

**THREE NAKED LADIES**

**PLAYING CELLOS**

An Arpeggio of Sixteen  
Unique Pieces

Reader's Guide



COMPILED AND EDITED BY MARY SULLIVAN ESSEFF

*Three Naked Ladies Playing Cellos*  
Reader's Guide: first edition

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“The Day I Should Have Died” by Don Windle is a factual, historical account. Within the remaining pieces, which are fictional, any similarity to real people, living or dead, is purely coincidental. However, if you recognize anyone, either by name or situation, the author responsible sincerely hopes you find it a respectful resemblance.

ISBN 0-9672220-4-4  
EPRN D222.9232.Z222

Published in three-dimensional format and on the Internet in the United States of America at <http://www.damnyankee.com>.

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## *Introduction*

I wish we could say we had planned this Reader's Guide from day one of the conception of the Anthology, but the fact is, just as *Three Naked Ladies Playing Cellos* went to press, I awoke at 6:30 one morning with an idea (not a usual experience for a night owl).

When I'm not plying my trade as a trainer or writing (fiction), I'm reading (or praying that I'll soon be able to write again). During this period, I decided to read a few of Oprah's picks. I had read two and was working on a third when I began to wonder how she selected each book. I thought perhaps she looked for a formula, but the stories were as diverse as were our Anthology pieces. At the end of the first book, *The Deep End of the Ocean*, I was surprised (and delighted) to find the interview with author Jacquelyn Mitchard and the thought-provoking questions for discussion. Although I had enjoyed the books, the questions and interview made me rethink the various themes in the book and how they impacted my life.

Coming from an Instructional Technologist's background where our company motto is "Learning is fun! If it's not fun, it's not learning," I immediately saw the potential of adding an instructional/fun element to our Anthology stories that were already fabulous in their own right. I emailed each writer and asked: Why don't we have a series of questions for each story/true account/poem that could be used in discussion groups, classroom settings, or private meditations that reflect the themes within the pieces. As one writer responded: "Often, when forced to sit in on discussions, I find myself thinking, 'Why don't they talk about the REAL issues here, instead of this stuff?'" Even, or maybe, especially, the title poem evokes a myriad of thought-provoking questions. Why did we select a title for a book that has nothing to do with naked ladies? (Check out the questions for discussion on page 1).

In further researching other Anthologies, I found no similar Reader's Guides (except in books developed for the classroom). However, I did find a whole series of great books with accompanying Discussion Questions on the Penguin Putnam

Publisher's website. In fact, the site contained a whole list of great books complete with discussion questions, author interviews, as well as suggestions on how to form a Reading Group. I make no claim that their site is the only such site, but I urge you to see: <http://www.penguinputnam.com/clubppi/reading/>.

We, at [DamnYankee.com](http://DamnYankee.com), are proud to offer another forum for discussion through the Reader's Guide developed for our Anthology which is available both through our website and as a print version.

We sincerely hope you have as much fun reading and discussing our pieces as we did in writing them. We also hope these questions offered for discussion are just a starting point for you. We see ourselves in everything we write, in each character we bring to life. We wonder if and how you will see yourself in our characters, how our themes relate to your life, how our piece affects your very soul. A few of the many themes we explore are: the environment, cultural diversity, freedom, love of God and neighbor, effect of war on people's lives, the impact of progress on both individuals and the community, the need for communication within families, suicide, AIDS, financial struggles, the plight of the Homeless, fate and predestination, truth, obedience, time travel, faith, monetary values, lawlessness, following/breaking rules, and the afterlife.

We suggest after reading the story, you discuss it before reading the Author Interview. Pause to read the Author Interview for greater insight, then resume the discussion. Remember, the Discussion Questions are only a starting point. Every reader gets a slightly (or diametrically) different meaning from every experience. Experience our pieces. And most of all: enjoy!

We welcome all your responses and can be reached through our publisher: [editor@damnyankee.com](mailto:editor@damnyankee.com) or via snail mail at the address on the copyright page.

Peace and blessings,  
*Mary Sullivan Esseff*

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# *Three Naked Ladies Playing Cellos*

*Michelle Buckman*

## *The Poem*

Read the poem: *Three Naked Ladies Playing Cellos*, then discuss it using these or other points the poem suggests to you.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. Why is this Anthology titled: *Three Naked Ladies Playing Cellos*? Do you feel the cover is offensive because there are naked ladies depicted?
2. Why is this Anthology subtitled: *An Arpeggio of Sixteen Unique Pieces*? Do you ever have different themes going on at the same time in your life? How do you juggle all these things: romance, spirituality, passion, strife, happiness, depression, etc.?
3. Read the poem out loud. How do you experience (or don't experience) freedom in your lives?
4. Some commercial artists create strictly for money. Do you think this is right or wrong? Some writers spew out book after book just to make a buck. Is it still art?
5. What do you think of art that doesn't move you? Does it still have value if you can't relate to it? Do you read a book because it was your favorite author's newest release then discover it has no magic like his/her previous books? How does that make you feel?
6. Is art more valuable to you if a critic proclaims it valuable, or if it touches something within you? Have you ever read a book because of the hype surrounding it, then wonder what you

missed? On the opposite end, have you read books that critics have panned, but have had an impact on your life?

### *Author Interview*

While the idea for the cover of this Anthology started out with humorous intent, the image grew in my mind until I could see them clearly, three nymphs from some mystical time playing their music into the sea breeze. They wove their spell around me until I put them to paper. And there, I saw it, saw what all artists know: We don't play music to please others, we don't write to entertain, we don't paint to give the public something to hang on the wall. We express what is in us. It spills forth into the air, onto the page, across the canvas because it must be released, and then we let others share in our experience.

The audience reaches out and touches this burning imagination, this magical creation that blooms from an unseen source. Sometimes the magic is understood. Sometimes it's shrugged away. But that's not important. We don't create for outsiders. We create because it's within us.

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# *Love Made Visible*

*Mary Sullivan Esseff*

## *The Story*

Khalil is called from his bed to help his Pop trek through a blizzard to answer the parish priest's cry for help. Throughout the week, he runs the gamut of emotions from being ashamed of his Pop to discovering what unconditional love means. He knows the phrase, love one another, but to a nine-year-old it was only a saying. He learns something of its true meaning when he sees it expressed by his saintly father.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. No matter what your age, you can remember specific events that changed your life. Discuss what they were and how they changed your life.
2. What is a "culm" heap? How did that constant burning affect the environment then? What kinds of "culm heaps" are affecting our present environment? Our world? Our town? Our home?
3. Khalil's parents were immigrants from Lebanon and he grew up in a multi-cultural environment. How did Khalil manage to transcend the two cultures in which he lived? How is this aspect of the story still as apropos today as it was in the 40's? How is life different (the same) then and now?
4. Duty: Is duty important in your life? Do you ever feel overwhelmed by it? What are some of the responsibilities that Khalil's family shouldered? What are some you carry? How can you ease the burden? How did Pop bear what Khalil felt were burdensome tasks?

