to blind him with headlights, and drove slowly so that Owen could get in. And as the car caught up with him that's exactly what Owen did.

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He opened the door and collapsed in the seat next to the driver. “Boy, what a relief, I couldn’t have walked another....” turning to the driver he stopped in horror. There was no driver. He was alone in a car moving by its own volition, soundless, dark and ghostly. He was unable to think clearly. His brain was addled by alcohol, exhaustion and fright. He set and hoped that he was having a nightmare.

Presently the car was approaching a sharp turn, a part of the road known for accidents. He wondered whether to get out of the car. Before he could make a decision a ghostly white hand reached in through the open window on the driver’s side. It grasped the stirring wheel, skillfully negotiated the sharp bend and withdrew. Owen sat paralyzed.

In the distance the sky was getting lighter. Too early for dawn, Owen knew that the sky was reflecting the streetlights of the now not too distant city. He determined to get out of the car as soon as they reached the city streets. They were now approaching a crossroad with traffic lights. The lights turned red. The car stopped. The lights turned green, the car started to move at its snail pace. “A law - abiding ghost car” mused Owen now more intrigued than frightened. And now the white hand again reached through the open window, turned the stirring wheel and stopped at an all night gas station.

A weary figure, dusty, sweaty but very much alive figure emerged from behind the car. Turning to the gas attendant he said: “For heaven’s sake fill her up please. I have been pushing the #*^#* thing for so many miles that I was ready to give up the ghost.

Valerie Bird



MAGIC

A mystery story in three chapters.

Tony woke up sensing that there was someone in the room. He stayed very still, trying to adjust his eyes to the light; there was no moon, and the room was pitch dark. Gradually his eyes adjusted and yes, there was someone moving very silently and confidently collecting Tony's possessions -- his wallet, his gold watch, his camera, his change -- and putting them in a bag. As his eyes got more adjusted to the dark, Tony had the impression that the intruder was wearing formal evening clothing; tails and a top hat. Before he had time to decide what to do, the intruder came up to his bed, pulled something out of his bag and put it over Tony's face. "There you are ladies, that'll keep you quiet for a while--- just in case you were awake and had ideas about calling the desk" he said, then confidently opened the door and left the room. But Tony was already out for the count; the chloroform had done its job.

Tony was on vacation staying in a good seaside hotel on the coast of Cornwall. When he woke up from his enforced sleep, it was morning. It took him sometime to get fully conscious and to decide whether he had dreamed about an uninvited guest or, whether an intruder had really been in the room. One look at the dressing table convinced him that someone had indeed been there, and had helped himself to such valuables as Tony had in the room. He briefly applauded himself for having put his travellers cheques in the hotel's safety deposit, got dressed and went to the hotel desk to report the theft. He found that he had been one of six victims, other guests had already reported similar visits, and those that had been awake also had the impression that this was an extraordinary elegant thief. He was told that a number of the hotels at the resort had been plagued with this intruder, the police were on the case, but it was difficult to catch him as he always dressed differently, sometimes formally, sometimes casually, but always in clothes which would not make him conspicuous in any hotel lobby, dining room or corridor. The man could easily pass for guest. No one had seen his face while relieving guests of their possessions.

A few telephone calls later made it impossible for the thief to use Tony's credit cards, so the damage was minimal, and Tony decided that he would not let this incident spoil his day. He went for a jog on the beach.

Chapter Two

In many British seaside resorts the promenade is above the beach, and at regular intervals stairs connect the two. The promenade is tree-lined and bordered with attractive flowerbeds, giving the place a festive atmosphere. Across the street are hotels, boarding houses, shops selling holiday supplies: buckets and spades for children, scrimping nets, beach balls, floats, beach towels, postcards. But Tony is heading for a little tearoom on the corner of the street. He enjoys going there, because it still maintains the traditions associated with his country. Tea is still tea: it isn't green or mint or jasmine or chamomile flavour, coffee is just coffee, not latte nor espresso. And both are served from proper tea or coffee pots, into bone

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china cups with matching small plates for pastries. Civilized, thinks Tony, who is a bit of a traditionalist, though friends teasingly call him a ‘stick in the mud’.

He is a little dismayed when he finds that all the tables are taken and is about to leave when a young woman at a table for two beckons to him and as he approaches says:” If you don’t mind sharing a table, you are welcome to share this one”. Gladly he sits down. He orders tea and pastries, which are brought on a three-tiered cake dish.

Tony and the young woman, who by the way is very attractive (young women in mystery stories are always attractive) while chatting discover that they are both Londoners, and eventually get to the subject of the resort and their presence in it. Tony, of course, is on vacation, and he assumes that his table companion is also there to recharge her batteries from whatever job she holds. Well, no, she says, she is here for the whole season with her father, who is an illusionist, a magician performs twice weekly at the Pier Theatre. She, herself, is a part of his act. Her Dad, she tells Tony, is also a hypnotist and she is a medium. In the show he puts her in a trance and asks her questions about selected members of the audience, she always gets the correct answers. She doesn’t know how she does it---when she comes out of the trance she remembers nothing. She would like to give it all up, but it is her father’s most popular act. Intrigued, Tony decides to go to the next performance: it would be an evening’s entertainment, and besides, it may lead to a further meeting with this attractive young woman. Especially since they are both Londoners and could arrange a meeting there after the summer.

Back at the hotel, as Tony passes the desk he notices a middle-aged man registering. He overhears the new guest giving his name as Detective Inspector Rigby. Inspector Rigby is of average height, he sports a small beard and moustache, and a neat style of greying hair. He is dressed in a tweed sport’s jacket and grey pants; a pair of brogues finishes the ensemble. I hope he is here to solve the thefts, thinks Tony, he looks a no nonsense character to me.

Chapter Three

It is Thursday night, and the night of illusionist Magister Porteous (his real name is Sydney Smith) performance at the Pier Theatre. Tony gets there early and secures a good seat -- he wants to observe the performance very closely, and try to discover how the slight of hand is done. Beside, he is looking forward to seeing his tearoom companion. He notes detective inspector Rigby a few seats away from him. Well, thinks Tony, perhaps the police also need to learn a few magic tricks.

The performance starts: white bunnies appear from empty top hats, doves fly out of sleeves, yards of colored silk kerchiefs appear from nowhere. All stuff Tony has seen before, but he still can’t detect how it is done.

And then Magister Porteous announces the highlight of the performance:

“And now, ladies and gentlemen” he says “you will experience the extraordinary gift of a young woman, who will amaze you with her clairvoyance. Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you, the fabulous reincarnation of the beautiful Helen of Troy.”

Tony's companion from the tearoom materialized on the stage. She is dressed in a classic Greek garment, looking very lovely. With great drama the magician hypnotizes and puts Helen in a trance. This accomplished, he surveys the audience, ponders a while, then selects a person to test "Helens" clairvoyance. She is asked about the person's profession, habits, possessions, marital status and such. To the audience's amazement the answers are correct. Several successful rounds later Magister Porteous points to inspector Rigby. Tony holds his breath. And Helen responds in a clear, unemotional tone of voice:

"This man is an impostor and thief, he has been robbing people in this resort." The crowd gasps almost in unison.

Inspector Rigby slowly stands up and with a wry smile looks around:

"On the contrary, ladies and gentlemen, it is your magician who is the thief, he, the master of disguise, has been leading a double life here. As for me, I am detective inspector Rigby and have been called in to help find the hotel thief."

