



# THE WRITE PLACE

## LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION *by Anne Fotheringham*

When I hear other writers bemoan the fact they are finding it difficult to spark their imaginations, I give thanks for my visits to my father in a long-term care facility. You may think that is an unusual association of ideas, but let me explain.

My father is 95 and has Alzheimer's. Earlier this year, he was placed in long-term care near my home and I visit him almost every day. Sometimes I'm lucky and he remembers me, but more often, he does not. He does not speak much anymore, so to make our visits more interesting for both of us, I've started telling him stories. I'm only returning the favour as he told me a nightly bedtime story until I was 12. It was always the same story, a garbled version of Peter Rabbit, but I loved both the story and that quiet time with my dad's voice lulling me to sleep.

Alzheimer's destroys short-term memory, but some long-term memory remains. My dad has no idea if he had lunch on any given day, but when I mention events from our past that he remembers, his eyes light up. He follows along with my story, nodding his head, and occasionally speaking in his thick Scottish accent. As I tell my stories, ideas for my writing begin to simmer in my brain.

We emigrated from England to Canada in the 1950s and had to make a new life here. It wasn't always easy and there are some funny, as well as sad, tales that have survived as part of our family lore. These are all food for the creative soul.

There's more food at the care facility for my inspiration than talking to my dad, however, as it is not just our family stories that I explore.

For example, I recently went to visit my dad on a day when a singer was performing for the residents. My dad had already been wheeled into the activity room when I arrived. I pulled a chair up beside him and held his hand – did I mention he likes to hold my hand? While I watched the show, I found my imagination captured by the centre's residents and their reactions to the singer and her music. Some waved their arms in time with the melody; some sang along while some just sat and smiled. The singer and the animator interacted with all of them, making sure they felt part of the event.

One lady, who had only one leg, used her hands and her one foot to propel her wheelchair around the floor as she sang and "danced" along with the performer. My imagination was engaged and I wondered about her past. What had her life been like years ago? Why did she like dancing so much that she would exert herself to do it despite her infirmity? What tale could she tell or how could I use her and her courage in one of my stories?

Looking around at these patients in their so-called "golden" years, my eyes were picking up tales of sadness and loss as well as ones about happy times being relived as the residents listened to their favorite music.

The sad part of the event was that very few of the residents had visitors with them and I was told that appears to be the norm at many of these care facilities. Families are spread out across the world today and often the grandparent is the only person still living in the former family residence or hometown. Some of these people end up isolated in care facilities, with only the rare visitor. It is a very sad fact of modern life.

One man I met is extremely bitter that his children have "dumped" him there and never come to see him. He says they figure they have "solved" his situation. Another lady, trapped in her wheelchair, unable to talk, makes guttural noises and tries to connect with anyone who comes near her. The nurses told me she just wants to give you kisses. It is so sad that she had no one from her family to give them to and no way of sharing her story with anyone.

So here's an idea – if you lack inspiration for your writing, why not volunteer to visit these lost souls? Care facilities usually have volunteer groups that will be happy to have some help with activities and events and, along the way, you may meet some wonderful people with amazing stories to share. You'll be doing something caring and you will be helping yourself at the same time. Inspiration is all around us and in all kinds of places – even in long-term care facilities. Visit one today and make some new friends whose stories will spark your imagination.

**It is with profound sadness that we announce the passing of Anne Fotheringham's father.**

**Rosalie Fisher, Joseph Mannella and all the members of the Canadian Writers Society wish to express to Anne, and all her loved ones, our deepest sorrow for their loss.**

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**RED by Joseph Richard Mannella**

Red molten lips	Red, liquid life
Seduce a young man.	Soaks an expended body.
One-time partner.	Crumpled sheets.
Some time lover.	Battered pillows.
Long-time friend.	Piercing knife.
Red satin sheets	Red, lifeless eyes
Caress naked torsos.	Consider a lonely void.
Undulating.	Surprise.
Writhing.	Anguish.
Screaming.	Fear.



