



# THE WRITE PLACE

## A CURMUDGEON'S CHRISTMAS by *Arnold Hanna*

The Fall Macy's Thanksgiving's Day Parade prematurely truncates the greatest season of the year, and brings us crashing into our most bloated legal holiday, Christmas. Only a gaudy wedding requires more expense and preparation than the annual festive ritual of celebrating the defrocked Saint Nick. The toll extracted from the human spirit is enormous. In fact, more people die in January than any other month, probably because they refuse to be subjected to the forced levity of another Christmas.

Every year I am reminded that, "Christmas is for the children," and I always respond, "So is the chicken pox." I don't hate kids, particularly since I used to be one but, fortunately, I outgrew it. Adults need to get over their sentimental attachment to the Yuletide before they are drowned in its undertow. Here are some very fatal threats of the season of giving.

Black Friday claimed one of us a few years ago in a stampede, but the real silent killer is consumer debt. This crushing burden actually forces families into homelessness, a condition which means they are expected to live outside like wild animals. A maxed out credit card won't even get you into a manger if you are turned down at the reception desk of the Holiday Inn. Between presents, food, greeting cards and holiday decorations, we spend more in December than in any other month.

Domestic injuries also increase during December because perfectly sane homeowners and apartment dwellers go out into the icy cold to climb ladders so they can hang dusty wreaths and partially burned out strings of light. Every year this crap gets dragged out of the basement or storage area, exacerbating back and respiratory ailments.

If you do feel compelled to display these accoutrements, it would be safer and easier to suspend the kitsch inside your own home, where you can enjoy it, rather than braving the elements to inflict it on your neighbours.

Another health risk is our epidemic obesity which gets a sugary boost, thanks to the reckless holiday diet. Eggnog, Christmas cakes, puddings, peppermint candy canes, and a river of white frosting are just some of the myriad diabetes-inducing atrocities haunting the dessert table. Coupled with excessive drinking, office parties, nattering relatives, and increased travel on icy roads, it is a minor miracle any of us wind up under mistletoe instead of under a blanket on the coroner's table.

Big family gatherings are routine at this time of year, and the stress of getting together with loved ones, and their significant others, is loosely reflected in the raised suicide rate on December twenty sixth. A year's worth of animosity is the most popular gift of the season, and often the expression "burying the hatchet" is bandied about, but that usually means in

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## WHY WRITE? by *Lynn Ruth Miller*

My sister telephoned me many years ago and asked, "What are you doing?"

"Writing stories no one reads," I answered.

She was amazed. Why would I work so hard on such a thankless task? She didn't realize that I figure out life by putting it on paper. That is how I understand the meaningless, hurtful things that I cannot control and the marvelous gifts that fall in my lap. Someone asked me "Why do you write?" and I answered, "Why do you breathe?"

Some people play with footballs and hockey sticks. Others play with recipes or computers. There are some who only play with other people. I have no interest in those kinds of games. I play with words.

I am a word-a-holic. I write sentences, notes, and observations on paper, on a computer, and in my head. I do it twenty-hour hours a day—when I walk my dogs, when I sit at my desk, and when I dream. Especially when I dream. Sometimes the words I write are published, but more often they are not. Occasionally I get paid, but I can never remember the amount I receive because my real compensation is what my words have created.

I live in my imagination because that is where I feel at home. The real world with traffic jams and angry policeman, frustrated projects and nine-to-

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## BOOK REVIEW

**“Short story collection by Montreal writer weaves a beautiful tapestry”**

***Bent Branches* by S. Nadja Zajdman**

**236 pages**

**Published by Shashi Publishing, 2012**

**Reviewed by BERNIE BELLAN**

No matter how many different accounts of the Holocaust I may read, there is always something so gripping reading a first-hand retelling of one or more persons' survival that I never grow tired of reading such stories.

