

The Write Place At the Write Time

[Home](#)[About Us](#)[Interviews](#)[Fiction](#)[Poetry](#)["Our Stories" non-fiction](#)[Writers' Craft Box](#)[Jungian Dream Corner](#)[Submission Guidelines](#)[Feedback & Questions](#)

Come in...and be captivated...

"Our Stories"

We have decided to devote a portion of our magazine to non-fiction. These are stories of things that have happened serendipitously being in the right place at the right time or just heartfelt musings, thoughts, and feelings on life. Join us in our non-fiction section. These stories speak to anyone and everyone and are told by anyone and everyone who has a story to tell.





"Season of Change" Cathy McLain Copyright 2008

A Bench of One's Own

By Stephanie Feuer

Crazy Horse sought out sacred spots in South Dakota to have visions. Winnie the Pooh had a thinking spot. I come to the public plaza behind the Barking Dog Restaurant with my vexing thoughts and editing projects. But on the first truly nice day of the year, there's someone on my bench.

She's dressed in an army green parka, too warm for the day, and she's talking loudly on the phone. She takes no notice of the buds, their fresh green trimming the bushes like decorations on a party cake.

"The doctor said I'm not a good candidate, my skin's too thin. It's a month away. Look at my face. I need your guy."

I'm not interested in her quest for Retin-A. She's invaded my spot. I was loyal to my bench all winter, tipping my wool hat to the Seward Johnson sculpture, "The Right Light," by the entrance; coming to my spot in the cold, just me and the pigeons, with the sad, bare twigs casting long shadows across my writing pad. While the cold seeped through my pants legs where my jacket ended, I'd look to the giant mural, a bucolic scene of a huge tree in full bloom by a bridge over a friendly little body of water, and think I was someplace else. The illusion worked like real travel does to stimulate my creativity. In a couple of weeks, water will cascade down the brick wall topped with the geometric edges that are reminiscent of a castle. I'd never

be able to hear the gentle tinkle that guided me through tricky passages of my novel over the telephone conversation I now can't help but follow. It's a wedding she'll be going to and her ex will be there.

I've had other spots. When I lived in Hell's Kitchen, I'd often walk east to 53rd Street between Fifth and Madison to the outdoor plaza edged with a graffiti-covered piece of the Berlin Wall which once stood at Waldemarstreet. I knew a guy who, when he heard The Wall was likely to come down, dropped everything to go to Berlin to take pictures. The images launched him into his dream career as a photographer. I've lost touch with him but I still seek out that spot when I need a special dose of inspiration.

When my husband and I were trying to start a family, I dropped a piggy bank full of coins into The Pulitzer Fountain at the Grand Army Plaza at 59th Street and Fifth Avenue. I knew the sculpture had some odd karma; the day the sculptor finished the model for Pomona he was run over and killed. His assistant finished the commission. Knowing the story didn't stop me from regular post-gym treks to give an offering to Pomona, the goddess of fruit and fertility who sits atop the fountain. I'd toss in my coin into what I called the magic fountain and wished for a child. "There's no magic there," my husband said of the fountain, when each month we were disappointed.

Eventually the goddess prevailed and we had a son, a big, beautiful and colicky boy. The only thing that would calm his incessant crying was running water. I discovered every outdoor fountain in Midtown that summer. I'd pack my son into the baby carrier and he'd wail like a demon child until he caught sight of the water. We'd sit on the lip of the pool outside the Time Life Building or under the curve of water behind the McGraw Hill building, the midday shade a welcome bonus. I'd take him up to Central Park, first stopping to offer a coin of thanks to Pomona.

With some 8 million people in the City, it's no wonder that more than 2,000 benches have been "adopted" in Central Park, each for upwards of \$7,500. Donors may have a plaque engraved with an inscription on their bench of choice commemorating their spot.

Songwriter Nick Ashford, who came to the City with 64 dollars and a

SONGWRITER NICK ASHFORD, WHO CAME TO THE CITY WITH 57 DOLLARS AND A dream, has his plaque on a bench in Bryant Park. The inscription "Nick Ashford slept here" references a time before he met Valerie Simpson at the White Rock Baptist Church in Harlem, before he penned hits like "Ain't no Mountain High Enough," when that bench was all he could claim as his own.

I have no such claim on my bench, and the stranger talks on. Her voice cracks. I hear the desperation when she says, "He's bringing her." I know that tone and know that, though she's attractive, she needs that Retin-A, needs all the comfort and power my spot can provide. She needs my bench.