5. Pride: When is it good to be proud? When does Pride become sinful?
6. Have you ever followed in someone's footsteps in the snow? What about in real life? How does it feel? Does it make you feel stressed? Proud? Do you think Khalil felt he could follow in his Pop's footsteps?
7. Why did the author use a title from one of Khalil Gibran's poems? What does "Love Made Visible" mean to you? How do you demonstrate your love for God and others in your life? Who is Khalil Gibran? Bring one of his writings to class next time.
8. The setting is during World War II. Is that time period relevant today? How did the war affect Khalil's family? Has war affected your family? What about the small "wars" we experience on a daily basis?
9. What did Khalil learn about his father? His brother? The priest? Himself? How did these lessons change Khalil? What do these lessons teach you? What can you do differently in your life?
10. Do you see yourself in one or more of the characters? Have you ever experienced similar situations? What are your family gatherings like? Discuss the food, music, stories, personalities.
11. How did you react to the way Pop served the priest? Discuss.
12. How did you react to the priest? How did you feel when he treated Khalil's Pop so coldly? How did you feel when he was accused of stealing the church funds to buy the new car? Did your view change later?

13. Discuss Repentance. How did Khalil feel when he usually went to confession? How did he feel this time? How did the priest react to Khalil's "mortal" sin? Do you ever make too much or too little of hurtful things you have done?
14. Discuss the redeeming qualities of various characters (*Abouna, Zachary*). Think of those around you? Discuss whether you look for the good, rather than the bad, in people you know.
15. What is the effect of lies, rumors, innuendo on individuals, the family, the community?
16. Some people put limits on their love; some people are able to love unconditionally, without prerequisites. Discuss the way Pop loved God, his family, Abouna. Discuss your experience in giving and receiving love.
17. How does Khalil view obedience? How does his Pop view it? What rules do you have to follow that you wish you didn't have to follow? How would you react if you broke the rules, or the rules you set for someone were broken?
18. Discuss the role of Khalil's brother in the family. Do you think he wanted that role?
19. Despite all the shortcomings the priest had, Khalil's brother still considered it a great honor to welcome him into their home. Why? Has such a confusing scenario ever happened to you? Discuss.
20. How did Khalil's view of his Pop change over the course of the week? How did the events change him?
21. What character do you most identify with? Why?

## *Author Interview*

Q. Where did the idea for writing *Love Made Visible* come from?

A. I grew up as an all-American girl. My ancestors had long left their ethnicity behind them. When I met my husband, Peter, in 1964, I was drawn into the fascinating Mid-East culture: food, music, loveable characters, tribalism, life-long grudges, deep emotions that could change in a moment's notice. Above all else were the stories: life in the Village high in the mountains of Lebanon, the fantastic journey from the old world to the new, a family (from father to youngest son) that had spanned more than a century. There were the tales told in awe of the saintliness of the father (grandfather, great-grandfather to some) who had died before the youngest son had reached adulthood.

For many years, my husband and I dreamed of going to the Village, but we were a young married couple with children to raise, a company to nurture, and graduate degrees to complete. In the mid-eighties, an unknown man knocked on my brother-in-law's door and announced he was a second cousin who had emigrated from Lebanon to Australia. Not until that time did any of the US family know there were living relatives in both Australia and Lebanon. The family had lost contact during WWII and because of the subsequent strife in the Middle East were never able to reconnect.

Within months, we traveled to Australia and met Peter's three first cousins, children of his mother's sister. Soon after, despite the on-going war, Peter traveled to Lebanon and met four other first cousins, one who lived in his mother's family home. They took him to visit the land that his father had left almost a century before and proudly pointed to the fruit-bearing fig tree that still grew there. The plot of land was still known as Jhilius' land. We have since visited many times and have researched the genealogy of the family tree. The family and culture have become part of my life, and I can't help but write about them.

- Q. Does that mean this story is really a true account?
- A. The characters are definitely based on an amalgamation of personalities I've met throughout the years and the tale might have happened, but it blends together many different elements to create the story told here. I have written many other "Khalil" stories, which will be published in time.
- Q. You hit many themes. What do you hope your reader will take from this story?
- A. First and foremost: God is Love. If we love God, all else comes easily to us. Every moment, I beg God to let me love. If I can love completely, selflessly, I am in complete union with God. Nothing is more important than that. That's why it was easy for Pop to serve the priest. He did it to serve God with joy. He offered thanks to God first, then did his job. Second: Obedience means giving joy to someone. Think of being a young child again. When we obeyed our parents, it made them happy and it made us happy to know they were happy. When we serve to make someone happy, it brings joy to all involved. When we are obedient and do it for God, out of joy, then we are truly blessed. Third: Truth is absolute. Lies only muddy the water. We should seek and offer the truth in all we do.

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# *Goat Lady*

*Douglas C. Smyth*

## *The Story*

A traveling peddler loses his professional detachment when he realizes the extent of the goat lady's vulnerability. The story is about that things are not what they seem, and that some things are inexorable once we intervene. We can't take back what we've done and it may turn out badly even if our intentions were good. It's also about how shiny and pretty isn't everything; the goat lady had a life and it was taken from her partly from misplaced concern, partly because of greed.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. What do we lose when we modernize?
2. Should people be left alone to live in their own ways, even if those look destructive and irrational to observers on the outside?
3. Why are goats beautiful? Or any other animal, for that matter.
4. When you see beautifully manicured horse farms, or upscale country residences that were once old farm houses, do you ever think about what was lost to create this "restored" farmhouse that is featured in House Beautiful.
5. Goat Lady is about the people who are left behind. What happens to them when "progress" comes to town?
6. What would be a more humane solution to the Goat Lady's dilemma? Discuss.

## *Author Interview*

- Q. Why did you write *Goat Lady*? Are there certain themes you want the reader to be aware of?
- A. The story is based on a real farm and a real goat lady and it was inspired when a friend remarked on what a beautiful, upscale horse farm it had become. That made me think about what had been lost.
- Q. Is it based on some factual incident?
- A. Incident no, but the setting and the person, yes.
- Q. What genre of fiction do you write ? Why? Where do you get your ideas?
- A. Mainstream, science-fiction/fantasy and historical, I've written all four. My ideas come from reading, from experience, from a sudden inspiration—wherever I can get them. What I have been unable to do is write fiction on demand, decide, like a friend of mine that mysteries are easy to sell, so therefore I'll write mysteries. It hasn't worked that way with me, even when I've tried.
- Q. Why and when did you decide to be a writer?
- A. My family has had writers going back to Nathaniel Hawthorne in every generation with the exception of my father. From my grandfather and back there have been both Hawthornes and Smyths writing, so I've always wanted to be a writer. When I first married, however, my wife told me I couldn't make a living that way, so I stopped writing for about 17 years. I began again about the time I was separated 22 years ago, and I remarried a writer and have been writing ever since—although I've done other things to live on until a few years ago. I can't really say why I have to write, except that it just feels right when I write and it doesn't when I stop.

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# *Invisibility*

*Gabriel Stevens*

## *The Story*

The homeless depend on others for their very lives. Some of the homeless have jobs and yet can't afford even the most rudimentary living spaces.

A high percentage of the homeless have been institutionalized for a wide range of disabilities in the past. Due to a decision of the courts they may elect to walk away from the institution and live on the streets if they so choose. Once there, they seldom go back. Many are so incapacitated they don't know how to go back.