## 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)		

## 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

**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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## 20 POUNDS OF FLOUR *by Andreas Kessarlis*

As a youth I never had issues with my back. I grew up straight and strong, never having engaged in any sport more rigorous than bike-riding. My problems began in my late twenties, when on a Sunday afternoon in autumn an SUV ploughed into my tiny Toyota Tercel hatchback, totalling the aforementioned vehicle with me inside. The quick, unexpected crunch of glass and metal snapped my seat back and twisted my body like a French cruller. Thankfully I was able to walk away with no more immediate damage than a sore back and neck. The discomfort soon enough went away, but the effects lingered, recurring every so often. The worst attack happened a few years ago at work on an autumn Thursday, when while lifting a box of books, I felt a small tingle in my lower back, (episodes where I slightly tweak something were and remain, regular occurrences). Within forty-five minutes I could not sit down, and a half hour later I was in such terrible agony that I could barely walk.

I had to leave work early with no realistic plan for getting home. I called everyone I knew, but it being the middle of the afternoon on a weekday all my friends and family were otherwise engaged. I finally decided to try and make my way to a hospital. As I stepped out onto McGill College Avenue the distance across the street to the taxi stand suddenly became a great, impassable expanse. I carefully lurched forward as best I could when my phone went off; one of my friends was on her way downtown to pick up her husband, an elderly college professor who needed a ride, (his hip a few weeks away from being replaced), and could come and get me as well.

When she arrived I tried to crawl into the backseat of her car.

"Hey I'm not a chauffeur," she said, "you can sit up front!"

She relented after I explained that for me sitting was out of the question.

After we picked up her husband, I asked her to drive me to the hospital.

"There's nothing they can do for you there. I know these things," she said, with the Professor, no stranger to the agonies of the lower back himself, agreeing with her.

"They'll only give you anti-inflammatories and send you home. I'll take you to a pharmacy, we'll get something for the pain, and then I'll take you home."

"You don't have to stay! Just please, leave me at emergency," I pleaded in vain.

After she dropped the Professor at their place, she drove me to a pharmacy. I asked her to buy me a particular medication, and gave her the money. As I lay in the backseat of her small sedan waiting, I was noticed by several people as they walked past the car. They looked at me as though I were a potential kidnapper, waiting to pounce on an unsuspecting victim.

My friend returned to the car and handed me a bag.

"Here you go. Your change is inside."

"Hey, this isn't what I asked for," I said.

"Oh, these are better."

They weren't.

The next day the crippling agony had increased and again I was on the phone imploring my friends to take me to the hospital. Even my father, himself a veteran of several spinal surgeries (he claims never to have had any problem until his early forties, when he slipped on some ice and landed right on his coccyx). I knew he would help me.

"No, just rest at home and the pain will go away. I know these things," he said.

Only after I practically begged did he agree to take me to a doctor on Monday if the pain persisted.

Monday morning came and the torturous misery was worse to the point where my tiny, octogenarian father had to act as my cane, (no easy task for him considering I weighed enough to qualify as a

*(Continued on page 11)*

**OVERSIGHT by Louis Lang**

While lazing in my garden,  
 On a a summer day,  
 I glanced up at the heavens,  
 And watched the clouds at play.

The figures that they formed  
 Were like an artist's hand,  
 Of animals and human beings,  
 Of castles in the sand.

It's sad that, in our fleeting youth,  
 We let the time pass by,  
 And the wonders of the universe  
 Do seldom meet the eye.

Some say the passing years  
 Are just a number spent.  
 How wrong they are, as they will learn,  
 For they know not where they went.

Those precious years that we forget  
 Will one day cause us pain.  
 Try as we might to bring them back,  
 They'll never come again.

For only those who've loved and lost  
 Have something to relate  
 That brings them comfort and relief,

**FERTILITY AND REBIRTH by Paul Tagney**

pretend you are a tree.  
 your clothes are leaves.  
 you are in the autumn  
 of your life.  
 you let your clothes  
 fall about you.  
 the wind takes them away.  
 you are naked, but not dead.  
 now begins the most physical,  
 the most beautiful,  
 the most intense  
 period of your life.  
 it is your time

**ALONE by Paul Tagney**

isn't anyone else  
 lonely out there,  
 lonely for a hand  
 to be placed  
 on the back of your neck  
 and left there,  
 lonely for five fingers to mess up your hair  
 with love, lonely for someone  
 to get smashed with  
 and belong to,  
 lonely for someone  
 to walk hand-in-hand with  
 along st. catherine street

**SUSTAINED by Maged El Komos**

My thought had been  
 Of a beauty or forgiveness to redeem  
 All human failure, to fulfil all need.  
 Your kindness seemed  
 Of such order, and your need  
 (I came to see) was in your kindness.  
 No sobering disappointment, then,  
 To free me from your pull,  
 No engine of indignation to throw me back and out.