I head east towards the river to Stuyvesant Cove, a manicured riverfront nook winding gently from 18th to 23rd Street. Each year at Rosh Hashonah, the Jewish New Year, we walk there from our Temple, bags of bread in hand. We ball up the bread, symbolic of our sins, and toss it into the water, saying a prayer and starting the year with a clean slate.

A chilly wind blows up from the river. A seagull is perched on the low fence, a couple jogs by. I take a seat and open my pad on the metal table, adjust my sunglasses and settle into my new spot.

The Accidental Writer

By Pat Greene

I didn't always want to be a writer.

In fact there was a time when I rebelled against everything that it took to be a writer.

I was four years old when I whittled the fastest gun in the West out of the fallen branch of a three hundred year old chestnut tree. I shot more Indians with that gun and I must have drawn against and killed "Billy The Kid" ten thousand times.

Once, I took my gun to school and I made the terrible mistake of trying to take

out "Billy The Kid " in full view of our headmaster, Mr. Collins.

He confiscated my pistola, while calling himself the sheriff of Dodge. He pistol whipped me a few times around the head with it and then he warned me, that there were to be no more guns brought into Dodge.

I got my gun back at the end of the school day and that evening on my way home, I shot "Billy The kid" one more time, for good measure.

I hated school. I hated it more than I hated Murphy's o'ul Alsatian dog who bit me in a very private place one day and after that I had to take the long way home from the village.

I could not grasp this school thing at all and why it was supposed to be so important for us. Two and two was always going to be four and c-a-t was always going to spell "cat".

Who knew if "Billy The Kid" knew his times table or if he could read and write. "Billy The Kid" was my hero and it didn't matter if I met and shot him every day at sun-up. That only meant that I was better than him and if Billy didn't need an education to survive, then what the hell was I doing, being locked up in that schoolhouse every day.

For five years I lived the life of the fastest gun in the West. I took my beatings at school for not doing my homework but I never once cried. I was Shane, John Wayne and "Billy The Kid" all blended together and real heroes like that never cry for anything. There was lots of stuff written on the blackboard at school and the opening of this and that page but for the most part, it all went in one ear and out the other. I would stare out those big old windows, where I had full view of the hill of Kiltely. I dreamt up Indians and horses and good guys and bad guys. I ventured far from the little remote corner of east Limerick and I was riding my shining black stallion through the "Bad lands" of South Dakota.

Ruler sticks and knuckles to the side of my head always quickly brought me back to my senses. I was made to stand in the corner, to see if that would bring me to concentrate on what was real in life... instead of all that day dreaming through windows.

It was a weekend assignment and we were to use our imagination. Write a story based on this headline and the winning story would win a prize. I was no writer and I had no intention of wasting a whole weekend writing some silly o'ul story and I would take my beating for it when Monday came around.

"Crossing the line"

Crossing what line?

What a silly thing to write on a blackboard and then to expect the fastest gun in the west to come up with a story about it. Now I knew that I was no good at writing stories.

Of course, if Mrs. Roche, my schoolteacher, wanted me to come in on Monday morning and tell her a story about crossing the line, then there was no better man to do it.

I could tell stories till the cows came home. I could start out talking, never knowing what to talk about but words and stories just came to me. Just as natural as it is for the fastest gun in the West to draw down his gun on someone and kill without the flicker of an eyelid.

I grew up on stories. I was raised in a rambling house and every night neighbors spilled in around our kitchen and stories and yarns were told into the early hours of the morning.

Us children were allowed to sit up for a while and listen to a few stories and even tell a few of our own. You were shunned if you didn't have a story to tell. Some of the old people would claim, "...a man without a story to tell, is not fit company for man nor beast."

I walked home from school that Friday afternoon and for some reason, I was not able to get those words out of my head. Martin Ryan and John Harty, the two slowest guns in the West shot me dead and I never even got to clear my gun from its holster.

I made up the excuse to both of them that I was sick and if they knew for sure what was going on inside my head, then they would definitely have proclaimed me to be sicker than I even thought myself to be. Martin and John were loyal non-home-workers too and it would have disgusted them to know that I was giving even the slightest bit of consideration to this stupid story idea.

When I got home I tossed my school bag in it's usual weekend resting place... the cubbyhole under the stairs.

I ate my dinner in silence and after dinner, I went for a walk down around the Ballinlough bridges.