Some manage to stay clean and even send their children to school even though they live in cars.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. What does the author mean by the "cloak of invisibility"? Did you ever want to wear such a cloak? Discuss.
2. Why do you think Howie's friends called him "Professor"?
3. Who were the "goobers"? How would you describe the goobers' reactions to the Professor and his friends? Why can't they stop at one place for very long?
4. Why did the Professor describe Bradley as a "jackroller"?
5. Why did Fat Jimmy get angry with the Professor? Can you imagine what it's like being without shoes? Needing shoes so badly you don't care if they were filled with holes?
6. Why didn't the Professor want to go to the library with Circus Jimmy?

7. Who was the woman the Professor was waiting for? Why didn't the woman recognize him?
8. Does the writer portray the homeless accurately? Have you ever known someone who was homeless? How would you feel if you had everything, then suddenly nothing?
9. Why can't the homeless stop at any one place for very long?
10. Did you think that Circus Jimmy was telling the truth about his "hide" far up above the city? Why would he lie?

### *Author Interview*

Q. Why did you write Invisibility?

A. Invisibility was actually a well researched story about the homeless. The story is part of a much larger project, a novel called "*The Sardine Stone.*" *The Sardine Stone* is about the travels of this stone which ends at Armegedden. I wanted to explore the "what if" of a world that is forced to contemplate its own structure.

Q. Is it based on some factual incident?

A. No.

Q. What genre do you feel your writing fits into?

A. I write in mainstream and in the speculative fiction arenas.

Q. What are the reader demographics that you had in mind when you wrote this?

A. I was pointing at an intelligent and thoughtful audience of adult readers. The story raises questions about the nature of this world culture we have built up, by stretching the social parameters in some cases to the breaking point.

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# *Options*

*Terry Burns*

## *The Story*

A young man in a cheap motel room has had enough. He's thinking about things no sane person should ever consider. Yet at the critical moment, fate intervenes and a former girlfriend shows up to talk him through his difficult period. He discovers he's contemplating a permanent solution for a temporary problem, and discovers he may have more attractive options.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. What is your first clue that the character intends to commit suicide?
2. Do you think he would have gone through with it if the woman hadn't shown up?
3. Is there ever a time when such drastic action is appropriate? Why or why not?
4. What do you know about this character? What do you not know about him? What makes you sympathetic toward him?
5. Does the weapon itself become a character in this piece? Why or why not?
6. What would you say is the moral of the story?

## *Author Interview*

- Q. Why did you decide to be a writer and when?
- A. I consider myself a storyteller, not a writer. I'm a 5th generation Irish storyteller and a 3rd generation Texas teller of

tall tales. Telling stories comes as naturally as breathing to me, and dates back to early childhood. Writing is just one means of conveying them.

Q. Is this story based on a real life experience?

A. Rather not say. But I will say it came from a very difficult time in my life, probably my worst, and if it has an authentic ring to it, there's a reason for it.

Q. Is there more to this story?

A. It's a story I didn't think I could write, but since this short story have begun to do just that, using the short story itself as the opening.

Q. There's a dark edge, a fuzziness to this story, why?

A. I wanted to try and get the reader inside the head of somebody that's in this mode. Not to glorify it or suggest it as an alternative, but to help people understand really bad depression is very real, and it can make things sound sensible that otherwise wouldn't even be considered. Nobody is exempt if the situation is right. We have to be on our guard.

Q. It has a positive ending, but not a very strong resolution.

A. Depression doesn't work like that. Overcoming this situation itself is a major victory, but battling depression is still a one day at a time, gut-wrenching battle until we wear it down and eventually make it go away. To write this piece and put a happily-ever-after ending on it would negate it entirely.

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© 2000 Terry Burns

# *Warriors*

*Michael Ostlund*

## *The Story*

After more than four years of combat Major O'Malley understood the hazards but still relished the fight. His team was the best, and he owed it to his son.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. Why do you think Major O'Malley frequently reenlisted for action in Vietnam?
2. What motivates men in combat? Do you know anyone who served in combat? Which war? Many of our young men today have served in Bosnia or the Gulf War. How are these men treated the same/differently from those who served in Vietnam, Korea, WWII?
3. Why was Major O'Malley unhappy with the honor of flying the Commanding General's helicopter?
4. How does the author describe Major O'Malley's reaction to danger? What part does courage play?
5. What part does loyalty play? And to whom or what?
6. How did Major O'Malley's age factor in his decision to accept the promotion?
7. How would you describe Major O'Malley's personal crew aboard his "Gambler"? What was the role of Major O'Malley's Gambler helicopter in this mission?
8. What turned the ground situation from cold to hot?

9. Why didn't the Colonel in charge send in reinforcements?
10. Who received the Congressional Medal of Honor? Why?
11. What role does ego, honor, and reputation play in the decision-making process?

*Author Interview*

- Q. Why did you write Warriors?
- A. Warriors was written first and foremost for entertainment purposes but also to stimulate thought about those who have served, sacrificed and given so much to their country.

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# *The Pendant*

*Michelle Buckman*

## *The Story*

Allysia is a young housewife with a secret she's afraid to tell her husband. Because of her superstitious nature, she weighs every turn of event as an omen forecasting her future. When she loses her pendant, a love-gift given to her by her husband years earlier, she begins to see everything through despairing eyes. The trick in the story, as in life, is to separate what is true from what we only perceive to be true, and to draw factual conclusions. Unfortunately, as some famous person said, "perception is reality."

## *Discussion Questions*

1. A person's perception of the world around them can ultimately affect what happens to them by changing their reactions to the people and events in their lives. From whose perspective is "The Pendant" told? How does it shape the story?
2. The story opens with a description of the pendant, alerting the reader that something significant will happen because of the pendant. What does the pendant represent to Allysia? Why is she so attached to it? What does the loss of it mean?
3. The author doesn't provide a thorough description of each character, but rather pulls out details through Allysia's viewpoint. How does this help or hinder your vision of the characters. Share and compare your visualization with other readers.
4. How does the communication and/or lack of communication between Allysia and Chris add to the tension?

5. Have you ever looked at a situation and let your beliefs or superstitions rule the moment and affect the outcome? Do you feel Allysia's superstitions will affect the outcome of her marriage, or is the future controlled by fate?
6. Do you think Allysia's suspicions about her husband fooling around were real or contrived?
7. If finances weren't a problem for this couple, would Allysia's superstitions have played as strong a role? Would taking a job help or hinder her marriage?
8. Allysia and Chris's marital problems are brought out slowly, like many fine cracks showing up in porcelain. How many different "cracks" did you catch, and did they seem legitimate, or merely everyday events enlarged by Allysia's perception?
9. What does the end imply? Do you believe the implication?
10. How would the story have differed if it had been told by Chris or one of the children?

### *Author Interview*

Q: What inspired this story?

A: My husband actually gave me a floating heart pendant while we were dating, and during one-month period I lost and found it three times. I laughed. But then I thought that if I were superstitious, I would have taken it as a sign to mean the end of "us." So, I created Allysia, a woman who would believe such a thing.