**THE GIRL THAT WEEPS** *by Moriah Kletinich*

She is the girl that weeps in the darkness,  
 She's awake in the middle of the night,  
 She's the girl who just likes the clear blackness,  
 So she is actually not that bright.

Everyone thinks she is a flawless girl,  
 But maybe if they had a closer look  
 They'd see that she's not just a pretty pearl,  
 And that you can't read her just like a book.

All she wanted was for someone to care,  
 Just someone who would always understand.  
 But this girl just learned that life is not fair,  
 And that she would just be forced to withstand.

No one can see that her smile is fake,  
 And no one feels that her heart will soon break.

*Moriah Kletinich is 14 years old and has enjoyed writing since she was little, from composing poems on Mother's Day to writing different stories. She wrote this sonnet for English class.*

**MA MÈRE** *by Mugnette Myers*

Cette toute petite femme  
 Qui remonte le moral en tout temps,  
           C'EST MAMAN  
 Cette humble couturier  
 Qui a travaillé dur pour élever ses enfants,  
           C'EST MAMAN  
 Cette magnifique personne  
 Courageuse et fière,  
           C'EST MA MÈRE  
 Cette frande Dame  
 Qui ne serait pas déplacée à la cour d'Angletere  
           C'EST MA MÈRE  
 Je n'ai pas assez de mots pour l'exprimer:  
 Mais celle qui sait tut comprendre,  
 Tout pardonner,  
 L'incarnation de Dieu sur la terre,  
 Pour moi,  
           C'EST MA MÈRE

**YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME** *by Cal Teichmann*

"It'll be over very soon," he said soothingly, as the water violently gushed into the small Toyota, pushing the air up towards the roof as the car sank further into the dark, murky waters of the sink hole.

While the muddy sides of the crater were falling and pushing them deeper into the watery grave beneath them, she turned to face him and said, in a loud panicky, shrieking tone of voice, "You've got to be kidding me, right? On our first date!?"

**THE FRIEND** *by Maged El Komos*

My corner of the library is sunny.  
 My needy contemporary is a regular too.  
 And he still makes for Reference and Newspapers,  
 Though his stooping walk is not determination  
 And he seems to go a little lower now.

I also see him,  
 Dressed in his usual brown,  
 Pedalling a rudimentary bicycle effortfully but firmly,  
 A plastic bag with a few groceries  
 Suspended from the handlebar.

Nobility is a form  
 But not specialized;  
 An afflicted indigent's engagement qualifies.  
 And he has kept me time,  
 Shared my life's way.

Is it the sun's warmth  
 That fuels my imagining,  
 Has me dream this figure  
 For whom I have as much pity as regard  
 My guardian?

## STAYING TUNED TO DAN LAXER *by Rosalie Avigdor*

Dan Laxer has worked, for the better part of the last two decades, as a broadcaster, a researcher, a producer, a freelance writer (columnist, blogger, and copywriter), a teacher, and a stand-up comedian. Currently, he is an announcer at CJAD Radio in Montreal, as well as writing and hosting the CJAD Trivia Show, the Sunday Afternoon Comedy Show, and The Real Estate Show. He tops this off as a weekly columnist for The Montreal Times.

*1) As a youngster, did you always want to be in radio?*

Well, not always, I suppose. I had dreams of being a rock star, an actor. I was always drawn to radio because I love music. But when I'd listen to the radio, sometimes I'd be more fascinated by the voice inside the box than the music. I used to listen to Ralph Lockwood on CKGM, and I wanted to be him. I wanted to do what he did, but I wanted to do it on CHOM, because as a teenager I was into the rock n' roll, and I loved CHOM. Still do.