*Bent Branches*, however, is more than a story of survival. It is a fascinating series of inter-connected stories centering around one woman, “Renata”, yet it moves back and forth in time so that it is possible to begin reading any particular chapter without having had to have read a previous chapter.

I had been approached by the author, S. Nadja Zajdman, some time ago, when she asked me whether I would be interested in reviewing her book. At the same time, when I learned that Zajdman had written for other publications, I asked her whether she would be interested in submitting something for our own paper.

This she did - and I was wonderfully impressed with her literary style. Possessed of a fluid descriptive ability, Zajdman is clearly someone who has honed her craft. In fact, in the foreword to *Bent Branches*, she notes that the first story in the book, titled “The Return”, was written in 1985, for a creative writing class.

As the years went on, she says, and as she learned about her family's history, she began to “connect the dots” and “weave these stories into a book with a unifying theme.”

*Bent Branches*, Zajdman continues, is “a collection of

stories building upon other stories which depict the narrative of a family weathering the storms of war and displacement, and ultimately surviving and prevailing; bent but unbroken.”

Again and again, as I myself have interviewed and written about Holocaust survivors for many years now, I have tried to understand whether it was anything more than sheer luck that allowed some to survive while so many others perished.

In reading about Renata Zajdman, for instance, who, it turns out, is actually the author's mother, (apparently most of the other characters have had their names changed in the book, Zajdman informed me in an e-mail when I asked her about that), it is plain to see that this woman possessed a determination and intelligence that were something more than good “karma”. As we learn more about Renata, her brother, her eventual husband, and others in her family, we see that it not so much remarkable that they survived the horrors of the Holocaust than it is the result of a determination to persevere. Of course, many others also had that determination and did not survive, but the fact that so many Holocaust survivors went on to make tremendous contributions to society is as clear an indication as any that they were possessed of a special spark so that, as I noted earlier, reading about them continues to be a fascinating experience - even after almost 70 years since the end of the Second World War.

Zajdman is able to take the mundane and imbue it with a vitality that is at times horrifying, at other times hilarious, but always rich in descriptive detail. As the first complete book of a writer whose ability shines through on every page, I look forward to reading much more from someone who has made quite an impression with her first compilation of short stories.



## THE WRITE PLACE

**FOUNDER & PUBLISHER** Rosalie Avigdor  
**MANAGING EDITOR** Joseph Richard Mannella

**CONSULTANTS** Steven Manners  
 Arnold Hanna-Fein

**ORIGINAL GRAPHICS** Laura Mannella

**Web Site:**  
[www.canadianwriterssociety.com/writeplace.html](http://www.canadianwriterssociety.com/writeplace.html)

**E-mail:** [the.write.place@hotmail.com](mailto:the.write.place@hotmail.com)

**Snail Mail:** The Write Place

C/O 9770, boul. St-Laurent  
 Montréal, Québec, Canada H3L 2N3

**Telephone:** (514) 707-9396

**Fax** (514) 383-6683

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**HOLIDAY CHEER** Editorial by Joseph Richard Mannella

I was listening to the radio the other day and the topic of discussion was whether, when we give money to a homeless person, we should ask how the money would be used. It made me think about a number of things, the least of which was the question that was being discussed.

How many of us, in our daily lives, actually take the time to see the homeless? No, I don't mean to go on a search and rescue mission downtown. I mean to actually see them, to notice them as we pass. When a person who finds himself living the hand-to-mouth existence of the streets approaches us, how many of us avert our eyes and modify our path to avoid contact with them? How many of us roll up our windows and stare straight ahead when a young woman, in ripped jeans and a faded top, approaches our car, holding a cardboard placard requesting money for food? When was the last time any of us paid a squeegee kid after they cleaned our windshield, or did we simply squirt our windshield with washer fluid as they approached, to keep them from giving us what might be, perhaps, the only service they are equipped to provide?