The audience sits dumbfounded: Is this part of the act? But wait, there is more. From the back of the theatre a man gets up and walks to the front to join the dramatic scene. He walks right up to inspector Rigby and in one fast move tears off the man's beard, moustache and wig. The now beardless, moustache-less, and blonde youngish man, no longer resembling the inspector stands rooted to the floor. And the new actor in the drama turns to the audience and introduced himself:

"It is I, ladies and gentlemen, who is the inspector investigating the thefts. And thanks to the young lady, my task has been made much easier. Two constables are waiting to take this scoundrel to the place where he will have difficulties in carrying on with his profession."

And the thief is dully marched away. The audience, delighted with the additional excitement, applauds Toby is amazed, but decides that he would leave well alone. He may have enjoyed knowing the beautiful Helen better, but is not quite prepared to risk a clairvoyant girlfriend.

Valerie Bird

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Jack Compton

I, as an octogenarian, am eager to be an actual part of this writing circle. I began with trepidation three years ago and now am comfortable in the group, helped by my compatriots. I had suppressed my writing, beginning as a teenager many years ago. I was always an avid reader and when I came upon a new word, I would look it up to enhance my vocabulary to include it in my writings. Now under the guidance of an amazing facilitator I am hopefully emerging as the writer and poet I would like to be.

EMPATHY

I stand in your shoes
and see through your eyes
I follow my heart to
accept the Golden Rule.
My precepts to be alert
and worldly wise.
To aid mankind –
to be nobody's fool
I give my hand in
friendship and right.
To shoulder and albeit
through the dark night.
Tho fully clothed I
stand naked to all
In your full sight I am
straight forward and tall.

BLESSING

He is beside me,
He is with me all the way.
Through the measure
Of each dawning day
He is my strength
To carry through
He is my attempt
In all I do.
He is my lifeline
My binding cord
Blessed Savior, my
Always precious Lord.

Jack Compton

RECOLLECTION OF A PET CAT

When I try to remember precise time and year of a personal happening I associate an event that transpired. This story that I write about is a tragedy that happened to our family – the death of our beloved pet cat, Snowflake.

It was long ago – fourteen years this April – 1995- I recollect it because it was the time we were making preparations for our daughter's wedding.

Snowflake was a Siamese Burmese born in our basement on a couch. I went down to get some clothes that were drying on our line, it was the year that my daughter began her junior high school, 1979. When I saw this kitten lying there, I called my daughter to come down to see the wonder of the birth.

Strangely, the mother cat was all black with white marking on its forelegs. This kitten was beige, with blue eyes and dark coloured ear tips and dark circles around the eyes, and a dark tail. We immediately fell in love with this tiny creature as the mother cat, Annabel, lavished all her affection on her precious offspring. Annabel was strictly a house cat. We hardly allowed her outside; the outings were particularly on warm days in our backyard tethered to a post.

One Sunday morning as we prepared for church she ran out the front door and scampered across the road. My daughter, a typical teen, was saddened by Annabel running away. She wanted to bring her home. I could not go to find her as church time was approaching. Later I went seeking her in the wooded area but was unsuccessful. I tried to console my daughter and wife, telling them when she is hungry she will be returning. Several days passed and I still was not able to find her. I then decided to bring some food to this one spot – a dense clump of bushes. To my surprise, the spot was a haven for cats. They came jumping out when they smelt the food. Annabel was among them. I grabbed her, disheveled as she was and brought her back home. I said to my family count the days – this is an account of how Snowflake was conceived.

We had her as a member of our family nearly seventeen years. We had her treated by a vet each year, given needles and shots. It was a regular session like our own doctor, routine. It was this vet that told us she was a rare breed, that the male cat must have also been a rare species.

This cat, as it grew, became an integral part our lives. She slept at the foot of my bed. In the mornings when I arose sat at a spot to eat breakfast, she would come and walk all over me, my shoulders and down into my lap and lay there with me. I was enjoying this creature, she was like a family member – another daughter.

The very disease she was inoculated for – cancer- abruptly came to a head. It was late in March that dark night, I heard her crying out in pain. She was trying to get into the clothes closet. I picked her up. Blood was oozing from underneath. I rushed to the closet to get

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some towels to clean up the mess. She was in pain as she tried to settle down with me. Needless to say, we were all alarmed.

I called our vet, she had just returned to her home. She told me to bring Snowflake to the office within half an hour when she would arrive.

The crux of this story, Snowflake had suffered a burst in her stomach and needed an immediate operation. It was to be costly but we were all of one mind – we had to give our beloved cat a chance for survival.

We were informed the next day that the operation was a success, but the survival was questionable. The next few days were unbearable. We waited with baited breath to hear some good news. It was Saturday, just after noon hour when I got the heartbreaking news. She would not survive, she was on oxygen.

I had the task of informing my wife and daughter who were in town buying items for the impending shower. The vet wanted us at her office.

I jumped into the car and went into town and they followed me to the vet's. She gave us the details and when she removed the tube, our precious pet took two gulps of air and passed away.

All four of us, myself, my wife, Rose, daughter, Rosanne, and friend, Sandra, all broke down and cried. Through racking sobs, unashamedly I told the doctor, "I have lost a family member – she was like a daughter."

I was completely attached to this pet. I vowed then I would not have another. Some time after, I could feel her coming down the stairs, then walking with me, cradling herself in my arms. The ghost of her presence was with me for a long time.

As I recount this story there is a lump in my throat and tears welling in my eyes, running down my cheeks. It is good to remember the time when a pet – a precious cat – could and did come into our lives, made us aware that we are keepers and that as we give to God's creatures we are so blessed.

Jack Compton

IT WAS A DARK AND WINDY NIGHT

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It was a dark windy night almost as bleak as Seanne's mood since she left her hometown in Saskatchewan. She couldn't believe it that day when her dad came home to deliver the news that he had been transferred and they were moving to Cape Breton. In contrast with her disposition, her parents were ecstatic about the move. They had been away for fifteen years and finally were fulfilling their dream to move home. She was despondent about leaving her friends and school; this was something that any twelve year old would dread she thought. She didn't want to leave her bosom buddy, Lorraine, and they spent countless hours crying over the dilemma. True to her nature, she decided to grin and bear it, because this was so important to her parents and her grandparents as well. Seanne was a very outgoing person, and she was confident that she would meet new friends. Everyone had always said that Cape Bretoners were such friendly people; Seanne surely hoped so.

Big Pond was a beautiful community, but there was no mall to go to unless you drove; this would take some adjustment, for sure. How long could a fashion conscious preteen be expected to wait to check out the latest clothes? She really hoped that she would meet some other girl who shared similar interests. The first week of school was really different; everyone seemed to have a twang and they talked really differently. Sometimes she didn't know exactly what some of her classmates were saying. There was one girl, Laura, in the seat behind her who seemed really nice. It seemed like she wasn't too boy crazy and liked things like shopping and movies. She couldn't believe it when Laura told her she loved the Discovery Channel and even dabbled in her own experiments; she and Laura were destined to become great friends. Their teacher had assigned a project and Seanne was thrilled to death when Laura asked her to partner. They were planning to visit the mall on Friday to gather supplies and look at the latest clothes at Bluenotes and Le Chateau. Marge, Laura's mom, invited her to sleep over on Friday, so naturally Leanne was flying high with excitement. Great news kept coming that week as her bosom buddy, Lorraine, had called saying that she could come for a two week visit in July. Wow, things were looking up; Big Pond wasn't so bad after all.