*2) On your FaceBook page, there is always an interesting rant and run of different comments from your fans. How do you deal with this while still remaining professional?*

It's hard, sometimes, because I tend to let things get to me. I mean, Facebook is a playground for me. I post things that I would either have said on my radio show, when I had a daily show, or on a comedy stage. What that leads to is me being perhaps a little less professional than I should be, and sometimes people get angry at me. Some have even unfriended me. But I don't worry about that because at the end of the day it's just Facebook. Also, people who know me well tell me I should be careful because potential employers might be sneaking a peak at my online presence. But, again, Facebook is a playground for me, and I tend to not hold back. I don't want to hold back. That being said, there is usually more controversy in the responses to my posts

than there is in my actual posts. What I try to do sometimes is let the posts speak for themselves and let those who comment talk amongst themselves. I might jump in with some humour and write things like "Ok, I'm turning in, You guys stay as long as you want. Just turn the lights out when you leave." Or I might kick them off my lawn, as it were, and threaten to turn on the hose. That helps diffuse things a little.

*3) Your tenure with CJAD has been quite turbulent over the years, yet you still are able to bounce back. How do you manage all of this and still maintain a positive attitude?*

That's a tough question. I'll be honest, it's been hard. Many years ago a former colleague said to me "Radio will always break your heart." It's been a very tough couple of years since they cancelled my show, Laxer Live. I also used to fill in on the morning show. On the honest-to-goodness CJAD morning show! And I was doing well. There was a time when I thought my career was set. But then the axe fell. There have been some emotional and personal consequences, financial consequences. I've seen it happen to many friends over the years, good people, people who are strong in their fields. But it's the reality of the job. And it's even more difficult here in Montreal. And the salt in the wound is hearing or reading the very negative comments from listeners who perhaps did not like me on the radio, and have a, shall we say, colourful way of saying it, not just to me, but to anyone who has lost a job in radio. And it's usually expressed with little or no regard for how it might feel. But I still get to write and host the Trivia Show on Sunday mornings. I've had the honour and privilege of working with Dave Fisher for the past I don't know how many years. He's been in the business



long enough, and he knows what's what. He keeps me grounded. And I still get to fill in during the holidays or summer months. And I've met some very good people hosting things like The Real Estate Show or Dollars and Sense.

*4) You have worked with many personalities over the years on different radio shows. Which show gave you the most satisfaction?*

Another tough question. I don't know if I can choose just one. When I got my start on CJAD (I'd worked at Mix96 a few years before), I worked with the late Mark Rennie. He was something special, and I was lucky to have the opportunity to learn from him. He was so young. And so much of what we did on the air for many years at CJAD were his ideas, his initiatives, his creativity. Years later Andrew Carter, who hosted our afternoon drive show initially, encouraged me to be creative. Working with Andrew on the morning show, I started writing comedy, jokes, songs, creating characters (The Birthday Monster, Hamish MacAngus, Edgar the Pig, the Mr. Messup feature). But hosting my own show was a dream come true. Those hours when I was on the air were some of the best hours of the day. And it was because of what I did on the radio, and how I did it, that I made another dream come true, becoming a stand-up comedian.

*5) I understand you also do stand up comedy at different venues. Since that entails a "live" audience, does that give you a more creative license than radio?*

More creative license? In a sense. I can be more open, if you want to put it that way. There are things that I can say on a comedy stage that I can't say on the radio. Things that would garner angry emails, phone calls, or even reprimands are

encouraged on the comedy stage. You get laughs and applause instead of hate mail. I've always said that comedy is the last bastion of free speech, and I stand by that. Not that you can't exercise free speech on the radio, but what passes for free speech on the radio needs to be tempered for a variety of reasons.

*6) In view of all the shake ups in the radio industry in Montreal recently, where would you like to see yourself professionally in the next few years?*

Wow, you're really lobbing the hard ones at me, lol. I would have been able to answer that question easily a few years ago. Now I'm not so sure. I have been exploring other avenues. I work as a freelance writer, copywriter, editor, content provider. I do media relations. I'm a columnist in a couple of different publications. Writing is something I've always done, and always enjoyed doing. Now I'm getting paid to do it. I would still love to do more radio, though. I guess I post so many controversial things on Facebook out of frustration; my status updates are in lieu of a radio show, as it were.