I am not immune to this attitude. It was brought to my attention very recently when a man, dressed in multiple layers of well-worn clothing, approached me as I ate at a local fast food restaurant and asked if I could spare some change. I patted my pockets and my shoulders rode up, my hands displaying their emptiness as I shook my head to avoid even having to speak to him. I turned away and found, to my consternation, a disapproving look being heaped upon me by my dining companion. Embarrassed at how I had acted, I raised my hand to catch the attention of the man as he got up to walk away, and dug into my pockets for

whatever change I had, which turned out to be a Toonie. My companion did the same and chipped in a Toonie, a Loonie and a couple of quarters. The man thanked us for our generosity and approached the counter, where he used the money to get himself a couple of hotdogs, with change left over for tomorrow's breakfast, perhaps.

It should have felt good, but I was disturbed by how easily I had started to brush him aside. I hadn't seen him at all.

The Holiday Season is upon us and many people live from day to day on the generosity of others. Hospital Emergency Rooms throughout the city, both English and French, take turns sharing the responsibility of what they refer to as the *transient week*. When Urgence Santé gets a call about a homeless man huddled on the sidewalk somewhere, they transport him to the designated hospital of the week. They are taken in, evaluated medically, fed, given a shower and generally cleaned up and, if necessary, given a place to sleep for the night. As well, if the hospital is able, their clothes that have seen better days are replaced with newer clothing, donations from the public. Even something as simple as a warm pair of socks or some clean underwear can be next to a miracle for some. Donations, however, are few and far between. Groups, like the *Salvation Army*, *Sun Youth* or *Le Bon Dieu Dans La Rue*, help them out as much as they can, but they all operate off donations as well, and the need is greatest during the winter months.

Perhaps, in the spirit of the season just passed, if we opened our hearts, and our wallets, a little more often, we might make lives a little less depressing for those to whom a helping hand would be a blessing.

# Submission Guidelines

An eight- to twelve-page B&W news magazine, dedicated to the English-language community of the Greater Montreal Area, will be published every three months. Submissions for entry into the paper will be accepted from any writer, with preference given to those resident in the Greater Montreal Area.

There will be no compensation to the writer for any work that we might publish. All submissions will be reviewed by our team of editors. There is no guarantee that any submission will be accepted for publication, nor that any accepted submission will be published. Submissions can be made a number of ways:

by e-mail : the.write.place@hotmail.com (subject line: Submission)  
 by fax : (514) 383-6683 (with a cover page)  
 by snail mail : The Write Place, C/O 9770, boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, Quebec H3L 2N3

Please include, with your submission, your name, an e-mail address where we can contact you, and a short bio that we might include with your story, if it is accepted. If you have a picture, please feel free to include it. If you want your snail mail submission returned, please enclose a SASE with sufficient postage. Any submission you provide should try to stay within a reasonable limit of these word count guidelines:

Short story :	500-2000 words	Postcard story :	250-500 words
Poetry :	3-50 lines	Book reviews :	500-525 words
Articles (by experts in the field) :	500-1000 words	Letters to the Editor :	50-250 words
Advertisements :	increments of 1/8 page	(contact us for rates)	

*(A Curmudgeon's Christmas, continued from page 1)*

your back.

The holiday season eventually degenerates into at least one trip to the mall. Beyond the insipid carols over the public address system, the most unsettling thing about the mall is all the headless and footless mannequins. It's creepy being around so many well-dressed, lifeless torsos, and it makes me feel like I might be the next victim in a Friday the 13th sequel. I'm sure I could afford those nice outfits if, like these dummies, I didn't need to waste money on hairstylists, dentists or at the shoe store.

Gift giving is a dangerous mission worthy of Seal Team Six. I could use the protection of a German Shepard with titanium fang implants when I hand over my pathetic offerings. Anything delivered to a child will automatically be called 'lame', and gifts for adults are either inappropriate or insulting. It was an expensive lesson when I learned that winter tires are never appreciated, regardless of how nicely they are wrapped, and incontinence products will be shunned, no matter how badly they are needed.