Q: Do you feel things happen according to fate?

A: No. I believe we are all blessed with freewill. We create our own success and failures in life. Some things may seem like fate, but how we react to them, like stepping through an open door of opportunity, is our chance to control our own destiny.

Some people are willing to sit and let life deal what it may. I'm the opposite. I feel compelled to set off on foot to find the keys that unlock the doors.

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# *Another Time, Another Place*

*James Ross Wiley*

## *The Story*

Young Stephen first meets Mrs. Cotter while trespassing on her property, playing hide and seek, in the dark hours of late evening. She creeps up to him as he hides in the damp, rank darkness of her hedges, a long butcher knife in her quivering, bony hand. After being scared out of his wits, Stephen avoids her until several years later when he calls on her to shovel the snow from her sidewalks. She looks even much older than that first time they met, if that's possible.

Older and more mature himself, Stephen sits in the old woman's living room after a freezing day's work, drinks a toddy to warm his body by her fireplace, while the young boy and the incredibly old woman discuss growing up and learning. He dozes off and dreams of far away times and places, with a teenaged Marie Cotter.

Or was it a dream? Had she hypnotized him, cast a witch's spell on him or had he actually traveled in time to visit her as a pretty young girl?

So vivid his experiences, he's certain it was more than a dream. If that's true, that he actually had met the young Marie Cotter, then it must mean that she's nearly a century and a half old, and if that's possible, that he has actually traveled beyond the barriers of time, changing his life forever.

## *Discussion Questions*

Fiction deals with "truth," whereas nonfiction work with "facts." Fiction asks "what if?" You must be able to dream to create, be able to imagine to attempt anything new. Albert Einstein, one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century, is quoted: "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Why would a

scientist say such a thing, and what do you suppose he might have meant by it?

1. What is “time?” When does “now” become “then?” And how does the future become “now,” then become “then,” in the past? How long does a “moment” last?
2. Think back to when you were very young, and you might have been frightened by someone, a very old person, or someone otherwise very different than people you were accustomed to then.
3. In light of how you may have felt then, were Stephen’s reactions about Mrs. Cotter justified? Would you have felt the way he did, or if not, what might you have expected of her?
4. Do we too often judge people based on their appearances and what other people tell us about them? How do you react to people who are different from us when you know little about them? What forms our judgments—“stereotypes?” Why aren’t stereotypes reliable?
5. Suppose Stephen never had met Mrs. Cotter that second time. Based on their conversation about learning and growing up, becoming mature, how might Stephen have turned out? Or how do you think Stephen \*did\* turn out after talking with Mrs. Cotter?
6. Consider a really interesting older adult you may have met, someone who captivated you with their wisdom and knowledge, their “persona.” What do you suppose made them the way they were? What if you had met them when they were your age; would you have liked them? What if you had lived as they had, grown up as they did; what would you be like now?

7. Mrs. Cotter seemed to know exactly when it was going to snow again, soon. She seemed to expect Stephen to return. What else might she have had in mind for their next meeting?
8. Is time travel really impossible? Why? Or, why not? What, exactly is “time?” Can you hold it in your hand, or make a picture of it?
9. Imagine you are about to take such a trip in time, backward. You are about to meet your great-great-grandparents. What will you tell them about how things are today, compared to the way they lived? How will you describe electricity, television, computers or microwave ovens? Would they believe you if you told them men had landed on the moon and returned to Earth to describe their adventures?
10. Has any older person started a conversation with you, “When I was your age... ?” Suppose you sat with that person and asked questions, thinking about writing a story like Stephen’s, as though you had met that person as a young person, the same age you are. What would you ask to learn about what life was like then? What details would you put in your story? Or, what details would you want to tell someone who might visit you from the future?

### *Author Interview*

- Q. How did “Another Time, Another Place” come to be? Was there a real Stephen or Marie Cotter?
- A. All stories come from who we were and who we may have been, or who we might have become. All our experiences are mixed with the “what if” tools of a writer to create something which never before existed. So, in many ways, there have been many Stephens and Maries. Mine are a mixture of many people, and yet are not any one person.
- Q. Is it really possible, those things Stephen experienced?

- A. I don't know. Neither do can I say they are impossible. In fiction we explore these things, knowing that all life, all experience deals with people, not just "things." We explore other people, imagining how they may react, and in imagining, we create other possible worlds within our world.
- Q. Have you known people like Stephen, Marie, and her sister and the other people in "Another Time, Another Place"?
- A. Yes, and no. I have known no one quite like any of those people, yet I have known similar people who fascinated me, who seemed to store within themselves much history and knowledge I can't know, unless I listen to them, try to get them to reveal what they know and feel. It seems to me that if I only know what I know, rely on what I have experienced, I am missing out on so much. I want to understand other people, try to feel what they might feel.
- Q. Then you know such unusual people? Have they affected you as Marie Cotter changed Stephen?
- A. Everyone we meet is "unusual," if we but take time to look deeper than the surface of what we see. If we could experience what they have, we would inevitably be changed, somehow. Imagining what that change would be like is the stuff of speculation, the "what if" of fiction, whereby we attempt to explain our existence, to give it significance, importance in the perspective of the vastness of the universe, of all time. We are not only who we are, but inside us also exists potential, to become who we could become, if we only look for it, turn it over in our hand and see what it looks like from all angles and decide to try to become it. Even then, we have to know that since we don't know the future, yet, we can't know what we will become.

But if we never try, never look beyond "now," we limit ourselves to what will be. I believe we have to take a positive role in this and mold not only who we are, but who we were, as a map to who we will become.

## *Related Titles*

Perhaps Stephen and his further experiences will appear as a full length novel or novella soon, in electronic book fashion. Some of his childhood friends will appear in stories of their own, on the Internet and in ebook format, too.

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# *The Third Virgin*

*Lee Smith*

## *The Story*

The Third Virgin is a tale of dystopia and yet hope at the end of the current cultural earth cycle. The world is staggered by nuclear warfare between small nations in which no one is sure who fired the latest rocket and so retaliation is scattered like buckshot. Iraq explodes bombs in the United States hoping that the United States will think that it is someone else who is to blame. In the face of this chaos the money systems not backed by gold break down and big business crumbles along with the social scene. The world is then ready when in Macau a young girl discovers a beautiful stone called the Sardine Stone. This stone reveals the future to those capable of the trance it induces. The stone tells the girl that she must carry the stone to St. Michael's Monastery in, Arkhangelsk, Russia, on foot. Most believe that this will precipitate Armageddon. Some think that this will mean the end of the world, while others believe it will mark a new beginning. Others believe that the horror of nuclear war has brought on insanity. The first and second virgins die en route. This story is about the third carrier of the stone, but mostly it is about a news reporter who is assigned to get the story.

## *Discussion Questions:*

1. How do religions come to be? For instance, how did Hinduism come to be?
2. What event/s caused Christianity to capture the public consciousness of the time and initiated the Catholic Church?
3. What is the essence of faith?