I "friended" Dan Laxer on FaceBook and we have had our back and forth comments on many topics. I admire him as an all-around people person as well as a great radio personality, and wish him a solid future in radio in Montreal. We met in person when I interrupted him at a meeting he had with a friend (I am known for this). Good things still can happen at the Cavendish Mall!!! It was a pleasure to meet you!

<http://www.danlaxer.com/>

<http://mtltimes.ca/category/westend-times-writers/dan-laxer/>

[http://www.therichest.com/author/dan\\_laxer/](http://www.therichest.com/author/dan_laxer/)

<http://www.cjad.com/Shows/CJADTriviaShow.aspx>

**Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend.**

**Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read.**

*Groucho Marx*



## DRIVING ME CRAZY by Ellie Presner

Yes, *this was an excellent idea*, I say to Melissa for the tenth time. My daughter, the university student, grins her perfect teeth at me. We are driving toward the Collins bridge and four days of freedom: a country bed-and-breakfast an hour away.

I feel so close to her right now. We're like sisters. No, *twins*, almost. We're right out of a textbook ... single mothers often develop an extraordinary kinship with their daughters, say the experts. *That isn't the best thing*, Melissa keeps telling me. She says she'd rather be treated like a daughter sometimes, not a friend. She'd just as soon be spared my confidences and insecurities. In theory, I agree with her. I even caution against this parenting pitfall in the family-advice booklet I wrote. *Hey*, I've told her, *just because I can't always follow my own suggestions, doesn't lessen their validity*.

Look, we're already at the bridge. Great not having to pay a toll, like in the old days. Thank God I don't have my bridge phobia anymore. If I did, though, Melissa could have driven us across.

I guess I'll be okay on the highway. I *hope* I'll be okay on the highway. I do feel a bit nervous, actually. Look how tight my hands are on the steering wheel. If I freak out, she can take over. Like that time we went up north, to the camp. But I don't want a repeat of that. Made me feel like such a wimp. A failure in her eyes. Got to be competent. Got to be strong. What's that? She's telling me to look at the horses out there. Well, I can't look right now ... I'll take her word for it.

Turn off at Exit Six, they said. What exit is this, coming up? 44?! This is going to take a lot longer than I thought. Now my stomach's in a knot. And my shoulders feel so tense. Oh no, not again! I know these feelings. I was hoping I'd gotten over this. The bridge thing was bad enough, but my highway phobia was even worse. A bridge takes only, what, a minute to get across. But driving on a freeway can take a lot longer – depending on your destination, of course. What's wrong with me? *Why*

should I be so uptight! I've studied my anxiety. I've learned how it grows. It starts from a spark of nervousness, then escalates through rigid tension, right up there to quivering, raw panic. It's totally irrational, I know, but still ...

What do I have to be nervous about? I'm heading for four days of blissful relaxation in the country, for an unofficial writing retreat with my beloved daughter. Okay, our destination is unfamiliar territory – I might get lost. Our hosts are unknown quantities – I might be disliked. But these fears are absurd. So what if we do get lost? We can always call them from somewhere and "get found." As for their not liking me – well, both husband and wife sounded very warm and friendly on the phone when I made our reservation. It's highly improbable that they'll suddenly decide I'm a bad person. And, even if they do, I – *Whoa!* What the hell was that! A huge mother of a truck just passed me, *WHOOSH!* So close. So big. So loud. So fast. My heart, my heart ... I ... I don't want to drive anymore. Ask Melissa to drive. That's all I have to do.

No! She'll be disappointed in me. I was supposed to have licked this phobia thing. She'll just tell me I have no reason to be nervous. Of course she's right. She usually is. A lot like her father that way ... she will *not* be sympathetic if I tell her I'm worried about how I'm going to manage with practically no cigarettes for four days. Okay, slight exaggeration, but really, having to go outside every time I want a – ooh – dizzy all of a sudden ... Wow, I've sure got a death grip on this steering wheel. Maybe I'll try that "paced breathing" and see if it works. One ... two ... three ... four ... This is *not* helping. Look at that. Exit 36. This is going to take forever! Maybe ... maybe I'll just tell her how I feel. Never mind if she's sympathetic or not. Sometimes just talking about my anxiety helps to lessen it.