The words were constant on my mind but for the life of me, I was not able to concoct a connection... a connection inspiring me to write a story.

I had heard the words so many times, both from my mother and my teachers. "You've crossed the line this time!!" and always a good walloping ensued but that would never be enough to base an entire story upon.

That Friday night I waited until everyone in the house was asleep. I stole down stairs and in the dark I foraged around and found my school bag in the pile of seven.

I sat in my mother's chair by the fireplace and I lit the candle on the mantle piece. By the flickering light I opened my copybook. A word appeared on the page in front of me and then an entire line was written. Somewhere after the third line was being told, I found myself walking with the pencil and I was no longer writing the story... the story was telling itself.

Monday came and much to the surprise of Mrs. Roche I had stepped over to the other side.

My fellow non-home-workers looked upon me with scorn and I could see in their disappointed faces that I was no more to them at that moment than a disgusting defector.

My story won first prize and hearing it read aloud in class, awoke in me a

passion for the written word.

From that day forward, I took to reading and writing. I read everything that I could get my hands on. At one time I had twenty seven pen-pals, worldwide and I wrote to each one of them diligently.

I could never imagine myself being "Billy The Kid" today. I have never once held a real gun in my hand. Whenever I look back on my childhood, I find myself wondering what that little boy would think of the man he grew up to be. I'm certain that I'm not anything like he imagined me to be and I'm sure he would be greatly disappointed.

It's difficult for an adult to comprehend the purity of a child's mind and it's impossible for a child to understand what growing up takes from a life.

I'm middle aged now and before me is an age that most people fear arriving at. There was a time when the thought of being old scared me too but somewhere between then and the not-too-long-ago, a little bird from the future visited me. The only fear that I have of old age now, is that when I get there, there won't be anyone to listen to my stories.

I grew up and I moved away and today I live in the story book capital of the world. New York is a long way from my childhood and sometimes that childhood seems so distant, I wonder if half of it was real at all. My past does call to me every now and then but even if I wanted to, I could never return to it.

The Ireland of today is not the Ireland that I grew up in. Most people that lived it mourn the passing of that old Ireland and I do too sometimes.

I should be sad but I'm not. I feel fortunate that I got to live that time and even more fortunate to know that when I am old, I will have such great stories to tell.

One day, my childhood will be what fairy tales are made of and when that time is written and told about, someone else will be "Crossing The Line".

Like A Warning

By Mark Barkawitz

Out on my usual Sunday morning run, I spot this young lady pushing a baby carriage towards me on the sidewalk ahead. She can't be more than seventeen, eighteen. Definitely attractive. But still a kid herself.

As we approach one another, two small words imprinted in cursive across the front of her little, off-white t-shirt come into focus, revealing her story like a warning to other girls: "Boys Lie."

The Girl Who Fell Out of the Band

By Vince Corvaia

I was a landlocked sailor in Pensacola who was missing home. It was a Saturday during my first April there, and my first Fiesta of Five Flags festival. The duty van was preparing its trip downtown, where I knew a parade would be taking place at 10 a.m. That's all I knew about the festival. I thought maybe a parade would help me out of my funk.

The sidewalks along Palafox were dotted with folding chairs, but I wouldn't exactly call it a crowd. I stood in front of a storefront diner and waited for the festivities. Already I was starting to talk myself out of it. I just wanted to sit in the barracks and sulk. Besides, it was already hot and humid, and the barracks were air conditioned.

A ripple of excitement moved through the people standing near the curb. I stepped up to get a better look. What I saw was a procession of children dressed as giant vegetables—large carrots and lettuce heads and tomatoes, all with little feet, some bare, walking along in silence except for someone's occasional applause. This was the parade? Now I was really depressed.

occasional applause. This was the parade. Now I was really depressed.

I was about to head back down to the USO to wait for the duty van when I heard a distant percussion growing louder. A marching band? Things were looking up. I felt foolish for thinking that walking vegetables constituted the entire parade. The music, now including brass, grew louder. Come on, I thought, get in the spirit.

The first band, according to a banner that spanned most of the street, was from Hammonton High School in Hammonton, New Jersey. They were playing something familiar and forgettable, but they were very good. Halfway through the band's passing where I stood, a girl playing the French horn on my side of the street broke rank and, without skipping a beat, marched to the curb in front of me and collapsed.

Fortunately I was wearing civilian clothes, because I would have been ashamed to be representing the military in light of what happened next.