4. If the currencies of the world are simply printed, and depend entirely on the citizen's faith in the country that printed it, then what happens to the value of the money script when the country is in shambles?
5. How long would it take for someone to walk from Macau to Mecca to Jerusalem to Arkhangelsk on foot?
6. If the currencies of the world are simply printed, and no one receives money except in exchange for equal value, then what is given for newly minted money which is not replacing old and worn out script, and where does this value go from there?
7. If there were no communication satellites, or mail systems, how would a correspondent get his story from Vietnam to the United States?
8. If money had no value, how would you obtain next week's groceries, and how would you continue to obtain them?
9. Do you think that if your government became ineffective that there would be no government at all? Would your area become lawless?
10. How would people protect themselves from intruders if all if the law broke down?

*Author Interview:*

- Q. How did you get involved in e-publishing?
- A. E-publishing brings the excitement back into publishing. For years the book makers have been tightening the perimeters within which fiction is forced to exist. This is based on marketing decisions and not on art. When the marketing department makes these decisions, new works are not permitted to explore. They must conform to what made money yesterday. And as the hand of the marketeers tightens the

parameters of fiction will become more and more echoes of the past. With the small and new presses experimenting, we will discover different paradigms. Already we see things like email novels being delivered chapter by chapter, novellas being offered in their own smaller spaces, individual short stories not being constrained by a magazine's policies and space. This is exciting.

- Q. What are your experiences working with such a diversity of writers?
- A. It's like herding pigeons, but the results are perplexing, fun, different, fresh, awesome on occasion.

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© 2000 Lee Smith

# *Unalone*

*Cindy Appel*

## *The Story*

This is story about a lonely person’s “awakening” to love... to show that no matter how isolated or down on yourself you are, there is always the potential to love and to be loved in return. Love is what makes us “human” whatever our outward appearance may be, and it is by love we define ourselves and place in society.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. It has been said that there are only three basic plots in fiction—man against man, man against nature, man against himself. Which basic plot device do you think best describes the main conflict in “Unalone”? Why do you feel that way?
2. Many studies have shown that we tend to be attracted to others who possess similar characteristics and upbringing to our own, yet many times we observe that “opposites attract”. Are Calinda and Loved Ones “opposites” or “similar” in their mutual attraction?
3. Do you feel that science fiction allows the writer to explore more deeply into the human psyche than is possible in other genres? Give reasons to support your position.

## *Author Interview*

- Q. Was this story based on a real-life experience?
- A. No, not really. I’ve never been in space or met an alien before! (At least not that I remember...) I’m a sentimental person at heart although I display a “tough exterior” a lot of the time to protect myself from being hurt, very similar to Calinda’s actions in the story. So, in that way, you could say the character of Calinda is somewhat auto-biographical.

Q. Why do you enjoy writing Science Fiction?

A. I've always been a big fan of SF since I could remember. I don't write much SF anymore since it's such a competitive field, but I always enjoyed the freedom SF gives the writer to place a character in any setting, any era, any culture at any point in history. I feel that SF illuminates the current state of our society by using allegory—which is why shows such as the original “Star Trek” were so popular. It demonstrated that no matter how far from earth we roam in the next centuries, we are still “human” at heart and display very human characteristics.

Q. I know you write a delightful humor column. Is it easier/more difficult to write this genre of fiction? Why? Where do you get your ideas?

A. Humor is a very difficult animal. I'm not sure I've mastered it well yet, but I do receive comments that folks find my columns “humorous” at times... Some days the ideas just flow and other days—yuck! It's like pulling teeth out of an angry baboon! Most of my ideas come from my life—my kids, spouse, activities, observations of our culture and society and a lot from reading the newspaper and watching the news on TV. Sometimes I get suggestions of topics from friends and readers and I explore those as well. I think column writing is easier when you don't “self-censor” your thoughts, you just let them flow like a journal entry. Of course, you have to re-write and revise religiously afterwards, but when I attempt to “censor” myself I find my creative juices drying up.

Q. Why did you decide to be a writer and when?

A. I'm not sure I ever made a conscious decision. I know I wrote short stories (and illustrated them) when I was a child and that I took Creative Writing in high school, but people always told me that writing wasn't a “real job” and encouraged me to follow other pursuits. (I began college as a film student and still enjoy watching and critiquing films. One day I may return and become a great director!) After I married, I'd find myself between jobs, babies, frustrations still writing down my thought and feelings--pages and pages of them! One day I

decided that I should at least try to make a little money from my ramblings, so I subscribed to Writer's Digest and read all the books on writing in the public library of our small town. I've been amazed at the successes I've had in the writing field since I'm a totally unorganized person and I have zilch business sense. I have to say that I'm happiest when I'm at the keyboard and the words are flowing off my fingertips and onto the screen--and I'm a lot more ornery in my old age, so when folks tell me to get a "real job" and stop writing, I tell them what they can do with it!

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# *The Big Black Shiny Cadillac*

*b.j. lawry*

## *The Story*

The story was inspired by an actual five-day trip across the United States with my mother who, indeed, was a little bird of a thing scared out of her mind to have been more than five miles away from home, and with a daughter/driver in whom she had no confidence to boot.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. Why does Sharlene decide to take her mother on such a long car trip? Have you ever been caught in a similar situation? Discuss some of the car trips you've taken and what you've done to keep occupied. Do you ever create fantasies to keep you or your children occupied?
2. How could you describe the mother's attitude toward Sharlene? How does a companion's attitude affect you when you're driving, especially on long distances?
3. How does Sharlene respond to her mother's comments? How would you have responded?
4. How could you describe this mother-daughter relationship? How would you and your mother (daughter) survive on a long trip? Do you think the trip would have been different if it had been a son traveling with his father?
5. Do you believe Sharlene's mother had grounds for her fears and anxieties, especially in regard to the black Cadillac?
6. Should Sharlene have listened to her mother and called the

police? What would you have done? Has something similar ever happened to you either on a trip or even within your own home or neighborhood?

7. Were you surprised when the policeman came to the door? How do you believe Sharlene would respond to the officer's question? How would you have responded to his question?
8. What if this story had a different ending, that the black Cadillac had been following them? Have you ever been pursued or stalked? What would you have done?
9. You won't hurt either of our feelings if you get MAD at us, that is, add, modify, or delete them outright. It's a process we teach to get the person writing the materials to zero in on what's relevant and what's not. We only suggest. You make the decisions.

### *Author Interview*

- Q. Why did you write this story? Was it based on something that really happened?
- A. It took me ten years to realize this event could serve as the bud for a story. By then, I was in a position to laugh about it, so that the story just flowed out of me. I wanted to show the too-often-taut relationship between a mother and her daughter who has become a woman and how that relationship, the lack of a sense of humor, the apprehension of life itself, can get an otherwise nice little lady in a heap of trouble. It was my first attempt at a kind of comic spin-off of what truly was a miserable situation. Writing it also made me realize what a wealth of fictive gold there was in my mother.