Retailers are complicit in the annual gift-giving angst. Clearly, merchants have no idea of what we want, and their shelves are erupting with pointless items, like blankets with sleeves, pyjamas you can wear outside because they look like blue jeans, or a clay head that promises to grow a green afro. One item on my shopping list every year is a coal-filled stocking, yet I still haven't found anyone who carries such an obvious Christmas product.

Most gifts can be classified into two groups: junk or too expensive. For a particular item, I was advised to rely on the sales help for guidance. These exotic beings are both rare and intimidating, but I cornered a Nordic Queen, built like a body-checking figure skater. She was busy texting a friend and her attitude telegraphed that I was not suitable clientele.

After bullying me into purchasing something three times my budget, she returned to texting her friend. When I suggested a 'thank you' might be nice, she glared at me and said: "It's printed at the bottom of your receipt."

Helpful friends always suggest I give perfume, but I thought I was in the wrong place when I saw a scent named after a running shoe. I'm afraid of some of the choices because I don't want anyone I know to smell like a polo pony or Calvin Klein. I grew up near a family named Klein, and they all smelled like bratwurst.

The season of giving means everybody has their hand out. The trash man lingers longingly over my can, hoping I will rush out with an envelope and, after a year of ditching my copy in the bushes, the paperboy leaves a nicely folded edition on my doorstep with a greeting card snuggled inside, his return address carefully printed on it. Huge boxes by the grocery checkout plead for canned contributions, but how much creamed corn do poor people want to eat?

Exhausted, and depleted, my family eventually gathers around the garishly-decorated, fatally-wounded evergreen to unwrap our booty. Even a ticker tape parade pales next to the flurry of flying paper that follows and, at the end, panting and spent, we all stare at the disjointed piles of knick-knacks, which have the unsettling feeling of a remainder after long division.

I know I'm not alone with my despair with the Holiday Season. It feels like a carousel that is speeding up a little bit every year, and the whole event is starting to spin wildly out of control. Hardier revellers, who may be closer to the axis of festivity, often chastise me, and ask: "Where is your Christmas spirit?" I assure you I drank it long ago to numb the bumpy ride we are all getting from the Santa Claus Express. Perhaps if I submitted to the 'Santa Cult' I could get some relief, but I refuse because that fat liar still owes me an electric train set.



#### **CSL READS** by Janine West, Library Director, Eleanor London Côte Saint-Luc Public Library

As part of the fifth annual *Côte Saint-Luc Reads* program, the Eleanor London Côte Saint-Luc Public Library encouraged residents to read the same book and then discuss it with friends, family and neighbours. First launched in the Fall of 2008, *Côte Saint-Luc Reads* was created to engage residents, foster a sense of community and promote a culture of reading in the city.

The selected novel for 2012 was *The Winter Palace* by Eva Stachniak. This beautifully-crafted historical novel swept readers into the passionate, intimate and treacherous world of Catherine the Great, capturing in glorious detail the opulence of royalty and the perilous loyalties of the Imperial Russian court. Published approximately the same time as author Robert K. Massie's biography of Catherine the Great, readers were given a chance to read Ms. Stachniak's fictional account as well as the historical account.

Author Eva Stachniak graced us with her presence on November 1, 2012. The evening was magical, starting out with a reception honouring the speaker, which included refreshments as well as the wonderful classical music performed by Marcel and Maya of the Musicians of the World Symphony Orchestra. Eva Stachniak introduced herself and her Polish background, then spoke about Catherine the Great in a historical context. Finally she spoke about the process of writing *The Winter Palace* and read passages from it.

*Côte Saint-Luc Reads* is a fabulous vehicle to get people reading. The Library prides itself on its author event, a season highlight, whereby well-known authors share their books and their craft. Past authors include Laurence Hill and Kim Echlin. Planning is already underway for 2013 and details will be made public during the summer.

(*Why Write, continued from page 1*)

five jobs cannot touch me there.