There! I told her. Of course, she's giving me the usual blah blah blah everything's going to be fine nothing to be nervous about et cetera ad nauseum. She actually sounds disgusted with me already! And I haven't even asked her to drive yet.

(Continued from page 8)

God, is a little sympathy too much to ask! Well, I'll say one thing. As long as she keeps talking, I feel a little less clenched, and my breathing eases a tiny bit. This hyperventilation is terrible. I feel like such a nut, panicked about nothing at all, nothing real, that is.

The radio hasn't helped. The classical music is like aural mush ... my racing mind can't focus on anything. The other stations, forget it – slices of loud rock, moronic commercials ... Oh, great. Now she's telling me to talk to her. How the hell can I talk, when I can hardly breathe. My chest feels like a bear's sitting on it. Okay-yy, now there're black specks floating before my eyes, time for Melissa to drive, oh yes!

What does she mean, oh no?! Wonderful, she wants to play therapist, says I have to get through this. Hah! I'll show her "through." How about "through" that telephone pole over there! Mel, I can't breathe! Wha ... what? Well, true, I guess she's right, if I created this panic in the first place, I can un-create it. Sounds really good, actually ... I half-believe it's possible.

Look at that idiot in my rear-view mirror. God, I hate aggressive truckers. Go ahead, pass me! Why don't you pass me, look, nobody's com – whoa – there he goes, but so close! There goes my breathing again. Oh-h-h Mel please please you drive I can't do this Mel I can't I can't I can't Mel it's only exit 29 and I just can't drive anymore you have to please please please wha ... wha ... what? Slow ... deep ... breaths? Okay ... I'll try ... That's a bit better. She really thinks I can do this, apparently. So cruel, but maybe so right ... I don't know ... I keep looking over at the inviting shoulder of the road up ahead. If only ... What? Oh, okay, okay, I'll talk. Hmm, I guess I'll just be honest and blurt out what I really think. No no no, I can't tell her that. I can't say I'm afraid she must love me less when I'm a wreck like this. She'll think I'm crazy for sure. I know! I'll say it as a joke, as in: *Well, I guess you*

*don't love me any less just because I'm screwed up, ha, ha.* There. Of course, she says *Don't be silly, Ma.*

Oh, for Pete's sake, where are these tears coming from? Just great, now my nose is going to get all red, and when we get to the bed-and-breakfast they'll think I'm an alcoholic! No, I'll tell them to just call me Rudoph.

Hey, what was that sign? Exit 17?! Maybe I'll make it! I don't know. I think I'll be okay once we get off this damn highway. Actually I'm breathing more easily already; knowing that we're getting closer to the end of this road is helping.

Should I tell Melissa I feel better? Why not. Because I don't want her to think that I'm *perfectly* all right, that's why not. What the heck, I'll tell her.

Great, now she wants to know *why* I feel better. I'll have to think on this for a while. Let's see. Was it the deep breathing? Somewhat. Was it the fact that



we passed Exit 17, and then I knew we were a lot closer to – hey! There goes Exit 10 already! We're almost at the turn-off. This is great – I'm feeling much less uptight now. Why is that, Melissa wants to know. Okay. I think I know. It was something in our conversation. It was when she said that of course she still loves me even though I'm screwed up. Okay, I'll tell her this.

Now she's asking, Didn't I already know that?! Oh brother. Didn't I already ... No! I did not. How could that be, she wonders. She looks over at me, innocent, bewildered. You love me with all *my* moods, she says. Ah, I say, that's different. Mothers are supposed to love their daughters. But – nowhere is it written that daughters have to love their mothers. Especially mothers who are so fallible.

Oh, she's giving me that "look," as in *oh Ma you crazy ol' thing you*, and somehow this makes my eyes all leaky again so naturally I don't see the yellow sign with the blurry number six on it until it is almost too late – but I make it! I make it. I make it.