Friday dawned as the windiest day with torrents of rain beginning late morning. The forecast said that rain and wind would continue all day and evening; oh well, she and Laura would be at the mall! After being dropped off, they shopped like two kids in a candy store; they had a ball of fun talking to new people whom Seanne hadn't met before. They all seemed so nice. Both she and Laura were really up for pizza and a movie. They were allowed to stay alone as Marge was going only two houses down the street to visit her sister. They were told to lock up and keep the cell phone in close range in case of an emergency.

After Marge left, they plowed into the pizza like ravaging animals. Who knew that shopping made you so hungry? The movies were really funny, and they laughed so hard that they had to stop from time to time to use the washroom. All these interruptions made the time fly by, and finally by midnight, they were pooped and went to bed.

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They were just drifting off when they heard this ungodly bang; they immediately thought that it was just the wind hitting something. This was a topic of conversation until once again they were drifting off to dreamland. Crash, bang and a very loud thud woke both girls with a start! What was that they wondered in total fear? Should they check? Where was the cell phone? They decided that rock, paper, scissors would decide who would go downstairs first to investigate. Seanne was the one to play detective. With Laura close behind, she cowered very quietly down the stairs in bare feet so as not to make a noise. So far everything looked normal; everything was in its place. They both sighed in great relief. As they approached the kitchen, they heard the familiar sound of running water. Crouching ever so slowly, hanging onto each other for dear life, they finally entered the kitchen. They both muffled their screams as they noticed the tap running and a smashed plate on the floor. Seanne crawled into the living room to retrieve the cell phone with Laura inches behind, in tears. They called Marge who said she was coming home immediately. Upon her orders, they hid in the bathroom with the door locked and lights out. They were so scared, they could hardly breathe, and Seanne was sure her heart was coming through her chest. When Marge arrived with their neighbour, Jim, they called to the girls. Jim checked things out but couldn't figure out what had caused all the raucous. Everything was tightly locked and apart from the plate, nothing was out of order.

Seanne had her own theory; Jinkz, the cat, was supposed to have been outside all night. Was he really out in the elements? What cat in his right mind would stay out in this weather? There was only one way to find out. They put some of his favourite food in a dish and waited. Lo and behold, after twenty minutes or so, who sauntered from behind the dining room cabinet but his Royal Highness, Jinkz? So the mystery was solved. Jinkz always had a habit of jumping on the counter to nuzzle his head around the tap until water came out; that's the way he liked to drink. When he jumped on the counter, he must have hit the plate, smashing it to the floor. With such a fright from the racket he caused, he probably took off to find a good hiding spot. They all decided that it seemed very likely that Seanne's idea was quite plausible and had a great laugh. Jim, who was a retired RCMP officer, laughingly told Seanne that she'd make a good detective! Hmm...where had she heard that before?

Shelley MacDougall

LOST IN LONDON

We, my six friends and I booked a trip of a lifetime. We were going to Europe. We booked in July for a September excursion. For a couple of months we planned, excitement mounted, shopping for new clothes, lunch meetings to talk about our fabulous adventure. We were so very excited. Finally the day arrived, we drove to Halifax to catch an overnight flight across the Atlantic to London, England.

We landed in sunshine and warm temperatures, and we had the whole day ahead of us. We checked into our beautiful hotel, The Victoria Park Plaza, located a fine restaurant to have lunch and then we were off to explore London.

The second day we booked a guided tour of London, including Westminster Abbey and then off to see the changing of the guards at Buckingham Palace. We delighted from the tour bus and proceeded to walk towards the Palace, along with hundreds of other tourists.

I stopped to take a picture of the guards on horse back. Upon taking the pictures I looked up to find that my group were no longer there. I ran to try and find my friends, but I could not get through the throngs of people. I was lost, panic set in I had no purse, no money, no idea what to do. I walked for a while and knew then that I was not going to find my group. I started back in the direction I thought that we came from I then sat on the curbside and prayed, and realized that it was no use to panic.

I happened to remember the name of the hotel where we were staying and asked various people for directions, but they were all tourists as well. I swear one gentleman I asked was Sherlock Holmes with the trench coat, hat and pipe, it made me laugh as he seemed lost as well. I kept walking until I saw a young couple, (probably honeymooners) with a map open. They let me look at the map and helped me locate the hotel.

I walked for about two miles and arrived at the hotel exhausted but very relieved. I asked the manager to phone the tour office to let my friends know that I was safe. They were out on the streets near the Palace looking frantically for me. They finally decided to go back to the hotel to phone the police.

I wandered outside the hotel and low and behold I heard them calling Camilla, we stood in the middle of the hotel square and cried with joy. After our reunion we carried on and went to visit the Tower of London.

Our trip was wonderful from London to Paris. Guess who is the brunt of all lost jokes.

This is a true story about one of the many adventures with my happy wandering friends, Cathy, Bev, Evelyn, Judy, Edna and Del. **Camilla MacGibbon**

Maureen MacIntosh

We are born to create. It feeds the soul. Writing allows me to express many inner thoughts, to expand my imagination and increase my vocabulary. Through this activity, I enjoy friendships, laughter and learning in a warm environment. I am grateful for this opportunity and hope you enjoy our little book.

FREDDIE THE RIVER RAT

Hello, my name is Freddie and I live along the banks of the Mira River with my brothers and sisters and my Ma. Pa got caught in a trap last fall when he ventured into the big woods. Most humans dislike rats of any breed but I'd like to introduce you to my family and our way of life, hoping we might build a relationship.

I am the youngest of a family of seven. We spend part of our day swimming and frolicking in the sun, part searching for food, which we share with others, and another part, educating ourselves by learning new survival and foraging skills. We are very adept at hiding beneath green foliage, our beady eyes and keen noses on alert for any dangers. We see you, but you rarely see us. And if there is a dog nearby, we slither away quickly. Dogs may be man's best friend, but they are our worst enemy.

We feed mostly on fish and edible plants located under the water and along the banks. In winter, we sleep in our snug, underground tunnels.

We have many relatives along the river, with whom we play, have parties and sleepovers. Our senior rats like to lounge in the sun and sleep a lot. We feel fear, mourn, and yes, we love. We live by the Golden Rule. Two of our favorite pastimes are basking in the warm sun and swimming in the cool river on a moonlit night.

To sum it up, I am one contented little rat, happy with my lot in life. Do you think you could adjust your attitude towards me a little? I hope so.

Maureen MacIntosh

A LITTLE MYSTERY

Old Mr. Harvey shuffled slowly around his backyard, surveying the last lingering plants in his garden. His jeans were thread-bare at the knees and he wore his heavy plaid shirt to ward off the autumn chill. Early morning and late evening were his favourite times. He avoided being outside when the children came to and from school. The bigger boys teased him mercilessly and threw garbage of all types over his fence.

Hercules, his British bulldog was usually chained to his doghouse at these times. He'd bark savagely, leaping into the air, jerking and rattling his heavy chain. Hercules had long yellow, protruding teeth and one side of his mouth drooped at a 45⁰ angle, from which drool always dangled. His misshapen head seemed overly large and his droopy eyes were always bloodshot. The children called him 'the beast' and they surely would have wet themselves from fear, if ever he should break loose. However, Mr. Harvey and Hercules shared unconditional love and trust.

One night, two neighbourhood hooligans, Dave and Tom, cooked up a scheme to con Mr. Harvey out of some money. They first checked to see if Hercules was chained outside and he was. They circled around front and rang the doorbell. No one answered, so they boldly entered and crept down the dimly lit hallway. There was Mr. Harvey, asleep on his day couch, a half-empty bottle of whiskey on the floor.

