PEN IN HAND

The Bi-Yearly Literary Journal

of the

Maryland Writers’ Association

Editor: Dr. Tapendu K. Basu

(Gandharva raja)

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Message from the Editor

A cartoon “The Dejected Rooster” was captioned thus: ‘What is the use? Yesterday an egg, tomorrow a feather duster!’
To this pervasive cynicism, I caution, “Do not belittle the feather duster.”
Cynicism pervades our daily lives, our office milieu, and the local, national and international politics. Today’s world direly needs “poets”!
I do not confine myself to those who juggle iambs and anapest. My “poets” include Gates, Bejos, Buffet, Musk, Obama, Malala Yousafzaí and others – who think and act, as a poet would do. They are visionaries. They believe in inclusion. They too are poets because they think in the vein of William Carlos Williams and Walt Whitman. Like Ginsberg they usher the new and what is contrary, they understand that the real is a dream; like Adrienne Rich they search ‘a silent core of waiting’; like Seamus Heaney they ‘feel the tug, of the halter at the neck’. Like Langston Hughes they wiggle our collective conscience. They exhort us to ‘hold fast to dreams’.
So, my fellow members, dream, dream, dream. Inscribe those dreams on paper or screen and send your best poems, short stories, flash fiction, essays, non-fiction’ how to’, short plays and other exotic dreams to

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or

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Pen in Hand is the official literary and art publication of the Maryland Writers' Association, to be published bi-annually in January and July. I am deeply indebted to Barbara Morrison, Editor of MWA Newsletter, for her help with editorial review. I congratulate the many MWA writers for their enthusiasm. I thank them for the many submissions, and encourage them to submit for inclusion in the next issue scheduled to appear in July 2017 [Submission deadline June 15, 2017]. Missy Burke’s Cover Design deserves applause: Two Thumbs Up!

Dr. Tapendu K. Basu
Message From the President of MWA

Welcome to an exciting new year with the Maryland Writers' Association. Are you aware that there are 15 members on the board of directors this year? All of us are volunteers hard at work developing, organizing, streamlining and experimenting with programs and services that benefit all of us. The Board is also working with MWA’s seven chapters to increase outreach to the community. These efforts enrich all of us.

As a member, make sure your membership profile is up to date. To check, just log in at www.marylandwriters.org. Most of MWA’S communication and information exchange efforts are done online and by e-mail. If you opted not to receive e-mails, are you aware that you may not get important information, including the newsletter, my “Quick Notes,” and *Pen in Hand*?

Register now for the annual conference, “The Writing Roller Coaster.” Date is March 25. Conference Chair Jess Williams has selected the Crowne Plaza in Annapolis, a beautiful venue conveniently located just off Route 50 with easy, free parking. Keynote speakers are well-known authors Jeffery Deaver and Maria V. Snyder. These speakers along with informative workshops, agent and editor pitches, and networking at lunch and breaks make the conference an opportunity not to miss. Just go to marylandwriters.org for more information and to register.

The novel awards contest is underway under the direction of Michelle Butler, Program Chair. MWA is experimenting with a new way to conduct the contest, which draws on the members to judge submissions.

MWA is fortunate to have Dr. Tapendu Basu as editor of MWA’s literary journal, *Pen in Hand*, and Barbara Morrison as editor of MWA’s new quarterly newsletter.

Vice President Janet Ruck prepared and submitted the application for a grant next year from the Maryland State Arts Council. This year the council awarded MWA a grant for $1500.

Communication co-chairs Tony Russo and Frances Altman are working with board members to carry out MWA’s information needs. Eric Badertscher is working on streamlining MWA’s social media.

Seven MWA chapters, each offering informative monthly meetings, bring MWA benefits to the local level to make it easier for members to connect and improve their skills.

Maryland writers reap a ton of benefits from MWA membership. And all of this activity is done with volunteers. Most of us who do volunteer feel we gain much more than we give. So when the call goes out for a volunteer, do yourself a favor. Raise your hand.

Eileen Haavik McIntire
An interview with Steven Leyva, Editor

Steven Leyva, Editor of Little Patuxent Review, has been a guest speaker at the MWA Baltimore Chapter monthly meetings on several occasions. Steven is at ease speaking of poetry, the art of editing and the nuances of publishing. He graciously agreed to this interview for the first PIH Journal of 2017.

1. What’s your advice to a newly hatched editor?

For someone who is just beginning, I would offer two pieces of advice:

1. In your reading cultivate a sense of "openness", reading diversely and extensively, so that you can recognize good work that may not be within your personal aesthetic. And 2. Recognize that you will have some blind spots, and gather an intelligent and passionate team who can help you see the power in a piece that you might otherwise overlook

2. Write or “tweet”? How do we fight the trend?

Do whatever feels comfortable to you regarding social media. It can be power platform to advance your brand and to connect with other writers. But, never neglect your writing. I don’t think at the end of things you will say, "I wish I tweeted more”

3. Bang for the buck – what’s a writer to do?

Find a community and other writers that will support what you are trying to accomplish and will help you move your craft forward. Work hard and work soft. Support your local literary art scene, and do your part to be gracious to yourself. Send work for publication when you feel the work is done. Revise, Revise, Revise. All else is luck

4. Checks and balances [speaking not in terms of the checkbook] are crucial to democracy. What is the modern writers’ role? Ah yes, responsibility?

Each writer has to wrestle with the world and any responsibilities felt must be interrogated fully. In other words, a writer may have many and varied responsibilities, though I tend to like Robert Pinsky's idea that a writers first duty is to enact transformation. The question is a difficult one; almost like asking a priest, "How should I pray". I would be skeptical of any short answer given. So I'll say this, I think a writer's responsibility is to see and learn to see fully the interiors of the self, the eccentricities of the world, and those mysteries which
clarify what means to be human.

5. Some say yes, some say no! Speaking of Climate Change, are we as writers, the keepers of the planet?

As living beings we should kindly care for the earth; I don't think writers are excluded from that duty. Writers have an ability to bear witness and affect society's collective imagination. What we can imagine doesn't always manifest, but surely it can never manifest absent an ability to imagine it. So writers can help us all imagine a more healthy earth.