I froze.

A middle-aged woman stooped and unbuckled the girl's tall, fuzzy helmet from under her chin and placed it on the sidewalk. Another woman bumped shoulders with me in her haste to get into the diner and emerge with a glass of water. She and the other woman held the girl upright by her back as she sipped from the glass.

When she evidently felt she could stand, the women raised her by her arms and started to walk her down the street in the direction of the band. As they turned her around, her eyes met mine just for a second. By now, another band was passing by. Her helmet still sat on the sidewalk. A man said to me,

"Why don't you pick that up?"

“Why don’t you?” I said. Oh, I was foul.

I took the duty van back to Shofley Field and was sorry I had ever attended the Fiesta of Five Flags parade.

* * *

Ted Botts (his name being the only thing I’ve made up in this account) was Shofley’s base photographer and a lifer. He worked out of the journalism office in the Admin building, down the hall from the Personnel office, where I worked as a receipts person. So we knew each other.

I was sitting in the mess hall, staring down at my hot lunch rapidly growing cold, when Botts set his tray down opposite me and dropped into a chair.

“Man,” he said, unfolding his cloth napkin, “...what’s got your panties in a bunch?”

“I sat over here so I could be by myself,” I said.

“Too late for that.”

“I could move.”

“I don’t think you have the energy to move. What’s up?”

Oh, what the hell. So I told him all about the parade, the vegetables, the band, and the French horn player and my inability to help.

“I’m scum,” I said.

“Is that all?” Botts said through a mouthful of mashed potatoes.

“You’re right,” I said. “I’m lower than scum.”

“No, I mean, is that what you’re so upset about? You didn’t help some chick on the sidewalk?”

“You don’t understand. That’s not like me. And I’m in the military. I was supposed to administer aid.”

“Who told you that, the Navy fairy? You didn’t owe anybody anything.”

“Yeah, but she looked at me. She knew.”

Botts rolled his eyes.

“So find her.”

“What, catch a Greyhound to New Jersey?”

“No, dumbass. You thought this morning was the Fiesta of Five Flags?”

“The fiesta is today. It was a parade.”

Botts laughed so hard he had to bend over his tray and then drink some

... milk.

“The fiesta is tonight,” he said. “The real parade is tonight. This morning was just a dress rehearsal for the bands. The organizers just threw in the vegetables to make it a salad.”

“You mean all the same bands will be there? Hammonton, too?”

“All the bands. You can get her phone number.”

“I don’t want her phone number. I want to apologize to her.”

“For what?”

“You don’t understand.”

“Look, I’m driving down there to cover the fiesta for the *Seminole*. You want to ride with me?”

The reality sank in that I could really do this thing. I could follow her parade route to the waiting high school buses and walk up to her and apologize. I was excited.

“What time are we leaving?”

The city was no less humid that night than it had been in the morning. Palafox Street was more crowded with onlookers than I’d ever seen it. Even

Palafox street was more crowded with smokers than I'd ever seen it. Even the raised grassy median was topped off by people with blankets and carrying cameras. Botts and I parted ways at a parking meter, and I climbed onto the median and walked north on Palafox until I got to the San Marcos Hotel, where the fiesta's "king" and "queen" would be viewing the festivities from the hotel's second-story veranda.

The parade started.

No vegetables. A band marched out of a side street opposite the San Marcos and turned left onto Palafox. It wasn't Hammonton.

Neither was the next band.

In fact, at least ten bands went by, followed by mounted policemen and a fire truck, and no Hammonton.

I felt the same blue fog overtaking me, making me question how I could be so foolish as to think my idea would have ever worked, when another band entered Palafox, and by its banner I knew it was Hammonton.

I sidled down the median hill and started walking parallel to the band. The girl who had collapsed that morning was back in rank, and this time she was on the opposite side of the band, the side where I was now keeping pace with her. I considered that a major coincidence and my heart began pounding.

But I didn't know what coincidence was.

A moment later, the same girl stopped playing her French horn and unbuckled her helmet. She broke rank and began stumbling toward me,

and when she got to the curb of the median, she tripped and tumbled forward onto the grass.

She had fainted again.

This time, I rushed through the crowd to the bottom of the hill, where two women (The same women? That was asking too much.) were helping her to sit upright. I was too late, but not too late to rush between the Hammonton ranks and into the diner, where I asked for a glass of water for a fallen comrade.