The first time my mother read me a story, I composed another for her, one so real it made me laugh and cry a lot harder than I ever laughed when she taught me how to bounce a ball or cried when she forced me to finish my milk. It didn't take long for me to realize that I could ramble on forever but, if my words didn't say something to someone else, they only nourished **me**. Anyone who is a real writer knows that ramblings like that are the stuff of journals, reminders on the fridge, and verbal meanderings. They are not, however, communication. I want ... no, I *need* every sentence I write to be a bridge into someone else's mind. That kind of composition takes work—a lot of revising, a lot of deep thinking, and a lot of painful cutting.

My first poem was published when I was ten years old. It was about a lamp post. But it told my readers a lot more than that. It told them we shared a human need to cast a light on where we are in our world. That is why it was put into a book.

As the years went on (and there have been more than seventy-five of them), I wrote for anyone who would read my thoughts and understand what they meant. I sent out

millions of messages to the world in the form of features, reviews, letters, columns, entertainments, greeting cards, short stories, and, finally, novels. I have written eleven of those. I sent one of them to every publisher in this country three times under three different titles, and not one company bothered to send me anything more than an impersonal rejection slip. When I finally published *Starving Hearts* myself, I thought it was a waste of time and money. To my surprise, it has sold more than six thousand copies and still sells today.

These days I still write in all those forms and I have added comedy routines and song parodies to the mix. People call me a performer now, but I am no such thing. I am a writer. That is who I will always be.

This is what I have learned from all these years of putting words together, all the millions of rejection slips and the tears they bring, the joys of that one acceptance that spurred me on: You can be paid a million dollars for words that came from your head instead of your heart, and that money is dross. But when you are walking on the beach and someone takes your hand and says "I read your book and it was me," you have succeeded. When someone says, "Your words gave me the courage to live MY dream," you have discovered heaven.

# BURLESQUE

## DOING IT THE SAN FRANCISCO WAY by Lynn Ruth Miller

*Burlesque is just vaudeville with tits.*

- Sophie Tucker

It was in 1942 that Johnny Mercer recorded what was to become my favorite song of all time, *THE STRIP POLKA*. I was 9 years old and we were in the midst of a horrific world war. Americans spent a lot of time collecting tin cans and paper, juggling ration stamps for gasoline, sugar, butter and meat, and rallying to the cause. Children were expected to make their own entertainment, because parents were too busy surviving or rolling bandages for the Red Cross, and entertaining soldiers in their homes.

Our house had a huge backyard and my mother had an extravagant supply of clothes she didn't like anymore. My cousin Jessica and I loved to put together crazy costumes and create glitzy shows for our neighbors after we did our homework and finished our chores. We thought we were wonderful and our neighbors thought we were a welcome relief from the tension of bombings, battles and not enough sugar or butter to make a decent cake. We would spend hours sitting at the kitchen table making posters to paste on all the trees in the neighborhood. Then, on a Saturday afternoon, to my mother's horror and the other children's delight, we would sing, dance and serve free Kool-Aid. Jessie's dog Dell was an immense boxer who drooled all over

our improvised stage and our terrier Junior was our one-man band. He barked and danced to the music while everyone clapped and stamped their feet. We sang "You're a Grand Old Flag" and "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition". We recited poems, did somersaults and always closed with my favorite finale: *THE STRIP POLKA*. I never really understood why the lady was taking things off and I never was sure WHAT she was removing, but I loved the jazzy beat. Jessica and I would romp around the improvised stage with Junior barking a rag time rhythm while we ripped off hats, coats, shoes, and hair ribbons and Dell crashed through the audience showering them with his unique brand of enthusiasm. You couldn't beat it for a fantastic finish.