## THE GIFTS by Doug Lucas

I've received many gifts during my life. All were appreciated, most now forgotten. Some gifts were practical, a few were for my pure pleasure and, of course, there were those given as small jokes to remind me of the joys of life. But those gifts I remember best came with a special significance because of the forethought clearly used by the person giving the gift. These were presents which would always have a special meaning each time I see or use them and quickly became treasures, enriching my life with memories.

I've become a tobacco pipe smoker in recent years and make no apologies for the pleasure I receive each and every time I smoke a pipe. Some have accused me of becoming an obsessed collector of tobacco pipes, which, of course, isn't true. I merely desire to have the ability to choose a different pipe each time I smoke. It should be clear to the reader, therefore, that it is a necessity to have a large selection of different pipes on hand. I might add this necessity also makes gift giving far easier for those who might choose to give me a present from time to time. I consider myself very considerate of others.

I'm a retired United States Marine and have never felt the need to apologize to anyone for the time I served. I was a Marine during a period in this nation when military service was not only unpopular, but those who served were disrespected in many ways by most. I didn't care what others thought. I quietly did what I felt was right. After I retired, I rarely discussed the time I'd spent in the Marines, other than to poke fun at myself and joke about the funny things which happened over the years I was in the Corps. I gave or sold almost everything I'd been given or used during my time in the Corps. I would be hard pressed to show anything of value from that period of my life to anyone.

But there was one item I doggedly retained from this period of my life, the emblem I earned in recruit training in 1964. The day I retired, it was put in a drawer and mostly forgotten for years. After I started smoking pipes, my wife tried to persuade

me to see if it could be used to make a pipe. I did nothing. About six months ago, emblem in hand, she and I "decided" to visit my favorite tobacco shop and pipe maker. As soon as we walked into the shop in Chambersburgh(Pa.), *she* cornered J.M. Boswell and queried him as to the expense of making a pipe with *my* emblem. I had no desire to part with it and told them both just that. Three additional trips to Boswell's, several discussions with my wife about *what I wanted* and a few tense moments, forced me to reconsider my position.

J.M. Boswell said it took him four blocks of briar before he found what he wanted to produce the pipe you can see at the start of this story. My wife's determination to gift me with a pipe filled with memories and J.M. Boswell's craftsmanship are only two parts of the gift I received, and they would have been more than enough. I was so thrilled with the promise of pleasure this pipe held for me, that I posted this photograph and a short blurb about it in five Facebook pipe groups I belong to. At present, I have received over two hundred comments and likes on the pipe. Most of the postings mentioned the pipe and more than a few thanked me for my service. More importantly, I was contacted by two veterans who had been watching the results of my postings. They also felt they'd received the gift of respect they'd never gotten before.

These are gifts which can't be bought with money and will always move your heart beyond words. How do you thank someone for the gift of a special pipe?



*(Continued from page 3)*

sumo wrestler).

“Why didn’t you tell me it was so bad?” he said.

He took me to a large clinic he frequented with his innumerable geriatric health problems. It was located in the same shopping mall where a group of Greek seniors rent a small space for drinking coffee and hanging out. I soon realized why he chose to bring me there: So he can play cards and backgammon with his friends while I waited to see a doctor.

The clinic was packed. My number was “56” and they just called “22”. The ugly orange plastic seats in the waiting room were molded, making it impossible for me to lie down across several of them. After standing uncomfortably for over an hour I realized that while there were only two doctors on hand, the clinic had fourteen examination rooms, so I asked the receptionist if I could please lie down in one of their vacant rooms, making it clear that I was more than willing wait my turn to see a physician.

The receptionist explained that there were people ahead of me and I had to wait. Obviously she didn’t get what I was saying, so I repeated: “Look, I’m not demanding to see a doctor right away, it’s just that my back is hurting so much and I need to lie down in the meantime. I will wait for my number, just please...the pain...it’s too much!”

She sighed and gave me a bitter, unfriendly glare that said “what a whining baby” before angrily gesturing for me to follow her, leading me to an unoccupied examination room where I was instructed to wait. She quickly exited, closing the door behind her. I heard her muffled voice tell the doctor that I demanded to see someone right away.