I carried the water back through the band and up to the girl, where one of the women relieved me of it and held the glass to her lips. Her helmet lay on the grass behind them. I picked it up and waited.

After a few more seconds, the women got the girl to her feet and were about to walk her across the street between bands when I tapped one of them on the shoulder and held out the helmet.

“Thank you,” the woman said.

They crossed the street, the girl never looking back.

I spent the rest of the parade in the diner while I waited for the evening to end so I could meet Botts at his car. Over a hearty meal of meat loaf and mashed potatoes (no vegetables), I considered the redemptive powers of fate and realized I felt better than I had since joining the service.

“What are you grinning about?” Botts said when he finally saw me leaning on the parking meter.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” I said. “Let’s go home.”

The Tears of a Giant Colorado River –Grand Canyon National Park

By Linda Emma

Approaching a wall of water measuring forty feet from its base, we quickly learned to discount the rapid rating system as readily as our guides had. If Hermit was only an 8, what exactly were we in for from the approaching 9’s and 10’s?

The bow of our craft ascended the monster wave (think Perfect Storm) and crashed into the cresting waters. Smacked from the pontoons of our silly rubber raft, we were left soaked and dangling from the rope hand holds, praying that they would indeed hold.

Shane had told us time and again that the Colorado 10-scale rating system was more estimate than accurate, that each day on the river was different from the day before and that the challenge of a 10 to its boatman could mean a milder ride for its passengers for safety’s sake. While a 6 or 7, maneuvered through just right could be a wet and wild ride for the trip’s annals.

We shook off the dripping waters; shivered away the icy chill; righted ourselves back on board; let the tension ease from our shoulders, settled in on calming waters.

And waited for the next rapid.

I had billed this to my family as the “trip of a lifetime.” We were to become true river rats, running the mighty Colorado River from Lee’s Ferry to a put out spot 187 miles down river, just past Lava Falls, one of the toughest rapids in the world. We would be hiking cliffs, sleeping under the stars and roughing it in a way that none of us was inclined toward. My own idea of camping had always been that hotel without the room service. My 13-year-old daughter was

thinking a spa in Italy would make a great summer vacation. My 69 year-old mother, always loath to decline an invitation to spend time with her grandchildren, was nonetheless wondering if she wasn't just a bit too old for such a vigorous undertaking. And my husband Garrett, who was still saying "no" as I was packing, chose to ignore the details. When I suggested that he might start walking to get in shape for the hikes, he asked, "What hikes?" He assured me he'd stake out a spot at the end of the trail with a clipboard and poll the hikers on just what he'd missed. Among the five of us, only my nine-year-old son Michael thought sleeping in a cavern with lizards and scorpions was a neat idea.

Maybe I was a little nuts.

Crazy or not, we touched down on a hotter than Hades July desert morning in Marble Canyon, AZ. If ever we had considered turning back, we'd just missed the opportunity. Now I know what the middle of nowhere looks like.

That night, dining on a hot meal that tasted probably better than it was, we were provided with a bit of unintended entertainment. Since Marble Canyon is often a spot for returning rafters, there were several among us. Kaleigh was a 19ish returning rafter who exuberantly shared her journey. She had a great time. Garrett asked if she'd like to do it again, offered her \$500 to take his place. He was kidding. I think.

At the evening's orientation, we learned what was to come. Our guides emphasized the national park philosophy of "take only pictures, leave only footprints." They told of the promise and perils of running rapids on the nation's seventh longest river and warned of the inherent risks. Indemnity forms had to be signed. They vaguely described our sleeping quarters: sand and sky; our bathing options: the river; our bathroom facilities: not much, and the wildlife we might encounter. (I'm sorry, but when they started referring to scorpions as "critters," I knew we were coming from different places.)

Then, on a crystal blue morning we set out from Lee's Ferry, a common launch on the Colorado fifteen miles south of the Glen Canyon Dam. In the calm beginning waters, with mascots of tiny swallows fluttering about us, we settled in, familiarizing ourselves with the boat, the rules of the river, the guides and

our fellow passengers.

We were a group of 22 on two 37-foot motorized pontoon rafts. The boats resemble large versions of the Zodiacs yachters use to reach their moorings today. Originally, they were World War II surplus, the cheap and plentiful rubber military rafts that could fit passengers and gear and tackle the toughest white water in the country in a way that wooden boats could not.