When I was sixteen years old, my date took me to a burlesque show in Toledo Ohio, in an attempt to encourage me to give him what he wasn't getting. The theater was on Superior Street, tucked in between a pawn shop and a greasy spoon. It was dark and narrow and looked as if no one had touched it with a dust rag or a broom in 20 years. We groped our way through the dimly lit lobby and I was hit in the face with an odor so dense and heavy, I almost fell to the floor. It was a combination of sweat, popcorn, semen and cockroach

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**THE WAD by Andreas Kessarlis**

Last Halloween, my partner sent me to a large produce store in her neighbourhood to pick up fruit and vegetable platters for a party that night. She failed to tell me those primitives were trapped in antiquated times and accepted only cash. They didn't even have a bank machine on the premises. Fortunately, it was one of those rare occasions I had some paper money in my billfold and was able to pay for the food and leave without incident. It was not always that way. It's just in the last ten or so years, with the digital revolution, that I do most of my transactions electronically with my banking card, even when ordering a pizza.

I traditionally have lunch with my father, brother and nephew at a buffet-style restaurant on New Year's Day, and every year my father picks up the tab by pulling a wad of cash from his right front trouser pocket and counting out the twenties until the bill is paid. It's always been like that with him. On top of that, he did not have an actual wallet. The closest he has ever come is one of those simple, small, soft plastic fold-over pouches designed to hold your vehicle registration and insurance slips. His contained the aforementioned documents and his driver's license, as well as his Social Insurance, Canadian Citizenship, bank and credit cards. And he'd never carry this "wallet" on him, instead choosing to leave it in his car's glove compartment which, for reasons to this day I still have a tremendous amount of difficulty fully comprehending, he felt was the safest place on earth.

My father spent almost forty years as a City of Montreal cab driver, back in the days when it was a "cash on the barrelhead" business, and the technology did not exist for taxis to accept credit card payment. He owned his own car and permit, enjoying the independence the job gave him. If he needed more money, he could work extra hours. If he wanted to go on vacation, he wouldn't have to ask anyone's permission to have time off. He enjoyed the rare privilege of not having a real "Boss" *per se*, just the once-in-a-while annoying customer, and the City of Montreal Taxi regulatory body. So, when I was at Barclay Elementary and I broke one of my front teeth in the schoolyard, he was able to take me to the dentist in the middle of the day. All the school had to do was call the cab company and he was there in less than two minutes (the taxi stand was on the same street as the school). He proudly has never been in debt or paid any interest, never carried a balance on a credit card, (using it only when he did not have enough time to go to the bank), and only wrote cheques to pay the rent, that due to our Landlord's insistence.

I recall multiple instances, as a child, when he'd buy something big, like furniture or a car. Upon completion of the deal, he'd pull out a huge bundle of bills from his brown polyester pants, (Dad never in his life donned jeans or anything remotely fashionable), and count out the amount needed. What would he do if he purchased something really expensive like a house? I imagined him with a humongoid wad, counting out twenties for hours.

After my parents divorced when I was thirteen, my mother would, on the first Saturday of the month, dispatch me to the taxi stand on the corner of Wiseman and Jarry in Park Extension to collect the alimony (she referred to it as what he owed her for all the years she had wasted with him) and child support. My father's pants were so loose and baggy that he could reach into his pocket and pull out the wad while still seated in his car. Now that I think about it, it was probably deliberately done in order to easily access his cash and give his customers their change, as well as hide the amount he was carrying. It was impossible tell how much he had on him at any time but, somehow, he always managed to have enough.

He'd carefully count out the scratch. "Here, this is for your mother," he'd dryly say with the first batch, "and this is for you and your brother," he added with the second. Although notoriously tight-fisted, he would then throw me an extra twenty and told me to have a good time. I was never exactly sure what he meant, but I took the cash anyway, and did the best I could to enjoy myself. I never told him what I used it for, certain he wouldn't have approved of the activities that, for me, constituted "fun", like going to arcades or taking guitar lessons. Such things were, in his opinion, unnecessary, wasteful and distasteful.