"Perfect!" they thought, as they each took swigs from the bottle. They then began to search for money or articles that could be easily sold. While Dave disconnected the DVD player, Tom examined the contents of a wallet on the countertop, while eyeing the gold watch beside it.

What was that sound? Someone was coming! They both glanced toward the door and there was the beast blocking the entrance. His stance told them he was ready for the kill. He bared his yellow fangs, drool foaming around his mouth and dangling downward. Dave and Tom froze; their lives were at stake here. When they regained their senses, they bolted through the backdoor and over the high fence like Olympians. As Hercules lunged towards them, they noticed he was still chained to his doghouse.

Rumours began to spread around the neighbourhood. Hercules was a ghost; the old man was possessed and was probably burying his victims' bones in his backyard. The message was: 'Stay away from Mr. Harvey's, his dog and his property.' Mr. Harvey couldn't be happier.

Truth is, Hercules is a twin. Oft times it was his identical brother, Brutus, in the back yard. Since Mr. Harvey always took one dog in before he brought the other one out, no one knew his secret. He never locked a door. He felt protected at all times. He also felt that an intruder, upon meeting one of his dogs, would exit quicker than he entered. His theory proved true. Mr. Harvey lived peacefully ever after. The old adage: 'two heads are better than one', can apply to animals as well.

Maureen MacIntosh

Christine MacKinnon

I began writing poetry as a teenager. In later years fiction has become my passion. My fondest wish is that my short stories will someday evolve into a published novel.

EDIE'S DOOR

Edie Morrison woke and tried to get out of bed with all the anticipation of a man on his way to the electric chair.

At 86 years old she supposed she was healthy enough except for this blasted hip of hers that should have been replaced years ago. Edie knew that time was running out for her. Her doctor had told her that it had deteriorated further and that this time there was no putting it off. The alternative would be a wheel chair. Edie knew very well that a wheelchair meant an old folks home and she sure wasn't ready for that step not while she still had one active brain cell left. She knew that her three children wanted her there but she also knew that it was just because they wouldn't have to make the annual duty visits any longer. Although now that she thought about it those visits were becoming less and less frequent and so were their phone calls. All of this seemed to coincide with the request she'd made over a year ago for just one of her daughters to come and spend two weeks with her while she recovered from her hip surgery. Things had changed since her day when all the young folks had looked after the old ones. That was just how it was done back then and she should know because she'd looked after her old coot of a father-in-law until he reached the grand old age of 92. At the end she was convinced that it was just pure orneriness that kept him alive. He'd died just as he'd lived with a curse on his lips...the old goat! Edie knew she wasn't an old goat but she sure had raised some god-almighty selfish children.

Just as she was finishing up the remains of her tea, toast and prunes she heard a knock at the door. She was surprised to be sure! She didn't think it could be those pesky holy-rollers because it wasn't Saturday. And she sure as hell knew that all her cronies from card club would never be out at this hour. As she slowly and painfully made her way to the door she allowed herself to hope that it could be one of her children arriving to surprise her or maybe a bouquet of flowers. After all they'd all forgotten her birthday!

She opened the door slowly savoring the moment when she would get to see who was on the other side. There was a grey haired distinguished looking man standing there on her stoop; well dressed, perhaps fifteen or twenty years younger than herself tall with dark skin and a rather nervous smile on his face. "Mrs. Morrison?" he asked, "Mrs. Edith Morrison of Convent Cove"? Edie didn't answer right away and the gentlemen continued to probe, "Would you be the former Edith O'Reilly of Convent Cove who moved to New Brunswick in 1941?" Edie still didn't answer. You see by this time she'd already looked into his eyes and saw. She saw the eyes that she never believed she'd look into again. They were his father's eyes you see and though she'd only looked into them for possibly fifteen minutes over 70 years ago she knew those eyes.

The image of them was burned like two holes in her brain. They had filled her nightmares

for three-quarters of her life. She felt her knees begin to buckle but she prayed for the strength to stay upright, to show no sign of emotion on her face. She prayed that he wouldn't look down and see her white knuckles as they clutched the doorknob. She prayed for the strength that she'd shown at her beloved Jack's bedside as he rotted away with cancer almost fifteen years ago. It seemed like she'd been standing by the door for hours but Edie knew that only moments had passed. She found her voice as weak as it was and said "No. Mrs. Morrison died about two years ago, poor soul but I sure have enjoyed living here. She left a nice tidy little place for me to move into." The gentleman's shoulders visibly drooped as he thanked her and began to walk away. He turned once and asked "Do you know if she had any relatives?", "No, I don't think so" she replied. "The neighbors led me to believe that she died alone". Once more he turned and began to walk away. As soon as Edie closed the door she nearly fell over with relief. Her only other thought as she slid to the floor was "Thank God in heaven that he didn't give me his name. If I knew his name I'd never be able to live another day."

After what must have been hours Edie painfully picked herself off the floor and managed to crawl into her bed and cuddle up with Jack's old plaid hunting shirt that she'd been sleeping with since his death. It had years ago lost his scent but it still offered her great comfort during her long painfilled sleepless nights. Her mind was as blank as a fresh school slate but gradually that door in her mind began to open. It started softly and quietly at first, and then in a huge flood the memories that she'd kept locked in there for the past 70 years came tumbling out. First of all she remembered the excitement of her first train trip to the city of St. John's. She was off to find a job at the Arcade or The London New York and Paris or one of the other beautiful department stores that dotted Water Street and the downtown core. There were five younger brothers and sisters left at home in Convent Cove and Mother and Pop told her they couldn't afford to feed a grown girl of fifteen any longer and she now must start to contribute to the family.

She was looking for the cheapest boarding house that she could find and managed to get a room at the old Cochrane Hotel. It housed young working girls and seemed to be quite respectable. The city was exciting beyond belief what with all the handsome American troops prancing around and the dancing halls, and the beautiful clothes in all the shop windows. But her parents had warned her to stay away from the soldiers. Pop had told her that they all had lust in their hearts and to even look at one would be a sin against God. Edie couldn't help looking though and couldn't believe that just a quick glance would land her in hell. Her first month went smoothly enough and she got used to the city and the street cars and the traffic that was unknown back in Convent Cove. One night she was asked to stay late by her boss to help finish a window display. The window was to a tribute to the soldiers and a campaign to sell war bonds and beautiful spring coats all at once. Edie had a creative gift, which became evident soon after she started working in the ladies dress department. Sales of scarves and brooches were up because of her knack of accessorizing and she was very proud when her boss acknowledged her efforts.

When she did leave work she realized that the last streetcar had left and she began the long and steep climb up Carter's Hill. From what seemed like out of nowhere an American serviceman came up and started to walk along right beside her. She could smell rum on his

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breath as he got closer to her. She couldn't believe it when he threw an arm around her shoulders. She indignantly and loudly told him to remove his hands from her immediately and she hustled off up the hill as quickly as she could manage in her new court shoes. She wasn't afraid, just angry that anyone would dare lay their hands on her person. No man had ever touched her before, not ever. Her father may have hugged her when she was a baby but she didn't think so. She'd never seen him be affectionate with anyone not even her Mother.