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# *Straight From The Heart*

*Jo Ann Yolanda Hernández*

## *The Story*

It is Christmas, a time for telling others you love them— and exchanging presents. Hilario accepts an expensive gift from his girlfriend, but cannot give her his present until several days later. She is expecting something the next day. Helped by Armando, his cousin, Hilario gives Amelia a gift straight from his heart.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. What are the expectations of holidays that make individuals feel they need to give expensive presents? Where has the value of giving a gift that is thought out and worked for gone? Is a gift like that more or less valuable than an expensive gift? Have you ever been given a gift you know the person had to think about? How did that make you feel?
2. The author gives us a clue that the reason Hilario didn't have a present was because he had used his money for something else? What was it? How did you feel when you learned what Hilario had used his money for? Discuss.
3. Why do you think Amelia was able to appreciate the gift Hilario brought her? Why?
4. What kind of opportunities do you think are provided for a young Latino boy to earn his own way? What opportunities does society provide young minority boys to earn money at a respectable job with a decent salary thereby giving them a sense of self-respect?
5. Where else could Hilario have gone to ask for help with his problem? Have you ever been in a situation that felt hopeless

and you didn't know who to ask for help? Who would you ask for help?

6. Why was it at first so difficult for Hilario to write the note to Amelia? What happened when he wrote the truth to her? How would you have described your situation? Write what you think the note said.
7. How do you think Hilario felt about himself after Amelia accepted his gift? Why? Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever had a similar experience?
8. How was Hilario's situation similar to one you have experienced? Do you see how Hilario's predicament could have happened to anyone? Explain

#### *Author Interview*

Q. Why did you write this story? Was it based on a real-life experience?

A. This is a true story. A young man told me his experience when his girlfriend bought him an expensive Valentine present. He and his cousin devised the plan to save his relationship with his girlfriend.

Q. From your bio, I know that you are active in women's issues, especially minorities and Latinos. What impact have you made (or hope to make) through your writing?

A. My stories represent the middle-class Latinos. IN the market today, there are no stories or literature that represents the middle-class Latinos. There is a need to cement the American Identity in all its aspects and cultures.

Q. I know you have won several awards. How has that helped you?

A. When I won the Latino/Chicano Literary Prize from University of CA Irvine, I was ecstatic. I felt for the first time I had been

acknowledged as a Latina writer. Being raised with privilege, internalized classism made me feel as I was not worthy to call myself Latina. I had to overcome this before I could accept myself as a writer worthy of representing the Latino culture. I have my unique voice to add to the literature; that being the stories of the middle-class Latinos.

Q. Why did you decide to be a writer and when?

A. It wasn't so much that I decided to write as writing was just always there. I wrote as a child. I wrote a novel at the age of 17 but when I showed it to the nuns at school, they took it away from me and sent me to confession. When I returned to college at the age of 33, I wrote because writing was easy and fun. I never took myself seriously as a writer until I was 40. Writing was just too easy to be of any real value I thought. I joined an artist group and they helped me see that my writing had value. Until then, I never took myself seriously.

Q. What advice can you give to other writers, especially women and minorities?

A. Dream. Get people around you that dream. Create a support group for yourself. No one can do this by themselves. Everyone needs someone to lean on at times. I think of this as having a harbor, a place to dock during the storms and a place to refuel and a place to depart for new and bigger adventures, always able to come back and be welcome.

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# *Governor Edwards' House Is For Sale*

*Susan Shell Winston*

## *The Story*

The four sections of this story were once separate vignettes modified to become the pivotal moments in the life of a single family. Only slight clues, a name, or an event referred to in a previous section, are given to connect these moments together. If the reader catches these clues, the story as a whole can become a gestalt, a story complete in its tragedy, with the memory of the pain it causes haunting the Edwards' family until long after their house is sold. It is this title then that completes the arc, implying the final long-lasting moment of the family's tragedy.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. This "short short" (a story of 1000 words or less) is a gestalt story, in which the reader is asked to participate in creating a whole much greater than its parts. Much of the arc of the story is only implied. As in life, the four moments actually written surrounding the tragic event in the Edward's family seem on first reading separate and disconnected. Discuss how you as a reader pieced together the story as a whole into a single plot of cause, event, and consequence. Why were each of the four sections chosen to imply the plot? Were they enough for you, or would you have wanted another event or two related? If so, what? When did you first realize the four sections were connected? What clues were you given in each section that resonated later into joining the story together for you?
2. Who is the most important character in the story for you? Julie, her mother, the ghost, or Jessie? Why? Write a character sketch of this character. Tell how each of the four sections relates his or her story?

3. Who is Governor Edwards? Does he appear in the story? How many times? How would you characterize him during at least four different stages in his life? Tell how the events in his life provide a timeline for the story, giving the reader a clue to how many years have passed?
4. What do you think Grandpa Edwards is in the first section? A ghost, a presence, or a memory? Where is he, do you think, during the rest of the story? Where is he when Julie is killed? Does he stay in the house or move with the family later on into the governor's mansion, then back again? What happens to him when the house is sold? Do you think the house itself will remember the family? If you've ever moved, do you feel like the empty house you leave behind you is haunted with memories? Do the memories stay, or do you take them with you, or do you feel like the house too has a personality that will remember you, one that you need to whisper goodbye to before you close that door one last time behind you? Do you believe in ghosts? What do think a ghost is? Is it real, or does it exist only in your mind?
5. A short story is usually about a single event in the life of a single person that is told from a single point of view and that occurs over a short period of time and that results in the change of life or attitude of that person. Consider how many "rules" of a short story this short short breaks. How often are you tempted to break rules in writing or in life? For what reasons have you ever broken a rule? Did any good come from doing so? Why or why not? How did you feel about it afterwards? Give other examples of when rules should or should not be broken. How do you feel about finding out someone else has broken a rule? Why are rules necessary at all in our society? Where do rules in writing stories come from and why and when if ever should they be broken?

## *Author Interview*

Q. What inspired you to write this story?

A. I didn't start out to write a gestalt story. The inspiration for the story as a whole came instead from a friend in my novel writing group who was involved in theater. After hearing four shorts I read one day, she mentioned how they each could be done together on the stage as related monologues. I went home, rearranged their order, and joined them into one story, strung together under the same title that is the first and greatest clue to their connection.

Q. You call each segment a "moment" in the story of the family's tragedy instead of the more usual term "event." Why?

A. That's all these four segments originally were, separate unrelated moments in different people's lives. Like an artist may draw practice character sketches for a large painting, I often write what I call "moments of perceptions," little more than prose poems which explore the mood and emotions I would feel in certain events, which I can often adapt and expand later into creating the personalities of the characters in my novels.

Q. What moments were you exploring in each segment?

A. The first segment was exploring what it would be like to be "in hell," something I don't personally believe in, but I was asked once to write about it. If hell existed, I had to ask myself, what would be the worse torture I could imagine for a soul or a consciousness still alive after death—to foresee a tragedy coming in his loved ones' lives and, being dead, be unable to warn them.

The second segment explores the feeling of freedom and joy you get yourself when you set a wild animal free, and in inference too, how the father will feel too in setting his own daughter free to live on her own. I dredged up a memory of healing a hawk once that had hit our window when I was too young to remember the feeling Julie feels afterwards. But she

feels what I would feel now. Her father taking her picture was my father always telling me to “watch the birdie” in the old cameras with their shutters opening and closing.