6. Which do you prefer – the Kindle, the Nook, or a paperback? Why?

Paper all the way. It reminds me that literature is not only the realm of ideas and consciousness, but involves the body and those tangible experiences which mark the heart.

7. What is your favorite award for writers’...Pulitzer? National Book Award? Booker? Or the Nobel Prize? What distinguishes each?

I’d have to say that the Pushcart Prize has a special place for me, because of the way it explicitly showcases small presses. After that, I guess I enjoy the National Book Award, as far as American awards go. I mostly think these awards are about advancing the public discourse more than anything else. For the winners of course there is the prestige and money, but for everyone else there is the “talk” that generates and focuses our attention on literature. It can be messy for sure, like a holiday dinner where someone lets a secret slip out.

Thank you, Steven. That was good advice!
MWA members: there it is… dream, write, revise, revise…all else is luck!
Of course, luck is what happens to the Doer...

Tapendu Basu
Painting is silent poetry,
and poetry painting that speaks
the best

Walt Whitman prophesized
that the United States was too immense,
unprecedented, strange and fragmented
to be held together
by anything but poetry.  

Robert Pinsky
Hospitality

_Sichuan, China_

In the lean-to kitchen the farmer’s wife
juliennes and crushes, shivers of onion
flying from the blade, steam hitting
cold mist at the open door.
I thrust booted feet at the tin
of hot coals under the table outside
and wait, wondering how many
spontaneous meals have serviced me
in my wanderlust? How much
ambrosial heat, sear and spice,
plumping bulgar and pitted peach?
It seems to be our needful thing
to forage for the magic within our reach—
the translucent rice grains,
the flesh of all creatures griddled or charred,
the way we wonder if nourishment exists
in snapdragon, the cathaya’s winged seed—
all the tastes we haven’t dared.
And we wonder if the damp earth still
has secrets to disclose that could remain
wondrous and unstained even by our knowing,
our prodding and splitting
with the knife or the tongue.
She emerges balancing three dishes
on outstretched arms and sets them
on the table, shrinking back in pleasure
and gesturing with a gentle turn of hand.
_Eat! It’s just a little something._
Birth of The Girl-Child

“Raising a daughter is like watering your neighbor’s garden.” —Traditional Indian Proverb

When she emerges in blood and mucous,
the birthing room steeps in quiet fury.

Husband twitches, aghast,
when told through the curtain,
disappears into the yawning twilight,
oncoming dark, scent of drought.

On the pallet, knuckles against teeth,
wife is silent, freshly emptied.

Already she’s dodged the fire
in mother-in-law’s eyes and hands

for insufficient dowry—now
this girl. She trembles, foresees

how rivers will run dry
and dust choke and strangle

the mechanisms of the turning world
because of the disappeared; thinks

*The earth is sodden with our secrets,
with the blood of our beliefs.*

Mother-in-law squats beside the pail,
which is sufficiently deep.

And the drought is already in the seed
and in the breast.
Remnants of Empire

I left the snake coiled under my sheet—
a toy, but lifelike enough
to snap blood through your aging veins

like a starter's pistol, to yank
a garbled scream from your lips
when you came in to make my bed.

By lunch I'd forgotten, returned
to muttered streams of abuses,
thick air, stewing hurt.

I shrank, deflected—An accident,
sorrry, ayah. But you knew;
brought me a sandwich

of chili peppers hidden
in folds of cheese, ham
I ate my penance silently.

In your small rooms

in Old Delhi, your grown son
hacked at a cobra slithering in

the open drain. You'd told me;
I'd forgotten. My tongue sears
now with remembrance.

Rachel E. Hicks’ poetry has appeared in Welter, St. Katherine Review, Off the Coast, Gulf Stream Literary Magazine, and other journals. She has lived in seven countries—most recently China—and now resides in Baltimore, MD. Her adult career has included teaching (high school English and homeschool), working with an international relief and development agency, freelance copyediting, and, of course, writing. She is currently applying to MFA programs. Find her online at rachelehicks.com
Marley Station Mall Reunion

Forty years later, my mother sees her high school history teacher at the entrance of Borders.

The woman looks over my mother in her black stretch pants, orange-black blonde hair (from the rust in our well water), sagging blotched cheeks, and rubs my mother’s round shoulders as if comforting a widow. She says:

*And we always thought you’d grow up to be Miss America.*

For the rest of the day, my mother beams, reminding herself: *I could’ve been Miss America.*

I weigh my heavy hips in my hands, wishing I’d had a similar chance.
A Project on Long Term Goals

When I drew out the time line of my life, my health teacher complained that I didn’t list a retirement age. Everyone wants to retire eventually, she said. We all get tired and old. I told her I was going to be a missionary, that I won’t retire from a lifestyle of sharing. She insisted, but so did I—and on my goals of having a book published by the end of high school, she said, What book? and By which publisher? She gave me a D on that assignment, while the girl next to me was given extra credit for writing that at nineteen, she’d marry Johnny Depp, and die of skydiving at sixty-three.

Meg Eden's work has been published in magazines, including Rattle, Drunken Boat, Poet Lore, and Gargoyle. She teaches at the University of Maryland. She has written four poetry chapbooks. Her novel Post-High School Reality Quest is forthcoming June 2017. Check out her work at: www.megedenbooks.com
A Visit to the Doctor of Herbal Medicine

She says, "You have the sadness in you."
She can see it in my dry, cracked hands.
My skin is raw with sorrow, it is true
what she says. "You have the sadness in you."
How can I hide it? Absence dries me through –
heart to knuckle-bones, I’m marked by its brands.
She says, “You have the sadness in you.”
She can see it in my dry, cracked hands.

LAURA SHOVAN, is the Editor of the MWA ANTHOLOGY:
Life in Me Like Grass on Fire [2011]; former Editor, Little Patuxent Review;
Her chapbook Mountain, Log, Salt and Stone was the 2010 winner of Harriss
Poetry Prize.