Lost in her thoughts of home she didn't even hear the soldier come up behind her the second time. After that things happened quickly but not quickly enough. As that door in Edie's mind opened fully the memories came flooding back into the conscious part of her brain. She'd decided many years ago never to open it until that morning and she never did not until she'd seen those eyes looking back at her over the threshold. They were the same eyes that looked into hers those many moons ago under the street lamp in an alley way off Carter's Hill. How does a girl get over being brutally raped and beaten and left for dead? She locks it away in a closet in her brain; that's how! After that night in the alley it took nearly two months in the hospital before Edie even woke up. The doctor's told her that she was with child. Her Pop told her it would have been better if she'd never woken up at all. Their family would never live down the shame of having a 16 year old pregnant daughter and no husband in sight. Off she was sent to a home for unwed mothers in St. John, New Brunswick. Her mother picked the city so that Edie would never again forget the shame that she'd brought on herself. Saint John N.B. and St. John's NFLD. must always be connected in her mind so she would never again fall from grace. Edie never saw her family again. She shut the door in her mind to the horrors of the rape, the disgust of her family and the eyes of the little boy that she gave birth to seven months later. He had his father's eyes and she screamed for the nuns to come and take him away. She never wanted to see him again and she never did; not until this morning

Edie was found by one of her card club friends the day after she missed a game. The doctors estimated that she'd been dead about three days. Her friend told one and all that she just looked so peaceful lying there in her bed clutching an old plaid shirt. All three of her daughters came home for the funeral. No one noticed the tall dark-skinned man with the tears quietly rolling down his cheeks standing at the back of the church.

Christine MacKinnon

TIGER THE LION-HEARTED

The first time that I ever saw Tiger he was leaping out of the bushes just like a lion that I had seen on television. He was chasing a butterfly and he looked so graceful as he danced across our backyard. My bed is as close to the window as it can possibly be. I'm in it all the time you see because I'm very sick with a blood disease called leukemia.

Before we go any further I should tell you a little bit about myself. My name is Cathy Anne and I'm ten years old. I live with my Mom and my Dad and my sister Marion and my grandfather Poppy. I got sick nearly two years ago and I hear my Mom and Dad talking to our neighbors and other people who drop by that it's a miracle that I'm still alive. My Dad said that if I could only make it to the 1960's then I might have a chance because they are working on new drugs all the time for people like me. But it's only 1958 and I feel weaker every day so I don't think that I can make Daddy's wish come true.

Now I must get on with my story about Tiger. That may not be his real name but that's what I've decided to call him. At first I wanted to call him Richard after Richard the Lion Hearted who fought in the Crusades but my Dad's name is Richard and my Mom said that one of them is enough to have around the house. I love to read about the olden days and about the brave knights who went away to fight leaving their beautiful maidens behind. Actually I like to read all books. I have a special library card that my Mom took me to get about a year ago. Now the librarian sends me books. I'm not allowed to go there anymore because I have no resistance to germs that may be in public places. The librarian Miss Fleming seems to know just what I like and she calls every week to see if there's anything special that I need. Lately all I've wanted to read are books about kitty cats. Ever since Tiger has come into my life I need to know all there is to know about cats just in case I can talk my Dad into letting me bring Tiger into the house. Tiger has no home. I'm sure of it. He's been sitting on my windowsill all the time now for over a month. A few times I've been very brave and opened the window and petted him. He purrs and rubs up against my arms and we talk to each other in kitty talk. If only my Daddy didn't hate cats so much! I just know that if he got to know Tiger he would grow to love him just like I do.

About a week ago I started feeding Tiger some of my supper and milk. My Mom and I have hatched a plan to get Tiger into our home. She's going to work on my Dad and I'm going to take Tiger into my room especially on the rainy days while Daddy is at work.

Now Tiger lounges with me all day in bed usually lying on whatever book I'm reading so that I can't see the pages. Sometimes my Mom comes and lets him out to do his business as she calls it. Seems to me like his business is usually jumping from behind shrubs like a lion in chase of butterflies or birds or sometimes just nothing at all. He never seems to catch anything. I don't think he really wants to. I think he's just getting his exercise. He never strays far from my window and I always see him looking back at me to make sure that I'm safe. I know that he's my knight in shining armour and that he's guarding me at all times.

A few days ago my Dad came home from work early and as usual came to my room right

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away to see how I was feeling. You can only imagine how startled he was to see that I had a new friend. He wasn't too mad at me but I heard my Mom and him arguing about it later. My Mom said " Richard, you know she doesn't have anybody in her life but us right now. All her friends have stopped coming by and she seems to love that old cat so much. Please let her keep him in there."

"Oh, I suppose he can't do much harm. The old thing looks like he won't last much longer anyway." I heard my Mom start to cry and then there was nothing but her sobs and a lot of silence.

My Mom is right about me not having any friends anymore. First when I got sick the kids in my class made me a big card as big as a window and my teacher brought it to me. Lots of kids took turns visiting but after awhile only a few dropped by and now none of them come anymore.

My Godfather Jack comes to visit sometimes and always secretly puts twenty dollars in the pocket of my red velvet dressing gown. I only wear it for visitors or for when the doctor comes once a week. Jack always looks so sad that I don't have the heart to tell him that I can't go out anywhere to spend the money. I've got seventeen twenty dollar bills secretly saved already and I've made a last will and testament leaving them to my sister Marion on the condition that she will feed and generally look after Tiger's well being. I thought these words sounded something like a lawyer would write and I hope they will stand up in court. You never know, the case could end up on Perry Mason. That's my favorite television show. I used to like Don Messer's Jubilee but now I'm too weak to dance with the Bookla Dancers anymore. I've written to Mr. Mason six times now and told him all about myself and how I thought that he was almost as handsome as my Dad. Mom mails them for me when she goes to the supermarket. And wouldn't you know it, about three weeks ago I got a big brown envelope with a postmark from Burbank, California. Everybody and I mean everybody gathered in my room for the grand opening. There was no letter inside just a big picture of Perry Mason. It said "Best wishes, Catherine Anne. Get well soon. From Raymond Burr." I didn't know who Raymond Burr was and thought someone was playing a trick on me until my parents explained it. I'm kind of sad that it doesn't say Perry Mason but my Dad hung it in a big frame on the wall across from my bed and I feel better about it now. Even Dr. Cameron seems impressed by it. He says I must be a very special little girl for an important and busy man like Perry Mason to take the time to send me a picture. I guess I am pretty lucky.

Tiger has been with me now for three months. My Dad has stopped visiting me after work and I'm thinking it must be because of Tiger. I miss my Dad. I miss our cuddles especially now that I'm feeling so much weaker than I did a month ago. I asked my Mom about it and she told me that it wasn't about Tiger at all. She said he was just too busy these days and that she'd have a word with him. That very night he came into my room when it was dark and quietly lay down with me. He told me how much he loved me and how sorry he was that I'd missed him and that he never meant to hurt me. His voice was very husky and when he left to go to bed my pillow was all wet from his tears. Now I think that I understand. I think it makes him too sad to see me so sick and that's why he stayed away. He said from now on he'll be with me every night no matter what.

I sleep a lot more now. Tiger never leaves my bed. He cuddles up on my pillow and lays his paw on my skinny arm. I dream a lot about an army of brave soldiers inside my body fighting off the bad blood cells. The army is always led by Tiger in a handsome suit of shining armour. Sometimes when I wake up in the night Tiger is laying on my Dad's chest and I'm so happy to see that they've finally made friends. In fact I'm thinking of changing my last will and testament to say that my Dad can have full possession of Tiger when I'm gone. I've asked my Mon to help me with the changes to my will because I'm too weak to write things by myself anymore and she said she'd be very happy to do it. I want it to be a surprise for Dad and she promised me that she wouldn't breathe a word until the time was right.