The doctor stormed in and gave me a stern lecture about how I was being unfair to the others and that I should wait like everyone else. When I tried to explain that I was willing to do just that I only needed a place to lie down he waved his hand in a “silence, you!” manner and told me to lie face-down on the examination table. After obeying him he proceeded to yank and bend my legs in different

positions.

“Does this hurt?” he said coldly.

“Owww, yes.”

“How about this?”

“Yes!”

“How about...”

“Look,” I interrupted, “it always hurts a great deal no matter what.”

“Fine. I’ll have some x-rays taken,” he grunted, stomping out of the room.

As I struggled to get off of the table the radiologist, a small, old woman, entered.

“Oh, you poor man,” she said sympathetically, “let me help you.”

As we made our way to the x-ray room, everyone else in the office stared at us as if to say “don’t help that goofball! He unfairly demanded to see a doctor right away!”

The doctor eventually wrote me a prescription and a worker’s comp chit, telling me there was no visible damage to my spine and I should go home, rest, and return in a week.

That was the longest seven days of my life. It took me the better part of an hour to get out of bed each morning. Every task from going to the bathroom to preparing meals was torture. And the worst part: I was all by myself day and night, with only my smartphone and social media for company.

I called my father and asked him for some provisions, requesting specific items. He brought me an extra-large carton of eggs, butcher-sliced slabs of bacon and ham, and a twenty-pound bag of flour, none of which were on my list.

“What the hell is all this?” I demanded.

“What?” my father said, “My mother fed our entire family of eight for a month with that during World War II! You kids today you are so ungrateful!”

*Kids?* I was forty-one.

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This is not atypical behaviour for my father. He is quite stubborn and old-fashioned. For example he always drinks his coffee black, and every time he notices me putting two creams and two sugars in my cup of java he looks at me disappointingly as if to say: "What did I raise, a Nancy-boy!?!"

In between high-cholesterol meals with unleavened bread I would text friends in an attempt to get them to visit me in order to break the mind-numbing monotony of *Star Trek* re-runs and endless CNN news cycles. My brother passed by one night with a rented DVD, but that was about it.

The next Monday I paid a return call to the doctor, who was considerably nicer this second time. The medication was working and I had improved, but not enough to return to work, so I was given another week of rest. Before long my father returned me to my hermitage for another round of cabin fever.

My only houseguest that week was my best friend Nick, whom I had to prod, cajole and guilt into seeing me. I asked him if he could pick up two liters of cranberry juice and some bagels (there is a twenty-four hour bagel shop, where he could quickly and easily get the aforementioned items, directly between his house and my apartment). He showed up an hour and a half late with an opened bottle of orange juice and a bag of frozen supermarket bagels, items he probably grabbed from his refrigerator on his way out the door. The whole time he was over he kept looking at his watch, and left after less

than an hour.

If the first week was the longest in my life, the second was even longer. The world seems different when one is home on a weekday. You become familiar with daytime TV, radio, and the habits of your neighbours. What was most surprising is how often someone knocked on my apartment door. *Is this what happens all the time when I'm at work?*

I was still a little sore the last time I saw the doctor, but I lied and said I was perfectly fine. I could not take another week of this. He let me return to work and gave me a note for my boss that stated clearly that I was to avoid any lifting for two weeks.

"Is there anything I can do to prevent a repeat of this?" I asked.

The doctor shrugged.

"What if I bought a back brace of some kind?"

"Okay, sure, why not," he said.

*Was this joker really a doctor?*

The day I returned to work nobody gave me a special welcome. Nobody said it was nice to see me, or that they missed my presence. One co-worker wryly asked if I enjoyed my vacation, but otherwise it was like I never left. Whenever I asked someone to lift a heavy object for me, they would sigh loudly as they shot me a snarky look that said "I'm lifting this for you, jerk! You owe me now!"

Ah, so good to be back.



## Canadian Writers Society

For the Love of Writing

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**NEXT ISSUE** — Deadline for submissions for our next issue: **August 15th, 2014.**

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!