[Editor’s Note: This poem, a Triolet, is a French form consisting of a single octave
built on two refrains. Line 1 reappears on Line 4 and Line 7; and line 2 reappears
on line 8. Rhyme form ABaAabAB.]
The Color of Her Volkswagen

Atlas blue. First Bug I ever saw. It showed up one day, a shiny little thing in Miss Kay’s driveway two doors down. Their old Dodge long gone. People on our street drove Chevys or Fords, nobody even knew how to say Volkswagen, were skeptical about a foreign car, but Miss Kay packed up picnic basket, playpen, her toddler son, the baby, her Coppertone oil. There was room for my sister and me. I rode in the front, watched Miss Kay shift the gears, her pedicured feet depressing the gas pedal, working the clutch like an extension of her body. She tuned the radio to WFBR, the Four Lads sang “Standing on the Corner”—she didn’t like rock n’ roll. When we got to the swimming place, an old quarry now flooded with water, now a club where you bought a daily membership, the loudspeaker blasted my kind of music—The Drifters, doo-wop, r&b—repeated every hour. We ate peanut butter sandwiches, Miss Kay plunged into the water from a dock. She wore a green bikini, adjusted the top over her small breasts when she emerged from the water. I slathered on her suntan oil, bounced the baby. Around us, teenaged girls mixed iodine and baby oil, greased up their arms and legs and shoulders, lit Newports and blew smoke rings. I longed to be like them. Homeward, the blue VW rolled up and down country roads back to the city, steaming streets, dried little lawns.

Lynne Spigelmire Viti JD, PhD, was born and raised in Baltimore, attended Notre Dame University of Maryland and graduated from Barnard College. She is currently a senior lecturer in the Writing Program at Wellesley College. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in The South Florida Poetry Journal, The Little Patuxent Review, Mountain Gazette, Amuse-Bouche, The Paterson Review, Cultured Vultures, and Right Hand Pointing. Her poetry chapbook, Baltimore Girls, is forthcoming in 2017 from Finishing Line Press. She blogs at stillinschool.
Evolution in Reverse

I want to be
an amoeba
one-celled
fluid and shapeless
sometimes a three-pronged star,
the letter S, or M, or W
ambling along with nowhere to go
no purpose to movement,
drawn only
by changing tides and a new moon

I want
no race or color
save what light defracts
no age, sex, sexual preference,
no political convictions
only binary fissions of nucleus and protoplasm
mitotic divisions
to infinity.

Tell me,
in all these many millions of years
what have we achieved by evolution?
Were we not immortal
long before
we knew it?

(Taken from Mustard Seed: A Collage of Science, Art and Love Poems)

Lalita Noronha, Ph.D. is the Former President, Maryland Writers' Association. A Scientist, Teacher, Writer, Poet and Editor, her Website/Blog--
http://www.lalitanoronha.com
Early September Evenings

Looking down the hill where the tall trees push out and up from the ground, it is all black, or so close to black most would see no difference.

But trace the tall tree trunk to the top where the leafing admits scant light and there another vision of the world, with its contrasts, comes clear.

Oaks and cousins reach up toward the early September night sky, darkly silhouetted in blurred shadows and moved by unseen whispers,

Where short months ago spring’s charming sparkles of incandescent flickers floated earthward in answer to some undeniable summons,

Serenaded by curious and cacophonous anthems of winged and watery creatures, each sounding its own insistent call for answer.

I missed that day when the flickers disappeared, too busy with matters too important to notice that my world was

A bit darker than it was before. A bit darker. The journey from noon to night is the time when it becomes a bit darker.

It is a marvel when we reach our early September evenings, when suppers are done and the sky darkens, when the flickers of light

Yield to inevitable darkness. It is then that the spirit within us looks up, and waits to be whispered gently into the night.

Thomas L. Budesheim, Esq., Actio Law, LLC, 51 Monroe Street * Suite 401 Rockville, MD 20850. His poem “Early September Evenings” won Third Place in
MWA Poetry Prize 2016. He can be found on Facebook.

Two Haiku

First written by the Japanese haiku master, Basho in the 17th century, the classical Japanese form is a 3-line poem with 5-7-5 syllables. The American haiku is more liberated.

A season of death
The leaves change only to fall
Red, Orange, and Yellow

Colors and patterns
All washed up on the seashore
Keepsakes were once homes

Andrew McDowell became interested in writing and storytelling when he was a child. He studied history, literature, and creative writing at St. Mary’s College of Maryland, where he graduated in 2012. He won second place in the creative nonfiction category of the 2014-15 M.W.A. literary contest. Website and blog: https://andrewmmcmcdowell.com/
Short Stories

My favorites: *The Moons of Jupiter*: Alice Munro, and *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*: Ernest Hemingway. Here are some others that I enjoyed reading.

Walk to Morning

It was something Philip said, one night after the snowball truck had come and gone.

As Katherine told it, she saw fireflies under the oak trees when she stood up from the porch glider. The sky was still blue over the park but shadows were already creeping out from under the trees and the light of the fireflies made a random pattern against the darkness.

Philip came out of the house, shoelaces flapping as usual, but when she mentioned it he just shrugged his narrow shoulders and said, "It's no use; they won't stay tied." She tied them anyway, with double knots.

Then they started out for a walk, Katherine taking his little hand in hers. Supposedly they were going to the farm store for milk but that was really just an excuse to be outside now that the heat was starting to fade.

At the end of the block they turned away from the park, heading up the hill to the store. The shadows and fireflies were behind them and the sky still light over the crest of the hill. Philip started pulling at her arm.

"Why is it night one way and day the other?" he asked.

Katherine tried to explain the earth's rotation as they climbed the hill.

"Well, then why can't we walk and walk till we get to morning?" he asked, as if it were that simple.

Katherine told me later that evening she'd had one careening moment of believing it was possible.

I told her the story of Anfortas, the Fisher King from the Parzival story with his great wound and barren kingdom. She said, "I've missed your stories, my friend."

I lived next door and had known Katherine since before Philip was born, had even known her husband and was unsurprised at their amicable parting just before Philip's difficult birth. He was a drifter, while Katherine wanted a home for both of their children, someplace solid and still. Sometimes her ex sent them money; most often he forgot.