By seventeen I had flunked out of high school and failed as a musician. Bored and listless, my father told me that, if I went to college, he would pay for it entirely. I never really enjoyed academic endeavours or thought myself the scholarly type, but most of my friends were already in college and I had no idea what else to do, so I gathered myself together and went to night school to finish my diploma and got into a CEGEP. At the beginning of every semester, like a living ATM, I would see him at the taxi stand where he would deal out the dough for tuition and books without complaint, and a few years later I had my DEC.

When I informed him that Concordia University had accepted my application, I could tell over the phone how happy he was, which was quite a big deal, considering this was the same man whom, if I had called him while he was eating, would not put his meal on hold for two seconds to talk to me. Instead, I had to listen to loud, open-mouthed chewing noises while I spoke, then struggled in vain to decipher his gruff, mumbled responses. As well, he'd seldom say goodbye to me at the end of a phone communication, opting to simply grunt and hang up after the conversation was over.

"Do you know what the proudest day of my life was?" he asked. The day I was born? The day I became the first of his children to get into an accredited institution of higher education? One of my other achievements? Anything to do with me? Anything at all? Of course not. "It was the day I was accepted into college when I was a young man in Greece!" he gushed excitedly. My father had attended university for one

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*(The Wad, continued from page 6)*

year but, for reasons unexplained (to me anyway), he failed to complete his studies.

University was considerably more expensive than CEGEP, but Dad was still true to his word. I didn't have to go to *Station Five*, as the Wiseman and Jarry stand is known to the drivers of the taxi company, to collect the money for fees and books. This time, he rushed right over to my apartment

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*(Doing It the San Francisco Way, continued from page 5)*

droppings. "I want to go home," I told my optimistic date. "It stinks in here." "Give it a chance," said my lothario. "You will really love this show."

I wiped off my seat with my head scarf and tried not to touch the arm rest while my date settled down to enjoy a bit of 1950's burlesque. The music began to play, the lights dimmed and the breathing of the sparse, totally male audience accelerated. The curtains parted and there she was: a 1950's Burlesque Beauty. Except she wasn't. Not at all. The woman that appeared on that filthy stage, framed in a tattered red velvet curtain, was not the glamorous gloriously-built vision I had expected. She looked like the 'before' in a weight watcher's ad, or the centerfold of a Health Magazine entitled THIS COULD HAPPEN TO YOU. She gyrated around the stage, the music's beat slowed to a throbbing pulse of drums and clatter and she removed one shabby article of clothing after another as she moved across the stage more like an elephant on crack than a dancer on a high.

The men in the audience gasped, sighed and moaned as each article of clothing fell to the floor and, when the song ended, our tarnished queen stood before me, a living example of why my anorexia made sense. "Let's get out of here," I said to my date. "Zip up your pants."

Tempest Storm said, "I've always said that a woman's greatest weapon is a man's imagination", but that was West Coast Burlesque. In the Midwest you needed more than an imagination. You needed to be drunk, desperate and horny. That sums up 1950's burlesque in the boondocks. Even in San Francisco, women like Blaze Star and Tempest Storm might have had better figures than that of the demented woman I saw. Indeed, they spent a bit more on their costumes, but the theme was the same... a lot of wiggling and bright smiles while women, who looked lousy in a Chanel suit, did the very thing I did every night before retiring... they took off their clothes. Of course, I didn't caress myself to music. I let my dates do that.

That experience cemented my vision of what Burlesque actually was and it did not tempt me in the least. I preferred a good opera or a stage play that made me cry. I certainly never associated what I saw in that filthy theater with *THE STRIP POLKA*, a happy, adorable romp with cute words that didn't make a lot of sense but always pepped up a party.

As I got older and life took me on different journeys, I

in Snowdon to deliver the dinero, as well as a box of celebratory doughnuts (I'm still uncertain why he did that... was it a Greek tradition or something?). And, of course, out came the wad with exactly the amount required.