The last two segments are from a mother’s point of view, something I’ve had twenty-two years experiencing. One explores a feeling I’ve never had to face, how could a mother forgive a child doing something she could never forgive in anyone. Would she forgive him, even at the child’s death? Does she blame the child, does she still and always love him unconditionally, even if unforgiven? And the last, moving out of a house was written at the time my sister-in-law moved out of a house she had lived in for thirty years, where her children and all her memories had grown up and gone away before her, a strong emotion too that will find its way into a character someday.

Q. What do you mean by “moments of perception?”

A. I write fantasies, I see stories for characters in a made-up world where events can cause an effect, consequence—and growth of the character. I don’t “see” stories like that in real life. In fact most people, it seems to me, can be defined by one or two moments only in their lives when they really are “alive,” aware of life, perceiving its meaning, if any, for them. For all the memories I have of my father, the one I’ll most remember him by is the one moment the evening before his heart operation standing outside in a dark wind before a storm, the wind almost blowing him over, a feeble as he stood. He looked up at the heavy sky, his eyes bright, and said, “This is living.” A moment of perception, disjointed, unconnected perhaps to any consequence in our lives, but sometimes all we have in real life as our own story.

In fiction, I like to experiment with joining those moments together into a character with more of a story to “tell.” Sometimes I make the connections very definite and concrete, so I can convey the same story I want to tell. But as often as I can, as in this story, I try to leave some connections only subtly implied for the reader to live through and connect instead, their

resulting patterns, meanings, consequences implied coming from our own minds and our interpretations of them, not necessarily from the events themselves, just as they exist separated and unrelated in real life until we actually take a moment out of life to perceive them and join them. In one way, what I'd like most to do in my writing, is write in dots a the impressionist paints, the joining of the moments of perception, of living the story with the characters, coming from the reader as much as from me. And that's too, why I write fantasy, perhaps the most impressionistic genre of all literature today.

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# *The Lesser Gods*

*Pat Brown*

## *The Story*

I wanted to explore the issues that might arise if a culture that is sophisticated and highly advanced met with a group of humans, isolated for centuries that are a futuristic version of the ‘cargo cults’. Moss’ people were originally meant to settle a planet that turned out to be too harsh for them to survive as more than ‘primitive’ savages. The genesis of this came from my own observations on how we in the Western world think of our ancestors. It strikes me that we often assume primitive people are less intelligent than we are, that simple means stupid. In wanting to examine this in more detail I conceived a novel that looked at both sides. From that came a short story that actually occurs before the time of the novel, but does involve one of the main characters. Moss features heavily in my novel where he finds himself up against a strong-willed woman who doesn’t take kindly to being looked on as a mere breeder.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. What was your impression when you first met Moss and the dead woman? Why was Moss so fascinated with the cloth?
2. What kind of beings were the crachina, *scatterpods*, seapods, deathcups? Why did Moss collect the fluid of the deathcups seapods? Can you think of cultures that we know of today that use hallucinogenic drugs in their rituals?
3. How did Moss communicate with the second woman? Where do you think she came from?
4. How do you explain the woman’s references to “garbled nonsense” and “gibberish”?

5. What do you make of the woman's camp? What do you think is meant by the reference to the "sky ship"?
6. What was Moss' motive in killing the woman? Was it justified? Was it an act of mercy or a terrible mistake?
7. How would you describe Moss' escape?
8. How do you interpret the story, i.e., do you think it is an allegory, a fable, a moral, a real event?
9. Where do you think the story took place? Who are the lesser gods? The greater gods?
10. Do you think there are certain assumptions made about so called 'primitive' people by the anthropologists who study them and how might this affect how a group of primitive people are viewed by Western culture?

### *Author Interview*

- Q. Why did you write "Lesser Gods"? Are there certain themes you want the reader to be aware of?
- A. Only that assumptions are often wrong. What's that old saw about 'ass'uming anything?
- Q. Is it based on some factual incident?
- A. Just my observations on how we think we're superior to our distant ancestors. We think if they lived in caves they must have been less intelligent than we are. Whereas I doubt if many of us could survive a week in their shoes (or bare feet as it were).
- Q. Is writing a full-time endeavor for you? If not, how do you juggle family, writing, job?

A. I make sure I have a few hours a day for writing. It often means getting up an hour or two earlier than I'd have to otherwise. Weekend mornings are especially fruitful, since I don't sleep in.

Q. What is your writing background?

A. I've been writing in one form or another since I was in my early teens. I'm forty-four now. I spent eight years in Hollywood writing scripts I never showed anyone. It taught me how to tell a story through dialog, which I still think is one of my greatest strengths.

Q. What genre do you feel your writing fits into?

A. I write Science Fiction, but often use it to examine modern prejudices and attitudes. I don't pretend to write 'great' literature, I'm more interested in just telling a story that people can enjoy and will remember fondly.

Q. What issues did you want to explore in this story?

A. In "Lesser Gods", I wanted to explore the issues that might arise if a culture that is sophisticated and highly advanced met with a group of humans, isolated for centuries that are a futuristic version of the 'cargo cults'. Moss' people were originally meant to settle a planet that turned out to be too harsh for them to survive as more than 'primitive' savages. The genesis of this came from my own observations on how we in the Western world think of our ancestors. It strikes me that we often assume primitive people are less intelligent than we are, that simple means stupid. In wanting to examine this in more detail I conceived a novel that looked at both sides. From that came a short story that actually occurs before the time of the novel, but does involve one of the main characters. Moss features heavily in my novel where he finds himself up against a strong willed woman who doesn't take kindly to being looked on as a mere breeder.

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# *That Face*

*David A. Woodbury*

## *The Story*

Many stories are constructed around the sin someone commits and its effect both on the sinner and upon the person who is directly diminished by the act. In “That Face,” Donnie’s father, a teacher, has apparently molested a high school girl who was his student. Perhaps he got away with it at the time. Perhaps neither party to the affair was significantly affected by it. This story shows what can happen when the sin is long forgotten and supposedly can no longer affect anyone else.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. How would you describe the relationship between Donnie and Kenny? Between Candace and the boys?
2. What led to Donnie’s first fascination with Candace’s face? What do you think Candace meant when she said: ‘I just love you Donald’?
3. Have you ever had a similar infatuation similar to that of Donald for Candace?
4. What did you think the story was about at the beginning? In the middle? At the end?
5. How do you think Donnie felt upon discovering his father’s secret?
6. Have you ever been betrayed the way Donnie was betrayed by his father?

7. Do you think Donnie’s mother knew about the affair? How does such an affair affect others in the family? The school? The community? Consider the era—late 1950s in the Midwest. Is it different now than at that time? Are morals different? Is a relationship between student and teacher viewed differently? Could it ever be okay, for instance, if the teacher weren’t married?
8. In the beginning of the story the reader is left as ignorant of the illicit affair as Donnie was. When did you catch on that the story might be taking a dark twist in that direction? What hints were there before you caught on?
9. Candace was (apparently) 18 and officially an adult when the affair occurred. But the story suggests that it was set against the moral code of the late 1950s. Assuming the affair were not found out, sparing her the social stigma, do you think Candace would be left permanently damaged by the affair with her teacher?
10. If you were Donald, learning of your late father’s deceit 40 years later, how would it affect your regard for your father’s memory? Would you understand? Would you begin to search your memory for signs that he might have had other affairs? Would you ask your mother about any of it?
11. What do you think of the author’s description of the setting?
12. Is it effective to suggest things but not actually state them, (in the name of brevity—this being a short story)? Consider the sentence quoted at the beginning: ...we discovered what happens when a black, cricket-sized catfish hits blacktop that has been bubbling under the noonday sun.