We lived in adjacent row houses on one of those small parks hidden in the city, and had gotten to be friends. I was stiff with Tony and Philip at first, not being used to children, but I basically treated the boys like small adults and that
seemed to work pretty well. It was lucky I didn't want to have kids of my own since I was so incurably alone. I seemed to fill the house anyway with just me and my books. I believed my soulmate must be living in Jakarta or New York, someplace other than here.

Katherine blamed my aloneness on my taste for reading medieval epics, but I was sure they could teach me everything I needed to know. I worked in the library downtown and loved to nest among the old books, sneezing at the dust, looking up obscure references to sword dances in Clee Hill and dreaming of battles wondrous and fierce. Katherine read biographies; said she was only interested in real people. I tried to tell her about loyalty at Roncevaux, the strong ties of friendship, but all she could see was that those brave boys all died because one man was too proud to ask for help.

She told me about visiting England before Philip and Tony were born and touring the Cotswolds. In village after village she stood in front of the World War I monument reading the Honour Roll and weeping hot tears for all the mothers' sons thrown away on a general's whim. Name after name, many the same, fathers, brothers, sons. She said she had never realized the magnitude of it before, so many names from each tiny village, and how empty the cottages must have felt afterwards. It was the rash waste, the prodigality of the sacrifice that tore at her.

Katherine taught in a junior high school and said she loved it. Once, when we were talking on the porch I complained about a group of teenagers who'd been in the park across the street the night before, their loud laughter and boomboxes waking me up to the darkness and the streetlight, and then in the morning finding their beer cans under the oak trees. But she wouldn't let me complain and told me about her own teenaged nights (and I remembered as she spoke) of riding too fast through narrow country roads, trees and fences looming suddenly in the high-beams, next to a boy who'd had too many beers. The delicious fear of watching him steer with one hand while he kept the other around her shoulders.

She often complained, Katherine did, but it was about the school system that suspended a child just as she was making progress, or parents who didn't know how to protect a child, or even teachers who didn't understand.

“One day,” she told me, “this boy -- a troublemaker but always good with me -- was so rude to me, hostile even. After class I asked him what was up and he told me about his father beating him with a 2x4 before he left for school. He showed me the bruises. How could he care about diagramming sentences with that on his mind?”

“There’s always a reason,” she said. “People do things for a reason, however odd.” I asked if she could understand the boy’s father and she said that she could but reported him anyway.

Sometimes through the wall I heard her arguing with Philip and Tony. It was usually the same argument:

“Tony hurt me.”
“Leave your brother alone.”
“You let him get away with everything.”
"You're bigger than he is. It's up to you to stop. Don't be a bully."

There aren't many family secrets in row houses. I knew Philip and Tony set elaborate traps for each other. I was appalled sometimes at the harm that could come to them. After one involving a rake and bucket that Tony set up under an oak tree in the park, I spoke to Katherine about it, about Tony's quick mind wasted on inventing ways to hurt his brother. I told her I was scared for Philip who seemed too frail to stand up to such harsh play.

She just sighed and said she'd been afraid ever since they were born. In my heart I wondered how in the world Philip was going to survive in public school. For now, though, he seemed safe with his first-grade teacher who called him her love-bug.

Once when I was babysitting for Philip, I caught him practicing his woebegone look in my mirror, the sad eyes and quivering lower lip. I laughed out loud and, seeing me, knowing his secret was out, he shrugged his narrow shoulders. I think that was when I realized there was more to this skinny little boy who'd never yet made it onto any of the pediatrician's growth curves. I started telling him the story of Parzival and his eyes got bigger and bigger. He listened and didn't say a word. But then when I was done he held out his little stick arms and looked at them. Then he looked back at me.

"You'll grow," I said, trying to keep the doubt out of my voice.
"Tony's bigger than me and lots stronger."
"He is now, but you are the sturdy heart of oak."
"What does that mean?"
"Ye sturdy hearts of oak -- the heart of the oak is the strongest part of the strongest tree."
"But Tony's the strong one," he protested.

I thought of the way the muscles already stretched across Tony's broad shoulders and back, the beginnings of a man's muscles on his eight-year-old frame. "It usually means stout-hearted, not just strong, you know, but brave."
"I can do that!" Philip's face opened up and he grinned at me and I understood suddenly why Katherine did what she did. After that I often told him stories about knights and ladies and heroes. When I told him the stories of questing beasts and holy grails he held his breath till I was afraid and had to remind him to breathe. I filled his ears with stories of Parzival and Roland and Gawain, and drawings of men on caparisoned steeds started to appear on Katherine's refrigerator.

When she had Philip, she was alone in the hospital, though she let me take care of Tony. She wanted it that way. Katherine was a parent before anything else. It was how she addressed the world. Even in church—we both went to St. Michael's, me because of their high-church ritual, and her because it was the closest one—when they said God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, I was sure it was the Son she spoke to. "Have you brushed your teeth?" I half-expected her to say. To her He was a child like any other. She saw the God in every child, the child in every person.

The way I saw it, it wasn't that she felt older or wiser than other people. It was just a choice she had made, a way she had chosen to be. So last summer, a
year ago, just before school started up again, when Tony ran out between two
cars and got knocked into oblivion, it was her own self that was struck dead
along with her oldest son, the reason and meaning she had given to life and her
whole philosophy.

There was nothing I could do. I got her through the funeral and left her
staring at the living room walls. I thought I ought to stay with her, but didn’t know
what to say. I wanted to remind her that she still had Philip, but remembered the
legend: her mirth drowned in the flood of her sorrow.

Philip walked out with me as I left. On the front porch, he told me how the
night before he’d woken up and heard his mother so he went and got in bed with
her. While she held him tightly, not speaking, he told her the story of a book his
teacher had read to them. It was about a little girl whose best friend died and a
special place in the woods that they had. Philip told her everything he could
remember of the story until she fell asleep. I asked him to tell me a little of it. He
did, and I was much comforted.

* * * * *

That was when the still time began. It was very quiet next door. School opened
and Philip started in the second grade. Katherine went back to work. I hardly saw
her at all that autumn, though sometimes I’d see her and Philip walking in the
park.