I think the time will be right very soon. Our priest Father Brown comes to visit me a lot now and he gave me something called absolution. My Dad got very angry and said " This beautiful child has no sins on her soul. This is bloody ridiculous. "My Mom was angry at my Dad for swearing in front of a priest but I think she was angry at the priest too. Father Brown told me that I will be in heaven soon and sitting at the right hand of God. That sounds kind of scary and lonely but my Dad told me that I'll be joined very shortly by Tiger. That makes me feel much happier. My dreams are full of sunny days with Tiger and me jumping around like lions in the forest as we watch over Mom and Dad and Marion and Poppy every day for the rest of their lives

Christine MacKinnon



Norma Lou

Just this and that. Something to think about. How we change our opinions as we get older. I'm using an alias "Norma Lou", that was what I was called when I was young.

COPS – THREE STORIES

God love the men in blue. They have no idea what a day might bring. I was in the hospital, I'd been there sometime. My doctor said I could go home, and I went. I was home for a week, the pantry was looking bare. Off to Sobeys in the car I go. I was trying to find a spot to park near the door entrance. I never use a handicapped parking space, even though I had bought a card when I broke my hip. Damn, the card was in Doug's car, he used it when he came to visit me at the hospital. I parked in the handicapped zone, I wouldn't be long I thought. I grabbed what I needed, went through the one to ten counter and left.

A cop was writing a ticket when I got to my car. I told him I had a ticket for the lot. I had been in the hospital and my husband hadn't put my ticket back in my car. He didn't believe me!!

"Look, I said, "I've got Scars to prove it." and I had my coat half unbuttoned and it was cold. "Lady, I don't want to see your Scars." he said as he tore up the ticket.

I have a friend in Glace Bay named Doris. She is married to Sam. Now Sam is a nice guy, but when he has had a few, he can be very, very, stubborn.

He has a thing about no parking zones. He would park his car right in the middle of one. The cops all knew Sam; he was one powerful coal miner. When they came across his car, they would put a ticket on the windshield. No sense in talking to him, they knew him well. Now Doris, Sam's wife was a busy gal. Dirty clothes piled on the floor, dirty dishes in the sink, and the baby howling in the crib. Now there was a knock on the back door. It was Alex the cop, all dressed up in his blue uniform. "Come in Alex before the whole neighborhood sees you." said Doris. Doris went to school with Alex, they all knew one another. "What's on your mind?" she inquired.

"Doris, it's about these parking tickets."

"What parking tickets?" Asked Doris

"Sam parks the car anywhere he wants; he's got a raft of tickets. You own that car, so you'll have to pay them or go to jail." Replied Alex.

Doris looked at the wash on the floor, the sink full of dishes, and the baby howling.

"Give me five minutes to take the bread out of the oven, and I'll come with you." replied Doris.

Alex turned on his heel and went out the back door. Mumbling aloud, "Forget those tickets."

We were in Dartmouth, visiting my aunt. "I'm so glad your here," she said, "let's call a few people and have a party." I knew she was lonely, I couldn't say no. When we looked around, we didn't have any cheese, and we also needed a bottle of rum and some coke. We'd have to go over the MacDonald bridge to get some lobster. Doug and I took off to get the party stuff. Doug had an appointment in Halifax. It would only take fifteen minutes we thought. It took two hours. I was cross, how would we get things put together for the party. It was starting to get dark as we drove up North Street. The ramp to the bridge was closed. I told Doug to drive

around the harbour. He drove right up the ramp.

Lights went off, an alarm started beeping, and a cop, on a motorcycle was right behind us. I was mad. I told Doug off in lavender. Doug had rolled the window down and that cop heard every word I had said.

"I'm from out of town, and this is the only way I know how to get where I'm going." cried Doug. I was very surprised when the cop, up and removed the barrier. He came back and told Doug, "Drive with caution sir; I have a BITCH like that at home."

Norma MacLeod

CHARACTER SKETCH OF DES BARRES

Colonel Joseph Frederick Wallet Des Barres was one of the most fascinating men in our Nova Scotia history. Des Barres was handsome, very intelligent, and spoke many languages. He was an officer with Wolfe when Louisburg fell. He loved all the ladies, and they loved him, to their sorrow.

In the newly found province of Cape Breton, the first governor, Des Barres, established a capital city. He called it Sydney, after the secretary of state, in London, Lord Sydney. J.F.W. Des Barres coveted a title, and would do anything to get one. Des Barres named the new streets in his town after royalty. George, Prince and Kings Road; Lord Sydney was not overlooked, his family name was Townsend. There were many problems in the new province. Des Barres handled them well. He was very capable, a renowned surveyor. He had mapped the whole Atlantic coast.

Des Barres had two serious liaisons, two common law wives. Mary Cannon, whom he would have married, she had five children. However, he went to London to pursue that title. There he mated with Martha Williams.

She had ten children, over a twenty year sojourn. Only one or two Des Barres had fathered, but he didn't know that. After having lived with Martha for forty years, he wanted to leave her in London. She threatened to disgrace him. At eighty two years of age, he was appointed governor of P.E.I. There, Martha was received as the governor's wife, and was treated as such.

Governor J.F.W. Des Barres lived to the age of one hundred and one, but of matrimony he had none. On his one hundredth birthday, the military in Halifax had a dinner for him, and he danced on the table. Locals who knew about his womanizing, conferred a title on him. They called him "The Old Rooster."

Norma MacLeod

Ref: "An Earl must have a wife." by W.R. Bird

THE BET

Everytime I drive by that house, I say a prayer for those within. I wonder how people cope. Must be faith.

I knew these people. I used to play bridge with Doris. She had arthritis, ever sine she was a child. She had married her childhood sweetheart and they had two sons. Greg the oldest was handsome, tall, and dark. Robert was small and fair, guess he could be called a nerd.

Doris went from cane to wheelchair, but she taught her sons to be strong and to help their dad. She died, he was heartbroken. The boys grew up. Greg went into hockey. Robert went to college.

Robert shared a room with a real jock. He might be a nerd, but he understood everything they taught in physics and algebra. Don could copy his homework.

Don was a basketball player, and hung around with all the other jocks. One day in the gym, these guys started to talk.

" How do you like living with a nerd?

"It helps with the homework."

"I'll bet he's still a virgin."

"Yeah. I guess so."

"What say we get someone to seduce him?"

"It would have to be a bet, say a hundred."

"I'll put up fifty. Who will we get to do the job?"

"What about Debbie? She sleeps around as we all know."

So they asked Debbie. " For a hundred sure. There's not a man I couldn't seduce."

Now Debbie was the cutest girl on campus. The belle of the ball. She was asked to all the frat parties. All the after game does to.

Robert was quiet and kept to himself. All of a sudden, Debbie started to talk to him. They started to date and eventually were asked to frat parties.

Robert didn't know how this had happened, he didn't ask.

This was taking longer than she thought. Debbie was having doubts. Robert was more polite and considerate than the jocks. She knew.

But a bet is a bet, and she could use the hundred bucks. One night her roommate was out, and the deed was done.

She dropped him, like a ton of bricks. Debbie wouldn't talk to him. Robert didn't know what the hell had happened. Debbie collected her hundred dollars. She would not talk to Robert. There was not a man Debbie couldn't seduce. If only it had remained a secret. This was a college campus,

Nothing remains a secret. Robert, completely dejected, went to Point Pleasant Park. He sat for a long while listening to the waves. Took off his shirt, folded his pants the way his mom had taught him. Stuck his socks in his shoes.

He swam away.