I never had the heart to tell him I deposited the money in my bank account, paid the tuition with a cheque, and put the books on my credit card. I imagine he'd harrumph disappointedly.

always remembered that catchy song. Whenever there was an entertainment or a community-sing, I would perform it because I knew all the words and it had an infectious sound. I sang it at sorority shows, family dinners and even at funerals. I thought it would cheer everyone up. I never thought of myself as an entertainer... my Master's Degree was in education. Besides, it took a couple of Brandy Alexanders or a Gin and Tonic to get me to make a fool of myself in front of people who, once they heard me, might never again be my friends.

Before I knew it, it was 2000. My life had changed. I no longer taught. I wrote books and stories and read them aloud at book stores. However, one performance led to another and everyone knows that once you give a Jewish ham a microphone, it is going to go downhill very fast as, indeed, it did.

By 2004, I found myself on stage telling jokes and wondering what I could do at the age of 71 to get people to notice me. After one of my comedy shows at Winters Bar in Pacifica, a few of us were getting drunk, trying to forget how small our audience had been and how little they had laughed, when a young man named Ian said to me, "Have you ever thought of adding music to your act?" and I remembered ... you guessed it... *THE STRIP POLKA*. "You know," I said. "I have a song."

And that is how it all began. One song expanded to a parody, and that bloomed into a full scale cabaret show. At every show, I did my shtick, sang my songs and then, for the finale, I did the one number I knew could never fail, *THE STRIP POLKA*. I was at 40 Mason Street in San Francisco, when Susan Alexander saw me and said, "Here comes the Stripping Granny." Another performer said, "Have you ever thought of Burlesque?"

I closed my eyes and remembered that disgusting theatre in Toledo, Ohio, and shook my head. "I try not to," I said, and he said, "You know, the scene is very different these days. It is funny and entertaining and sexy in a very different way than it once was in the days of Gypsy Rose Lee and Sally Rand." "I'll bet it is," I said.

That was when I met Maxwell Wood. "I know some people who would LOVE your act," he said. And the rest, as they say, is history.

*Burlesque is [...] about knowing how to shake what you have and being proud of it.*

- Baby Doe

## TIME by Rosalie Avigdor

The New Year has come and gone and, with it, some old friendships have disappeared as well, either through death or simply growing apart. We should treasure each other during the time we have together here on earth while we are still young, and know it will not go on forever, nor remain as before. We learn, however, too late that time doesn't stand still for anyone, that the time we give to each other is the best gift of all. None of the gifts under the tree can give us the pleasure and peace of family and friends.

We live in a technical world. We are robots with cell phones attached to our ears. We run to the computer and constantly check our in box or, better still, get constant beeps reminding us of an incoming message or text on our phone.

How often have I, as a writer, headed for the computer to finish writing a chapter in a book I had started far too long ago? How many times have I started something new, yet not found the proper moment to take it to completion? I could make the time, I suppose, if I were more disciplined, I would have more books to send out for approval. Writing from home doesn't help either. Phones ring, friends at the door, dog to walk... more excuses for improper "time management".

We, as humans, waste time, filling it with meaningless worries, anger and grudges. We feel guilty if we rest, play, or simply do something just for ourselves.

I mourn time lost with my old friend, the time I should have given and did not. I am left with the feeling it wasn't enough. Yes, we visited and spoke on the phone, but I am left with doubts and sorrow about the quality time we should have had together. Life took over for me and, very often because something or someone needed me more, the call or visit would be delayed. My friend is alive and well but, being in her 90's, doesn't always remember me, nor recognize my voice. I still make the call and, when she remembers, the time we spend together is wonderful for us both.

Time is the only gift that you can return but cannot take back. Once it is gone, it is gone forever.



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**NEXT ISSUE** — Deadline for submissions for our next issue: **March 15th, 2013.**

We look forward to receiving your SUBMISSIONS . . . short stories, poems, articles, book or movie reviews, letters to the editor. We know you can do it. Let's get your name, and your work, out there for the public to enjoy! Be a part of our new and exciting plans!