I believed that when they went down the hill out of sight that they were
going to visit a tree she once told me she liked: a black willow, old and massive
that grew down by the stream. Trees of course require no tending, so it should
have been a comfort to her. I thought it was the contrast of the tree that
captivated her. Four great trunks rose together, thick and covered with dark and
shaggy bark that had fallen off in great chunks. Yet these solid muscled trunks
were clouded by masses of thin leaves, delicate willow leaves, slightly curling, a
pale grayish-green against the black trunk.

As I imagined it, the whole fall went by with her watching the tree, its
leaves fade and drop, the sad thick arms of the tree unable to hold their feathery
cloud.

* * * * *

I didn’t see either of them all winter. It rained a lot, but Philip never came out to
the porch to play. I’d go over and knock on the door but if Katherine came to the
door at all, she’d say she was busy. She never invited me in. She didn’t even
come to church. Advent used to be one of my favorite seasons, the sense of
anticipation, the empty crèche. But this year the stones of the church felt cold,
the air dry with stale incense.

At the Lessons and Carols service, I couldn’t help but think of her. There
were the readings, the one about man’s disobedience and then the one she
hated. I remembered last year her leaning over during it and saying she didn’t
need a burning bush to tell her not to take her son up on the hillside. Then there
was the part where we stood to sing one of my favorite hymns and I stumbled
over an unremembered verse, about closing the path to misery. I wished I knew
how to do that. After the service I lit three candles, one for each of them.

I worked late at the library, long after the homeless men in their dark
mummy layers of clothes were ushered out and the brass doors locked, moving books around, trying to bury myself in footnotes. I turned off the top light and just sat at my desk with a lamp throwing a circle of light on the open books and the papers. Now and then I looked at the tall windows and the persistent rain streaming down them and wondered if Christmas would ever come. One night I stood at the window and watched the lights come up on the Washington Monument. Then I turned away and sat down at my desk again. I laid my hands palm-down on the open book there, smoothing the pages out away from the spine. After a while the black marks began to look like words again and I continued reading.

It was raining the night of the midnight service, a wild unseasonable rain with wind and thunder. Trees limbs thrashed around as I drove to church, the car lurching as the wind roared around an intersection. Power was out in one neighborhood I passed, side-streets dark, all the Christmas lights lost along with the streetlights. I was soaked in just the short walk from the car to the church, the wind tearing at my coat.

But when I stepped through the heavy glass doors, it was suddenly warm and still. I found a spot in the back of the church and took off my wet coat. All around me people held candles, the only light until midnight when the lights would come on and the organ roar to celebrate Christ’s birth.

But now the church seemed like a dark cave, a haven lit by our small lights. I thought of a walled city, the townspeople and outlying farmers gathered in during some assault, camped together in the cathedral, awaiting word from the armies outside. Our peace seemed precarious when set against the roaring wind we could hear even though the thick stonewalls.

* * * * *

In the spring, in March, Katherine came out one night and sat on her front porch. She seemed much smaller than I remembered. I hesitated but went and sat with her and looked out at the park. We could just see the top of the willow tree with that faint haze that comes just before the leaves. I didn’t know what to say. After a while she went inside. The next night I sat with her and the next.

She and Philip went to church with me that Sunday. She touched the car door and paused—just briefly—before opening it. She sat through the whole service without moving, never kneeling or standing or saying the prayers. Philip stayed next to his mother. When we got home, she took him inside and shut the door.

After that she’d often sit on the porch with me in the evenings after Philip was in bed. Sometimes she’d even talk a little, mostly about school, her girl students. She wouldn’t talk about the boys. On Maundy Thursday, she brought Philip to church with me. I was a little uncertain about the whole thing, and sure enough, right in the middle she got up, actually got up and walked out. I hurried after her with Philip’s hand tucked in mine, into the cold spring air. She was waiting by the car, still pacing back and forth. We were halfway home when she muttered, “Silly old men.”

“What?” I asked, not sure I heard right or was supposed to hear.

“Playing games at the altar with hyssop and wine. What do they know of
“giving up a son?” Her anger made her voice harsh, but for me the streetlights had suddenly grown halos. Philip in the back unbuckled his seatbelt and pushed himself forward until he could stand and put his hands on her shoulders. I glanced over and saw her reach up to cover his hands.

How far away does morning lie? After she put Philip to bed that night of the walk, that summer night after the ice cream truck had come and gone and the milk was safely sitting in the refrigerator, Katherine sat out on the porch with me. The city had mown the park earlier and the sweet smell of the cut grass still filled the night air.

She told me what Philip had said as they’d walked up the hill. “I told him,” she said, “after that one mad moment of believing it possible, that we couldn’t catch it up again. He stopped walking and looked up at me. ‘Don’t worry, Mom. If we wait, it’ll come around again.’ And then we went on to the farm store.”

We looked out over the park, hidden now by darkness, the streetlights along the edge just lighting a small circle of grass or the underside of a heavy-leaved oak tree. The drone of the crickets mixed with the distant sound of traffic.

This then is the end of grief, I thought. I started to tell her the story of Anfortas, who was greyer even than mist, and how long his climb to morning would be, the years of waiting for the right person, the right question. I thought of Philip sleeping upstairs, his thin chest barely lifting the sheet as he breathed in and out.

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The Mountain Man

Pete McKenny swung his 2015 BMW onto the dirt lot in front of Rosie’s Cafe Bar and parked on the driest patch. He’d been on the road since breakfast, and now he was ready for lunch. This cafe looked like a place he could get a decent sandwich. He examined his face in the rear view mirror, smoothed back his hair, then eased out of the car and walked toward the cafe, shaking out his pants legs. He saw himself in the plate glass window as he approached and smiled. Creased khaki pants, sky blue shirt and the new tie from Collete, his girlfriend. His smile turned into a predatory grin. His girlfriend . . . for now. The tie was a bit loud, all pink and red roses, but wearing it was a small price to pay. He hummed to himself.

Inside, cigarette smoke wafted over from the bar, leaving a dull haze that muted the cheerful red and white decor of the cafe. At least the no smoking laws hadn’t reached this part of the boondocks. Pete walked through the cafe to the bar and slid into a booth where he could watch the comings and goings of the local yokels. He lit a cigarette, squinting through the smoke rising across his face, and smiled at the waitress when she dropped a menu on the table. Young. Could be pretty, he supposed, if she fixed herself up a bit.