Norma MacLeod
Feb.16th. 2009



Sharon Schaller

Two women have been my inspiration for writing. The first is my Mother, Rosella Jane Gordon Wolfe and the second is my daughter, Kathleen Rose Schaller. Both are gifted poets, and while I wrote poetry in my youth and teen years, now I prefer to write short stories. These gifted writers inspired me to try my hand at writing and so, after retiring from teaching, I joined this group to help me find the discipline to write. I have enjoyed my time with this group immensely and have made some good friends. I am enclosing my favorite stories that I have written this year; not necessarily my best stories, but the ones that speak to who I am and how I feel. I hope you enjoy these stories, and through them, get a sense of who I am and what I love.

EMMA'S GOURMET SUPPER

Emma sat in her favorite chair by the window and looked through the magazine in front of her. Her table was strewn with magazines and cookbooks. A notepad and pen were by her hand and every now and then she would smile, grab her pen and make notes on the paper. Emma was planning a lovely gourmet supper for her family and she was having it this evening. To be sure, it was a little late to be planning this gourmet supper. She had, after all, invited her family over a week ago, and she wanted it to be perfect. With their busy lives, it was hard to get all the family together for a meal, so she had arranged this get together and all had agreed on the date – wonders of wonders. Emma wanted to make this meal special. But as usual Emma had procrastinated, and here it was, the day of the meal, and Emma was still in the planning stages. Oh well, she would just find some recipes that used the food she had in the house.

She thought she would start with some canapés. She found some good recipes that she could make and wouldn't take too long. Then she found a good recipe for a salad using the fixings she had in the fridge. She was looking for an entrée to serve, when she thought of something and got up to go to the dining room. She stopped in the doorway and surveyed the table. It was beautiful! She had spent hours yesterday, ironing the tablecloth and napkins, polishing the silverware, and setting the table. The table had an elegant centerpiece that she had made. The silverware glistened, the good china was all stacked and ready to go on the table, and all the appropriate stemware was in its place. At least the table was ready.

Emma returned to the kitchen and her list. She had just decided on coq au vin, when the phone rang. The shrill sound made Emma jump. "What now?" she thought. "Just when I am on a roll." Emma reached for the phone and checked the caller display to see who was calling. A smile lit her face as she recognized it was her neighbour. Sally was a sweet, little old lady and rarely called unless it was something important. When Emma answered, Sally was crying. She begged Emma to come quick.

Emma grabbed her coat, threw on her boots and scooted out the back door. Sally met her at her door. She was wringing her hands, and tears filled her eyes. "I just don't know what to do!" she wailed. Emma patted her shoulder and told her to calm down, that she was there to

help. It turned out, that Sally had a water leak under her sink, and today it had burst. Water was everywhere. Emma was pretty handy, having lived alone for a number of years, so she went to the basement to find the main shut off. Once the gusher stopped under the sink, Emma helped Sally call her handyman who did odd jobs for her. He said he would be there in an hour or so. He was just finishing up a job, and since it was an emergency and Sally was such a good client, he would be there as soon as possible.

In the meantime, Emma and Sally got busy and started mopping up the water. Sally was a little more settled, but was still a bit shaky, so Emma ran home and brought back two cups of tea. Things always seemed better with a cup of tea in your hand.

Emma stayed with Sally until the handy man came and was well on his way to fixing the pipe. When Emma returned home it was almost noon. She fixed herself a sandwich and then returned to her menu. Dessert. She needed to make a wonderful dessert to finish off her gourmet meal. As she was searching through her Company's Coming Dessert book for a scrumptious repast to complete the meal, her beloved cat staggered into the kitchen. He looked up at her with pain in his eyes, and meowed in a pitiful manner. One look told Emma he was not well. Without stopping to think, she scooped him up, pulled his cat carrier from the shelf in the porch and popped him in. He hated that carrier, and would run if he even thought she was going to get it down off the shelf. Grabbing her car keys and purse, she thrust on her boots and jacket for the second time that day.

She drove to the vets as fast as safety would allow. Four hours and three hundred dollars later, Emma returned home. Puddles was asleep in the carrier, so Emma lovingly scooped him out and placed him in his bed by the radiator. She patted his soft, furry body and was rewarded with a soft purr. Emma brushed the tear from her eye. That was a close call. Puddles had had an attack of his urinary tract disease. Cats can die from that, and so Emma was relieved that he was okay. He would need some TLC and special food and medicine, but he would be fine. Emma glanced at the clock. Oh my God! Her guests would be here in just a little while - so much for her gourmet meal.

Forty-five minutes later, the house was filled with wonderful smells, laughter and love. Her kids and their families were installed in the living room and Emma entered the room with a plate of sausage rolls from M&M's that she had had in the freezer. No one seemed to notice that she hadn't spent hours fussing over fancy canapés.

Soon, Emma announced that supper was served. They entered the elegant dining room with the table set so perfectly. They took their seats and after Grace, Emma passed the tossed salad and popped the top on the tureen in the center of the table. "Good old beans and wieners for supper, again, huh, Ma," laughed Lane the eldest. Everyone joined in the laughter as Emma sputtered. "There's pie and ice cream for dessert," Emma offered. "The frozen pie is in the oven now," she laughed and she proceeded to tell them about her day. There was no gourmet supper, but there was love, and laughter and good food, and, after all, isn't that what it's really all about?

Sharon Schaller

OUT LIKE A LION

Elmer Dodge straightened the pens on his desk and glanced up at the clock on the wall. 4:30pm. In thirty minutes he would walk out of here a free man. He should be ecstatic. But he wasn't. You see Elmer was retiring and usually that is a good thing, but for Elmer it wasn't exactly as he had imagined it for all these last years.

Elmer was sixty-three years old and was being forced to take early retirement. He had planned to work until sixty-five and then with his Canada Pension, the Old Age Security, the small pension from his company and his savings, Elmer and Sadie, his wife, would have a nice life. There would be enough to spend a few weeks in Florida in the winter, and they would sell their big house and spend the spring, summer and fall at their old bungalow. At least that had been the plan.

Then had come the recession and downturn in the economy. Businesses were cutting back and the first to go were the old geezers like himself. Oh, they had offered him a nice severance package and early retirement, but he just wasn't ready to go. He was only sixty-three after all. He still had at least two more good years in him. But he didn't fit the new way of doing things. To the young men in his division he was a dinosaur.

Elmer was methodical and quiet. He wasn't loud or brash. He serenely went about his work, making contacts, getting clients, making the sales, doing all the "behind the scenes" work. Bosses and CEO's had come and gone over the years, while Elmer had gone gently on, taking pride in his work. He loved the firm and was proud of his contribution to its success. Then that saucy, young pup, Scott, had come. He would take all the work Elmer had done, and sign the contracts with the clients and take all the credit. Scott had been salesperson of the year last year. Of course, Elmer and Scott both knew that Scott wouldn't have stood a chance of winning the reward and subsequent bonus without Elmer's background work.

Quiet, meek Elmer was a bit of a joke in the office. Elmer knew that, but he didn't mind. He liked his work, and truth be told, he didn't like the limelight. But he would have liked for the bosses to know just how valuable he was to the firm. Oh well, they would know soon enough.

Elmer looked at the clock. It was 4:40. At noon, they had had a cake for him in the break room and everyone was laughing and having fun; everyone, that is, except Elmer. He had just sat there quietly as he had every day. But inside, he was seething. They thought that things would go on as normal when he left but he knew better. They didn't have a clue how to make the sales, who to talk to at the different businesses to make the sales, who to stroke and with whom to play hardball.