Our skipper was Shane, a 30-year-old former teacher who was regrettably making his only trip of the year with us. We soon learned that for all of the boatmen, the river was not a job, but a passion. The waters pulled at them all like a magnet. Jeff, the other skipper, was an English teacher fond of quoting Robert Frost. He'd brought his 17-year-old son Connor with him to work the river for the first time. Alan, 22, a custom woodworker, was on his sixth run on route to the day Tour West would allow him to pilot his own vessel.

And Lori, a 24-year-old college student, works in the Orem, Utah Tour West office, but it's more than a summer job to her, it's her heritage. Frank Stratton, the company's founder, was her grandfather. Her fond memories of the teacher and farmer with a zest for living and river running were inspiring. Although his roots were in the town his ancestors settled along with other followers of Brigham Young, his spirit was roaming the walls of Grand Canyon. His love affair with the Grand Canyon inspired him to honeymoon there and in 1969, with three lifelong friends, start the novel business.

At the first sign of white water, we waited for one of our river authorities to tell Michael to join his grandmother at the stern. No such order was given. Michael straddled the pontoon and held to the straps like the reins of a bucking bronco, while Garrett and I tamped down our visions of him being swept overboard by a colossal wave.

We weathered that first turbulent water with a sigh of relief, only to discover that it wasn't even considered a rapid. It was the Paria riffle. We were learning the lingo and coming to the realization that Shane's calm demeanor wasn't going to waver.

Around mile seven, Shane quieted the motor and told us the legend of the

approaching Badger Creek Rapid. As he closed the story, he introduced us to our first real rapid. The sound of a muffled locomotive and the apparition of the river ending were more telling than anything in Shane's manner. In fact, we were to learn that the story before the fall and the mild "hold on tight," spoken in the same tone as a stranger might say, "have a nice day," were all we could expect just seconds before the world dropped off.

Shane didn't need to tell any of us to hold on. It was a white knuckled roller coaster ride akin to a well-lit Space Mountain, only shorter, wetter and a whole lot colder. That first 46 degree icy blast was a shock even to us hearty New Englanders as we plummeted Badger's 15 foot descent, but riding "up and on," we all survived it. And Michael had ridden like a pro, and to my silent pleasure, I noted that at this rapid and throughout the trip, a guide would quietly come to the bow and position himself somewhere near my son.

Lunchtime was also our bathroom break. There are a hundred and one uses for a rapidly running river. And another opportunity to get to know our fellow passengers. Forty-two-year-old John and his son were celebrating Jeremy's high school graduation. As our trip unfolded, John became Michael's personal guide. He was sand sculpture adviser, geologist, and archaeologist. John conducted his own critter hunts and led Michael to his discoveries: lots of lizards, fire ants, Grand Canyon toads, deer, goats, heron, falcons, bighorn sheep and (whoopie) an actual Grand Canyon pink rattlesnake. Among the rest of us were people from as far away as Germany, as near as Utah, joining some 20,000 people who run the Colorado each year.

Back on river, we descended further into the canyon, regressing to the era of our planet's birth. Perhaps nowhere on earth is the tapestry of its geologically diverse fabric more on display. At the outset we were gazing at rock formations that existed long before the presence of humans. We were dangling our toes in Mesozoic Era waters, scanning the horizon for the beasts whose size would have been more proportionate to the canyon walls. By the day's end, we would be enclosed in formations that were 500 million years old, and by journey's close we would be staring at the volcanic remains of Vishnu Schist that were nearly two billion years old. If estimates of the earth's age of 4.5 billion years are accurate, we were looking at its midlife crisis.

Upon query, most of us would state simply that the Colorado created Grand Canyon. In reality, the long process that made the river's contribution the canyon's result began with that two billion-year-old rock. A combination of plate tectonics, sedimentary deposits, seismic activity, uplift, erosion and water flow from melting glaciers set the stage for the play of the Colorado verses the earth. The modern day canyon is an embryonic two million years old. Where humankind fits among the floodlights depends upon point of view. Are we pioneers who tamed a mighty river to expand a nation or are we traitors to a planetary trust, promoting progress at the sacrifice of all else?