“Somethin’ to drink?” she asked without much interest.
“Just a cup of coffee. High test. I’ve got a lot of driving to do.”
“Comin’ up.” She sauntered through the swinging doors behind the bar, returning a minute later with a cup and a coffeepot. She filled the cup, set the pot on the table, and pulled out a pencil and pad. “What’ll it be?”
He flicked an ash. “Club sandwich. On toast.”
“You got it.” Her smile was perfunctory.

As Pete picked up the cup, he heard a loud grinding of gears and screeching of brakes. He turned around and looked out the cafe window. A rusty red pick-up truck had pulled in. Jeep, it looked like, maybe ’85. Pete studied the truck. A real piece of junk. He glanced over at the waitress and saw her frown, mutter to herself, and take refuge behind the bar.

He heard the cafe door swing open and turned his head to look. Standing at the threshold, casting his eyes through the cafe to the bar, stood a tank of a man, large enough to block the doorway. He wore a white jumpsuit, dirty and stained. His graying beard was long enough to reach his chest. The beard still had the remnants of breakfast trapped in the hairs. The hair on top was gray, too, and probably curly if it weren’t so greasy. He strode into the bar and sat on a stool, his back to the counter. The bartender handed him a beer.

“Thanks,” the man grumbled and took a long swallow as he eyed Pete in the booth.
“You’re not from around here,” the man said.
Pete stared back at the man and summed him up. A mountain man. Big. Probably clumsy and stupid. A real character. “No, I’m not. Just passing through.”
“Uh huh.” The mountain man picked up his beer and walked over to the booth, pushing the table towards Pete as he wedged himself onto the seat. Pete sat back and fingered his coffee cup. This should be interesting. “I guess you live around here,” he said.

“Born here, gonna die here,” the man said. “Name’s Buddy. Buddy Wetzel.” He stuck out his hand.

Pete shook it. “Pete McKenny. I live upstate.” He wondered where he could take the conversation. This could be good material. “You a farmer here?”

“Well, I am and then again I ain’t.” The mountain man sat back and grinned.

The waitress pushed through the swinging doors and, keeping a wide berth from Buddy, set the club sandwich down in front of Pete. Buddy looked over at her.

“Hello, doll baby,” he said, an unpleasant smile on his face, “you gonna ask me what I want?”

“I know what you want,” she snapped. “I’ll bring you your cheeseburger and fries as soon as they’re ready.” She retreated behind the bar, looking tense and wary.

Amusing, Pete thought. Some history here. He took another drag on his cigarette. “So maybe you’re a farmer and maybe not. How’s that work?”

‘Whyn’t you tell me what you do?”

Pete watched the mountain man sit back, looking pleased with himself at this brilliant sally. “I’m a reporter. You know, newspapers. First time down this way.” And, Mr. Tough Mountain Man, I hold a black belt in karate. He didn’t say that. Too many yahoos always wanted to test you.

“Reporter, huh?” The man took another swig of beer. “Wouldn’t a figured that. No sir. City boy, though. That’s sure fer certain.” He turned to the waitress, still busy behind the counter. “Sweetheart, if you ain’t gonna gimme some nookie, how about that cheeseburger?”

“Coming up,” she said, not looking at him. She disappeared through the swinging doors and reappeared with a large plate filled with the cheeseburger, fries and lettuce. She handed the plate to the bartender who brought it to the table. The mountain man narrowed his eyes and called over to her. “Now look, darlin’, I can’t give you no tip if you don’t provide no service, now can I?”

She shrugged. “Not worth it.”

The mountain man chomped into the cheeseburger. “Yessir. City boy. Fancy car. Fancy job.”

Pete averted his eyes. Bad teeth. Bad manners. What a specimen. “Come on now. I’m sure you’re doing quite well with your farm-nonfarm job. Probably own a hundred acres hereabouts.”

“Maybe not a hunnert acres. But I do all right, I do.” Buddy nodded to himself. “Got my retirement all ready in my cellar. Lotsa gold too. Yessir.” He lifted his beer in a salute and took a swig.

Sure you do, thought Pete. Probably done up in a sock. None of these old guys believe in banks. “Aw come on. In your cellar? No way.”
“You callin’ me a liar, mister?” The mountain man leaned forward and challenged Pete with a glare over the cheeseburger.

“Nobody could live on what’s in their cellar. Especially in these parts.” Pete injected heavy skepticism into his response. With a black belt, he felt he could risk needling the old guy, and this had the makings of a good story.

“I do, don’t I, Susie Lee?” The mountain man looked over at the waitress, then at the bartender. “Virgil? That’s right, ain’t it?”

The waitress and the bartender glanced at each other. “Sure,” said the waitress indifferently.

“Yep,” added the bartender. “Got more gold than anyone else in these parts.”

The mountain man sat back in the booth and smiled at Pete in triumph.

“You see?”

Pete shrugged. Window dressing. “So what do you do then to be so fixed up for retirement and get all this gold?”

“Told you. I’m a nonfarmer.” He laughed and bit another chunk out of his cheeseburger. He reached for his mug of beer and lifted it toward the bartender. Pete raised his cup at the waitress. She brought the coffeepot while the bartender poured out another beer and hurried it to the table.

The mountain man took a long swallow of beer, wiped his mouth with his sleeve, and leaned back. “That your BMW out there?”

“Yep,” said Pete. “Love that car.”

“Guess you make good money working with them big city newspapers.”

Pete shrugged. “Yeah, sure I do.”

“Uh huh. I had me a real job,” the mountain man grinned at the waitress, “at the quarry down the road, ‘fore I struck it rich, that is.”

“That why you drive that wreck out there?” Pete glanced over at the waitress and winked.

He saw the mountain man’s eyes shift to the waitress, then back to himself. The mountain man pursed his lips, then spoke. “That’s a quality ve-hic-le I got. Lasted me a long time, still works good, antique too. 1981 Jeep pick-up. Can’t get no better’n that. Worth good money.” He leaned back.