### *Author Interview*

Q. Why did you write “That Face”?

- A. I like to use the western Ohio settings of my boyhood and the perspectives of the naive boy that I was. I thought I could add to that the pathetic infatuations that accompany the stirrings of first romantic notions, and season it with a final conflict. Telling it in the first person is not to imply that it reflects a situation of my own experience.
- Q. Is it based on some factual incident?
- A. Only the parts about playing in hay lofts, begging cookies, and catching baby catfish.
- Q. How did you get involved in e-publishing?
- A. I was interested in the commercial possibilities of the Internet but had to consider what I could market that would be uniquely my own. It so happened that I also had a number of books I had written but which had never appealed to the screening agents used by publishers. When I also managed to nail down a domain name that I believe reflects my own self-image, I put the whole thing together and created an Internet publishing entity with the objectives of offering my own works and attracting the work of other talented writers.
- Q. Did you enjoy compiling and editing this Anthology? What were your experiences working with such a diversity of writers? Do you plan another Anthology?
- A. I certainly enjoyed sharing the enthusiasm of the participants right from the point of initiating this project all the way through its eagerly-awaited completion. I especially enjoyed examining the work of so many writers in such detail. What was most gratifying, though, was the complete cooperation everyone showed in working together. After the main body of the anthology was initially completed a few more stories appeared from these and other writers. I think there is a basis for another volume such as this and I would be privileged once again to serve in any capacity to make it happen.
- Q. What genre do you feel your writing fits into?

- A. I'm not attuned to this concept of genre. What genre does Tarkington fit into, or Sabatini? Steinbeck, Michener, London? Eliot or Dickens? Some of these would be considered "historical" now, but that's only because their writing about contemporary settings is now historical. The best I have figured out is that it's "general" or "mainstream."
- Q. What do you feel is the most important quality a writer must possess?
- A. Command of one's language. This, combined with a gift for telling a yarn and some life's experiences on which to draw make for a promising piece of literature.

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# *The Day I Should Have Died*

*Don Windle*

## *The Story*

“The Day I Should Have Died” is a factual account of a war-time incident that can cause the reader to consider important aspects of life. There are junctions in people’s lives such that if another path had been taken, no telling where it would have lead. Who can know the outcome if a different choice had been made?

## *Discussion Questions*

1. Had the writer and his shipmate exchanged gun stations before the fateful May 3rd attack, would the writer have died that day instead of his shipmate? Or would the plane have hit the bridge, still killing the other seaman and leaving the writer alive?
2. Is the death of each person preordained? If so, can the actions of man alter that preordination?
3. Does the gunnery officer, who failed to effect the transfer, have any responsibility for the seaman’s death? Does the writer share any responsibility for the seaman’s death?
4. Have you ever survived a near-death experience? What was its impact on you? Has your life changed?
5. Have you lost a beloved person during wartime or known someone who did? What is the impact of that death on you and/or those affected by the death?
6. Have you been directly affected (physically, emotionally, economically, psychologically, etc.) by the destruction of war? How? How has that changed you or others you know?

7. Is death the worst way that war can affect you? Describe your experiences.
8. How do you cope with the death of a loved one after an illness? Is it different if the death was a tragic one? Do you view the death of a child differently from the death of a person who has lived an expected life cycle?
9. Do you think about death? Are you prepared to die? If you knew when you were going to die, what would you do to prepare?

#### *Author Interview*

Q. When and why did you write about this episode in your life?

A. The Aaron Ward crew has a reunion biannually. At the '96 reunion I mentioned the incident to the Gunnery Officer, and he said I should write about it, so I did.

Q. How has this factual account made a difference in your life?

A. At the time, I attached no spiritual significance to the event (I wasn't attuned to Godly things at that time of my life), but there was a nagging voice that periodically asked, "Why was I spared?" Years later when I accepted Christ as my Savior, I came to recognize that it wasn't just Fate, or "luck of the draw"; It was God's Hand on my life that spared me.

Q. Have you written more about this time in your life?

A. No, but I have been working on memoirs that will encompass that time.

Q. What other types of things do you write? Fiction? Non-Fiction? Poetry?

A. Novels and essays. I did an autobiography of my childhood for my son and grandsons. I printed three copies.

Q. Why did you decide to be a writer and when?

A. In 1962 I had my first spark of interest in creative writing. Why? I had some ideas, principles that I wanted to share with others. I am not a good speaker, so writing was the best means of sharing my views. I chose fiction rather than overt, direct exposition because many people won't read anything other than fiction.

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# *Mercedes*

*Deb Hartrum*

## *The Poem*

This poem was inspired by my brother's much too early death. It reflects the spiraling direction his life took while he was a part of my family and as a member of the larger community.

## *Author Interview*

Q. Was the poem based on something that really happened?

A. Yes. My brother died November 2, 1999. He was 38. He died as a result of AIDS.

Q. Who is Mercedes?

A. Mercedes is my brother's alter self whom he finally re-claimed as his total identity around the age of 22. His birth name was Charles but inside he was always Mercedes desperately trying to come forward.

Q. Have you published other poems/fiction?

A. Yes, DarkStormy Press has a few of my poems and I am currently working on an Anthology of Poetry with my sons.

Q. What is your writing background?

A. Most of my experience generates from academia where I have been published in numerous journals. I also write curriculum for character education and religious studies.

Q. Are there certain themes you want readers to be aware of?

A. I'd like readers to think about:

- identity crisis
- mainstream idealisms met unsuccessfully
- the need for a gentler society, and humanity scrutinized.

- Q. What do you mean by the need for a “gentler society, and humanity scrutinized”?
- A. You were right to put the idea of humanity scrutinized and the need for a gentle society in the same sentence because unless we take a closer look at our reasons for being somewhat harsh and judgmental, regarding stereotypes, we can not begin to emerge into the gentle and compassionate people I am convinced God designed. This is not to say that all of humanity strives for a harsher vision, only that a little scrutiny into our motivations might illuminate more about our individual selves and generate a desire to see things differently as a collective group.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. What did this poem mean to you before you read the Author Interview? Did the interview give you greater insight into the story beneath the poem?
2. How did you picture Mercedes the first time you read the poem? Discuss how this special tribute to Mercedes affects you. What feelings does it evoke?
3. Do you know anyone who has AIDS or died from AIDS? How has that affected your life? If you’ve never known anyone who suffered from this illness, can you relate to Mercedes through another illness or death? Discuss.
4. The author reveals her brother struggled for many years with his identity. Have you or someone close to you ever had an identity crisis? How did you deal with it?
5. The author talks about “mainstream idealisms met unsuccessfully” as one of her themes. What do you suppose she means? How is it reflected in the poem?

6. Is there a need for a gentler society and humanity scrutinized? What are some signs in your own community that support your view?

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