As we drifted through Marble Canyon and noted the metal borings of a potential dam site, it was hard to fathom that the powers that be could ever justify flooding this rustic canvas. But indeed they had. They had contemplated it, and time and again, they had done just that. Dedicated by Ladybird Johnson in 1966, the Glen Canyon Dam stopped the mighty Colorado in its tracks and created the huge Lake Powell in Utah. It took 17 years for the backed up waters of the Colorado to fill Lake Powell. With a 2,000 mile shoreline, it's hard to imagine that there's a campaign underway with growing momentum to drain the nation's second largest manmade lake. But its proponents argue that Lake Powell is shrinking on its own, losing water to seepage and evaporation at an alarming rate. And they cite a moral responsibility to restore what man has destroyed.

The dam transformed the Colorado from a free raging river of fluctuating temperatures, with cleansing cycles of ebb and flow, flood and drought, with an artificially clear government controlled 46-degree electricity source. Its tides are no longer controlled by the cosmic forces of earth and moon or the seasonal rhythms of an undaunted river, but rather they are more likely determined by how many air conditioners are on in Phoenix, how much water is being tapped by Las Vegas hotels. Gone are scores of Mother Nature's deposited beaches and the many native plants and wildlife that lived their. And invading species vie with those remaining for limited natural resources. Also buried under the waters of Glen Canyon are an estimated 1,000 archaeological sites and their unknown treasures. Marble Canyon and Grand Canyon have avoided the fate of their sister canyon, but not without a struggle. If the Sierra Club hadn't successfully mounted a campaign to preserve the waters we traveled through, the Colorado may have been further damned and today's Grand Canyon may

have become a flooded and lost jewel.

At the end of each day on the river, our guides motored us onto one of the dwindling beach sites and we would step up to a fire line to bring from boats to beach our belongings and our camp. On that first night, the jigsaw cot on which we slept was almost impossible to assemble. Who could have known we'd all become pros by the end? And each night we were treated to a dinner fare to rival many restaurants.

In the chapel stillness of the evenings, we settled into books and journals. We became reacquainted with muscles that hadn't been used in awhile and lay on star facing cots, waiting for the show to begin. At first, that smear of white in the sky was merely a cloud to my unaccustomed eye. Then, it morphed to a piece of the cosmos that would never have been visible at home. Even satellites and shooting stars were on handy display. And on our last night, the moon's luster was so bright, I could have easily read by it.

By the third day, we had all adapted to the sliver of river life to which we were witnesses. I watched my family relish in the thrills of rapid waves that would dwarf the storm surf of our Atlantic beaches. We conquered 25 rapids of significance that day, one with an elevation drop of 25 feet and another that our guide insisted was a "12". On another, aptly named "Sockdollager", Michael was the only one left perched upon pontoon, while the rest of us were knocked to the boat's center. I relished in the suspension of any sense of time. Garrett would occasionally flip open his cell phone only to discover that still he had no signal. I bathed in the admiration the crew showed toward my mom and sat reluctantly by while my daughter Alex forged comfortable relationships with the teenage boys on board. We sat rapt at stories of long ago heroes and pioneers. Around each bend in the river there seemed to be another example of an inaugural voyage, a daring adventure, a tragic demise or an idiotic effort. We hiked canyons with passages so narrow that we passed heel-toe upon angles so steep that even those among us without fears of height were taken aback. We threw our bodies down mini rapids of crystal blue travertine waters and plunged beneath thunderous hundred foot waterfalls. We belly laughed during the boat-to-boat water fight that was our only salvation on the hottest of days that also had the fewest rapids and the slimmest slices of shade.

When we lolled into camp on our fifth and final night we were well-worn river travelers that could have as easily been cresting the brim of the twentieth century as the twenty-first. On river, sense of time and era had become irrelevant. The serenity of our daily backdrop, the stark contrasts of cliff and sky, the monotony of the cloudless heavens: these had become our home. At the outset of our river journey we had completed a survey given by a Yale graduate student studying attitudes toward the river and Grand Canyon. The questions were transparently biased toward the conservationist. However, with the privilege of running the powerful Colorado through a chasm unlike any other on planet earth behind us, it wasn't too difficult to understand the sway. Like the endangered creatures preserved for future generations in the captivity of zoos, is the magnificent Colorado River being held captive by the will of man? Perhaps the recent flash flood that pushed waters up the canyon walls, forcing people to scramble like ants, and the continued stresses that breach the walls of Glen Canyon Dam are signs of angry canyon gods fighting back. Or perhaps we had just spent the last week riding on the tears of a lost giant.

Silent Night

By Denise Bouchard

I didn't receive a call from the hospital the day that my father was dying. It was just an intrinsic knowing that I needed to be there and quickly.