Elmer took his pictures of his family off his desk and put them in the little box at his feet. Then he meekly got up from his desk and quietly went to the corner of the room and retrieved what he needed next. He returned to his desk and plugged it in. Then he picked up his little coil notebook. He flipped through the pages. Thirty years of names, addresses, phone numbers, account numbers, orders, important information on all the people his firm

had done business with. The others in the office had joked about those books. They used PDA's and now Blackberries. The old man was hopelessly out of date.

There were five of these books. Elmer glanced at the clock and starting with the newest one, he tore the pages from the coils and began feeding them to the shredder. The paper shredder whirred as it chewed all this valuable information into thousands of little bits. Page after page, and book after book went into the noisy, little machine. Elmer emptied the base and continued. The rest of the room glanced up when the machine came on, but they just chuckled to themselves. Old Elmer was cleaning up his clutter, they figured. They were a bit confused by the bright, gleeful smile on his face though. Many of the younger ones had never seen that smile before, didn't even know, in fact, that Elmer could smile.

Elmer fed the last notebook to the shredder with a satisfied look on his face. There now, let's see how that snot nosed Scott would get along now that he would have to do all this work himself. Elmer had made sure he wouldn't be able to use his, Elmer's, contacts. The information was still available, but Scott would have to go through mountains of files and search the computer databases high and low for the information. Two minutes to five, Elmer reached over to his computer and double-checked his files. Yup, they had been deleted and completely removed from the computer. Elmer was ready.

Elmer rose from his chair and took a long, slow look around. He bent and picked up his box of belongings, and started for the door. Elmer Dodge, meek as a lamb, was going out like a lion.

Sharon Schaller



Daphne Winans

Daphne Winans lives in Whitney Pier with her “family,” which consists of two maiden-lady cats: Minnie Purr and Peony. A retired broadcaster, Daphne now writes short stories and poetry, some of which she describes as “doggerel” (and occasionally, “catterel”). A few of her pieces have been published over the years, but she has no illusions of future fame and fortune. She prefers to simply amuse and entertain with her words and word-play. This is her second year in the Writers Circle. The abundant talent and positive influence within this circle has inspired Daphne to keep writing and honing her craft.

INFLUENCES

My Mother was a stickler about language. She insisted on certain linguistic standards, from which I would stray, to my peril. Speaking to Mother was like running an obstacle course. I could be tripped up at any moment over a minor grammatical defect or an inappropriate word. Pronunciation was a big issue. At the same time, Mother was very understanding.

For example, I hated school, most of the time. Some of the kids made fun of me, because I was an avid reader and often used language from the old-fashioned books our home was filled with. I sounded “different” and my very long braids were fun to pull. When I complained about being teased by other girls at school, Mother said they were idiots. This surprised me because the other girls usually got good marks and I was skimming through by the skin of my teeth.

I wasn’t lonely or isolated in any way. I had friends. Judy was my best friend. One day, after a quite informative visit to the museum, Judy and I became very artistic in our attic. We had big sheets of paper and crayons to work with, and under the influence of the museum sculptures of male and female figures, we drew our own renditions of nudes. We got rather carried away. Anatomical parts were intriguing at age 10 or 11, and we drew them with a lot of attention, and, I suspect, many inaccuracies. Mother, suspicious of how quiet we were, except for occasional giggling, suddenly appeared in the attic doorway. She confiscated our works of art. She commented on Judy’s anatomical exaggerations and my poor sense of proportion.

Throughout my childhood though, it was Mother’s encouragement and faith in me that shaped my future. She often corrected me, but she was enthusiastically loyal and her praise was genuine. She was very particular, but that only made her compliments more valuable. Just as important was her sense of *fun*.

Years later, as an adult, going through Mother’s possessions with my sister, I found a brittle, yellowed drawing I’d made as a child, tucked in one of Mother’s old art magazines. It was a picture of a little red train, leaping and looping, far above a fairly straight row of tracks. None of the wheels touched the tracks. The lopsided signature on the picture was mine. She had kept it and I’ve no idea why, but perhaps Influence is simply what gets through and lasts; is worth keeping. Whatever that picture meant to her, it means so much to me that she saved it. I think it made her smile. So perhaps influences go both ways.

Mother passed away in her sleep one night, a month before she would have been 104 years old.

On her 100th birthday, I wrote a poem for Mother in an attempt to express what her influence meant to me.

TO MY MOTHER, VIOLET

(On her 100th Birthday, December 10, 1987)

You gave me Wind in the Willows
Tea for tummy aches
And peppermints in church.

We watched the trains together
And you found a rock
Where I could sit and smell the earth.

You made me love the sounds
Of words and music;
Raindrops and Whip-poor-wills.

You filled my mind with stories
Of animals and elves,
Making me believe in Possibilities.

Today, I find you still, in scattered tunes,
In childhood verses,
In whistles of long-lost trains . . .

You are here, with the scent of oranges
On Christmas Eve
And I expect surprises.

I wish that you had taught me
The proper magic
For showing you my gratitude . . .

I only bring a bunch of Violets
And the same old words:
Happy Birthday, Mummy,
With all my love,

Daphne

THE WHITENING OF NANOVAR

Once upon a time,
When the Earth was very new,
There was a land called Nanovar
And Wiffens lived there, too.

Now, Wiffens were a little folk,
Just seven inches high.
They made their homes in hollow trees
And kept them warm and dry.

Wiffens had few enemies,
Except for certain elves,
For Wiffens were a friendly lot
And played among themselves.

When the winter Whitening fell
And winds blew cold and shrill,
Wiffens made up stories
To keep the children still.

There was a little Wiffen
Whose name was Rogalay.
He didn't like to be inside
And found it hard to stay.

He ventured out one Whitening time
To see what winter meant.
He left so very secretly
That no one knew he went.

The outside world was strange and cold
And nothing looked quite right.
He wandered up and down some hills,
'Till day turned into night.

Inside the cozy hollow home,
They called for Rogalay
And when he didn't answer,
They knew he'd gone away.

The Wiffens started chanting
The missing-Wiffen prayer,
And "Bring him back!" his mother cried,
"Or keep him safe out there."

The Spirits of the forest
And the Sprites of Nanovar
Listened to the chanting
And hunted near and far.

But Rogalay was hiding then
In fear and bitter cold;
Too late, he learned what winter meant
And knew he'd been too bold.

He whimpered for his mother
And longed for warmth and cheer.
If he started shouting,
Would anybody hear?

He knew he should be chanting
But couldn't find the words.
The world seemed dead and empty;
No rabbits, deer or birds.

His little heart was broken,
So all he did was weep
Until the falling Whiteness
Whispered him to sleep.

Wiffens tell an ancient tale,
That has both rhyme and reason,
Warning them to stay inside,
Away from Whitening season.

But when they knew that Rogalay
Was lost and in the lurch,
They made a bold exception
And crept outside to search.

The weather was unpleasant
And the chill was something new,
But they proved it couldn't harm them ---
The story was untrue!

They tramped around and shouted;
They chanted and they prayed
And Rogalay awakened
As night began to fade.

In the morning sunlight,
The Whiteness seemed to shine,
And though their toes were freezing,
They knew they would be fine.

Rogalay was covered
With a blanket deep and white,
But he could hear them calling
And knew he'd be all right.

Oh, the joy and scolding
Everyone expressed
When the little Wiffen
Was rescued from his nest.

No honey with his acorns
Was the punishment he earned,
But everyone admitted
That a lesson had been learned.

Though winter was so cold and fierce
And Wiffens were so small,
The Whitening fear was only myth
And just a fable after all!

Daphne Winans

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