Pete laughed. “Whoa. I think my BMW is a sight better than that, and I could sell it right now for a heap more’n all the gold in your cellar.” Behind the mountain man he saw the waitress frowning at him. Trying to warn him, he supposed, but this mountain man was barely a challenge. Heck, he was huge, a lumbering mastodon on the road to extinction, and stupid, living on instinct and responding to any bait on the hook. This might be fun. Make a good story too.

Pete leaned back and smiled lazily at the mountain man.

“What do you say to a race? My BMW against your Jeep.”

The mountain man squinted and took another swig of beer, again wiping his mouth with his sleeve. His eyes shifted toward the waitress. “A race, huh. What kinda stakes we talkin’ about?”

Pete rubbed his chin with his hand. A scene from the movie Deliverance flitted through his mind, but he could handle himself against this old guy, and he had a gun in the glove compartment if the karate didn’t stop him. Pete drew on
the cigarette and exhaled. “You win, I give you $100. I win, you show me the gold in your cellar—that is, if you really have gold in your cellar, which I doubt.”

The mountain man swallowed the rest of his cheeseburger and stood. “You’re on.” He looked at the waitress. “I ain’t leavin’ you no tip neither.” He shuffled out the door, and Pete could see the stooped shoulders and arthritic gait of an old man. *Hardly a challenge.*

Pete dropped a ten on the table, grinned at the waitress and said, “That ought to make up for it.” She smiled at him and took the bill but shook her head. Pete winked at her.

The mountain man waited outside by his pick-up. “Tell you what. These roads hereabouts are all two-laners, so we can’t just race side by side. We got to go by the time it takes.”

Pete nodded. “Sounds fair. That means we synchronize our watches.”

The mountain man shook his head. “Ain’t got no watch. We’ll go by your watch.” Pete hid a smile. *How much easier could this be?* “So where will we go?”

“We’ll go to my place. Just check your miles. Five miles down the road, turn right and go down a gravel road for about three miles till you come to my mailbox. Can’t miss it. Mailbox has my name on it. Wetzel. Drive through my gate and up to my house.”

“Yeah, well, you know these roads. I don’t.”

“Sure, but you got the fancy car, don’t you? Tell you what, we’ll take five minutes off your time. That oughta even things up.” The mountain man squinted at Pete. “Anyways, I’m gonna skin your ass with my pick-up.”

Pete shrugged. “We still won’t know what time you get there if you’re first.”

“I’ll check my house clock. Then you’ll just have to trust me.” He tossed the challenge to Pete and turned toward his truck.

Pete looked at his watch. He pretended to weigh this proposition before nodding as if he were making a big concession. “Okay. I’ll do it. I’ll follow you but I’ll be on your tail.”

The mountain man laughed. “Don’t be so sure of that.” He stepped up into the cab of the Jeep. “Just watch the miles. You got that?”

Pete nodded. He looked at his watch, held up a hand and then waved. “Go!” he shouted. The mountain man gunned his pick-up, spraying gravel as he spun out of the parking lot and onto the road.

Pete ran to his car, checked his watch, and raced out of the parking lot to follow the pick-up.

Pete hadn’t figured on the potholes and debris in the county road. *What did they do for road maintenance around here?* His BMW bounced from side to side, jarring Pete and making him grit his teeth. He slowed down. To hell with the bet. He peered through the dust and spotted the truck not too far ahead. That heap could never outrun a BMW. This whole race was ridiculous.

At last they came to the turn at the gravel road. Pete slowed to a crawl as he bumped over the gravel. It seemed to take forever to get to the mailbox with “Wetzel” printed on the side. He drove through the gate and up to the house, parking alongside the pick-up. The mountain man had disappeared, and no one else seemed to be around.
Pete reached over to the glove compartment and removed a gun small enough to fit in the palm of his hand. He slipped it into his pocket before cautiously stepping out of the car. He listened for a dog but heard none as he walked toward the front door of the house, stepping around rusted automobile parts littering the yard. Car tracks in the dirt ran across scrawny patches of weeds toward a large barn, about 100 feet away. The barn door was open, revealing the gleam of several cars inside.

Pete suddenly heard buzzing near his ear, then a sharp sting. He slapped at the insect, felt it in his hand and stared at it. A bee. Then he noticed the line of white beehives standing in the field by the side of the house. He felt another sting, then another. He ran to the house and pounded on the door.

The mountain man opened it. “Sorry. Had to pee. Come on in.”

“I got stung by your bees,” Pete stammered, rubbing the stings as he entered the gloomy house.

“Uh huh. Hadn’t oughter wear your big city perfume. And bees don’t like your colored shirt and tie neither.”

“Why didn’t you tell me you had bees?”

“Told you I was a nonfarm farmer, didn’t I? What’d you think I meant?” The mountain man folded his arms and stood tall, as if to challenge him.

“Okay, okay. You got something for these stings?”

“Nah. Don’t need it. That’s why I wear my bee suit. Bees don’t mind white. Keeps them calm.”

Pete shook his head, feeling weak and shaky. “Okay. So you got here ahead of me. What was your time?”

“Tell you what. It was real close, so I’m concedin' the race to you. Especially since you got stung and all.”

Pete swallowed. “Then you’re going to show me your cellar?”

“Sure. I don’t mind that.”

They walked into the kitchen. Dirty dishes stood on the ancient porcelain sink. The floor was scuffed and grimy yellow linoleum. In one corner, a covered metal barrel gleamed. It almost looked like a wringer washing machine without the wringer, just a handle protruding from the side. Shouldn’t that machine be on the front porch? Pete almost grinned at his little joke.

The mountain man gestured to Pete to follow him and tramped on the linoleum floor over to a hall door, latched with a simple hook and eye. He flipped up the hook, reached in to turn on the bare overhead bulb, and stepped down into the murkiness. Pete followed, trying not to trip on the uneven stair boards.

The cellar floor was dirt, but rough wooden shelves lined the walls. An insulated water heater sat on a cement block in one corner, next to an oil-burning furnace. Most of the shelves on two walls were filled with jars of home-preserved vegetables, jellies and fruit, neatly labeled. On the other two walls, the shelves were packed with jars of gold. Pete looked closer. Honey. They were filled with honey. He stared a moment, then laughed. Honey. Pete laughed again.