The car decided to act up of course and wouldn't start, so I had to call AAA only to wait, wait, and wait some more. The New Year, soon arriving, didn't look all that optimistic.

My mother, always so devoted to my father was having lunch at my aunt's house. This showed how little we understood this to be my father's last day. If we'd had a call in the night, we would've slept there, not leaving his side. Still, in spite of no warnings or phone calls, I felt a growing sense that we should all get to the hospital that day. How does one call their mother and say, "I just have a feeling about Dad..."

When I finally arrived, his eyes grew large with relief and they locked onto mine. It was the only way left to hold him. It seemed that in the night his

weight had been stolen and only his bones being covered up by the blankets were left to trick us into thinking he was still there.

I was shocked; we knew that my father had cancer, but we thought he would improve and we'd even been encouraged in the past year when I was taking him almost daily for treatments.

Just the day before he'd looked more vital... Yet hadn't there been signs? He kept reaching out to something invisible, repeatedly pointing to the corner of the room's ceiling.

I left the room, which I will always regret, to call my mother and brother. I met my mother in the parking lot but she didn't believe that my father could've taken a turn for the worse so quickly. I found a nurse and asked her what was going on, but she was of no help or comfort. "I no know he no look too good..." was all she said say to us.

In the short time it took me to do these things, my father had slipped into another place; he wasn't gone, yet I couldn't reach him any longer.

In the long afternoon that followed, we listened to his increasingly labored breathing. My brother, mother and I put our hands over his when he was near the end; he sighed deeply and his head fell to the side.

Everything after that seemed to go into slow motion. My mother pounding on my older brother's chest saying, "It isn't true! You're lying! Dad can't be gone..." My own sobbing without being able to catch my breath... and then silence. Such a deep, empty silence.

The snow that I had been watching pile up on the window's sill all afternoon, was suddenly swept off neatly and completely as if a hand had come and cleared it. That sudden wind on a calm and snowy afternoon took him from us; taking with him, his laughter and his light.

It was hard to get through that next year of constant memory bombardment. The way he stoked his pipe as he gave out life lessons... His way of taking care of everyone. strangers included. The unique witticisms that had people crving

with laughter. The way he folded our towels for the beach; so carefully, like a bed-roll, as he'd learned in WWII. Dancing with my mother and teasing all of the grandchildren... Watching the gentle way he adored my daughter who would come screaming down the hallway in delight whenever he arrived.

One day I dropped my daughter off at school and I heard a rendition of "Silent Night" by Mannheim Steamroller. It was a new version back then and the most beautiful one of the Christmas classic that I had ever heard. At the end of the song, a strong wind comes up sounding like the very epitome of what happened the day of my father's death.

The song ends with a sleigh being driven away into the distance. I could see the snow again in my mind, clearly blown off of the sill just beyond the moment of his passing. I was so moved, realizing that there is still so much beauty in the world and that the universe speaks to us through words, music, art... It whispers, 'I know' and 'You're not alone.'

Perceptions on Halloween... Or the Year's Coming Attractions

By Nicole M. Bouchard

When I think of Halloween, I think of the bravery to be something you don't have the luxury to be all year round. Whether you don the costume of a hero, a princess, or a Disney villain with a little black silk, you are still you, but you're entertaining a latent facet of yourself. The masks and guises of Halloween are often associated with trickery and deception, but that night of the year has always held an element of truth for me.

I could always take toll of how the pendulum of the year would swing by how Halloween night went. Feelings were unveiled. Old foes showed up unannounced, traces of regret in the various pairs of eyes... their candy bags open looking for a bit of the past. The bad boy stops by even though he has other parties to attend if only to see the good fairy at the top of the stairs. Friends reveal malicious streaks... Some promises go unfulfilled as the moon rises higher yet they haven't arrived yet. A candle flares and breaks in a thoroughly creepy manner after a phone call signaling the end of a

friendship. New people arrive on the doorstep to join the fun. Others who've been there all the while stay true, smile, drink cider and rifle through the chocolate supply. Romances kindle. A life changes. Career paths veer. New work begins.

I would wait in the window as a child on Halloween night for a preview of the year to come. I gave out my sweet side.

Halloween and I know something about truth. Besides, and I say this with a laugh, I've found that few are ever so false as they are for Christmas. My two favorite holidays have flip-flopped their conventionality on me.

© 2008 *The Write Place At the Write Time*

This on-line magazine and all the content contained therein is copyrighted.