The mountain man drew himself up. “What are you laughin’ about. That’s my income there. And my retirement. Ain’t no call to laugh about a man’s livelihood.”
Pete controlled himself. The joke was on him. This tough old bird spent his days at a roadside produce stand. Pete almost snickered. This would make a good story.

“Thanks for showing me your,” Pete hid a smile, “gold, Mr. Wetzel. I’m very impressed.” He was already plotting the story in his mind.
The mountain man surveyed the shelves with pride. “Yessir. Good food here. Good money, too.” He turned and tramped up the stairs. Pete followed and stood aside for the mountain man to turn off the light and latch the door.

“Now there’s something else I got to show you,” the mountain man said. “Come with me.” He stomped out the front door into the yard and over to the bee hives. “See here?”
Pete stood at the door, afraid to follow. “They’ll sting me.”

“Nah. Come on out here.”
Pete hesitated, stepped forward, heard the door shut and the lock click behind him. He gauged the distance to his car just as the mountain man lifted the lid off a hive and then removed the top super. He banged on the outside of the hive with his fist. Thousands of bees soared into the air. They headed for Pete.

“Them’s holler bees,” called out the mountain man. “Wild bees outta the woods. They’re mean suckers.”
Pete screamed as he fought off the bees and ran for his car. He felt for his keys but couldn’t get them out of his pocket as he ran. His screams grew weaker, and he fell, then lost consciousness.
The mountain man replaced the super and the lid. “Yessir. Mean suckers.” He brushed aside the few bees that clung to his white suit, which was dotted with tiny yellow spots of bee pee.
He bent down over Pete’s body, pulled the car keys out of a pocket, and stepped over to the BMW. “Yessir. This is one fine car.” He ran his hand along the hood before opening the door, getting in, and driving it into the barn.

Eileen Haavik McIntire, President of the Maryland Writers’ Association, is the author of the 90’s Club cozy mystery series and two historical novels. She has been a beekeeper and once had a mean, nasty hive taken over by wild bees from "the haller," that is, the woods. She hastens to add that bees are mostly gentle critters. They only sting if necessary to protect their hive.
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In the Homicide Unit of the Baltimore City Police Department, a high profile murder investigation was called a “red ball”. Not sure how that name came about, but it was a way of distinguishing it from the normal everyday murder in Baltimore City. Not long after the initial on-scene murder investigation, the terms “red ball” would be tagged to the investigation.

In 1983, my squad got one of the most unusual “red ball” murders that you could ever imagine. Most of your murders in a high crime city like Baltimore occur on the streets. This murder occurred on the death row cellblock of the Maryland Penitentiary...that’s right, you heard me...a murder on death row.

I was a supervisor of one of the six homicide squads within the Homicide Unit of the Baltimore City Police Department. My squad consisted of six very experienced detectives. Most had at least five years in the unit, a few had over ten years. I had been in the Homicide Unit since 1974 as a detective. In 1978, I got promoted to sergeant and after one year in patrol, I returned to the Homicide Unit as a detective sergeant.

The procedure for handling new murders in the unit went like this: when the phone rang and it was the police dispatcher informing us of a murder, the squad that was next up took the murder. The detective answering the phone would not necessarily get the assignment. I would go to the detective who was up next. Up next meant that if you were working and it was your turn, you got the assignment.

“Red ball” murders would get more attention than your normal everyday murder. All the murders in Baltimore did get thoroughly investigated. But, because the media would be hungry for information on high profile murders, the “red balls” got the most attention. The detectives in the unit took pride in solving murders. We had a large plaque on the wall in the office that read “NO GREATER HONOR COULD BE BESTOWED UPON A HUMAN BEING THAN TO INVESTIGATE THE DEATH OF ANOTHER HUMAN BEING.”

That year in 1983, my squad got the call to meet patrol officers at the Maryland Penitentiary. The police dispatcher who called the Homicide Unit informed us that we were needed at the penitentiary for a possible murder on the death row tier of the prison. Knowing this would definitely be a “red ball” investigation, I went with the detective to the prison. The detective assigned was a very experienced investigator in the unit.

We arrived at the prison and were met by a prison official with the rank of captain. He informed us that his guards heard a commotion on the death row tier. When they went to investigate, they observed an inmate hanging from a sheet in his cell. The sheet was configured into a rope, which was around the inmate’s neck. The guards cut the sheet down from the ceiling, and the inmate was pronounced dead on the scene. Initially, the guards believed that the inmate may have committed suicide. Upon examining the body, they observed numerous wounds that were consistent with a beating. The captain ordered that the body be kept in the cell until our arrival. Death row at that time consisted of about twenty-
five inmates. All but five were waiting to be executed, the others were on the tier serving life sentences without the possibility of parole.

I was very familiar with the Maryland Penitentiary. When growing up, my family lived about two blocks from the penitentiary. I can remember when the executions took place at the prison. The neighbors would gather outside on the street at midnight to watch the lights blink on the top of the prison. On the top of the prison there was a small structure that was used for the executions. The last person to be executed by hanging was William Thomas which occurred on June 10, 1955. I was twelve years old. The last person to die in the gas chamber was Nathaniel Lipscomb on June 9, 1961; I was in the Marine Corps at that time. The last inmates to die by lethal injection were John Thanos on May 17, 1994, Flint Gregory Hunt on July 2, 1997, Tyrone Gilliam on November 16, 1998, and Steven Oken on June 17, 2004.

Governor Parris Glendening stopped executions by executive order on May 9, 2002. Governor Robert Ehrlich ended the moratorium and resumed executions in 2004. On May 2, 2013, Governor Martin O’Malley signed a law banning executions in Maryland, and thus Maryland became the eighteenth state in the U.S. to ban the death penalty.

When we arrived at the prison, we were instructed to put our weapons in a secure location; this we knew from prior visits to correction facilities around the city. We were also advised to leave our wallets, badges, pens, and any other objects that could be used against us by the inmates. The prison guard in charge of the death row tier told us that the guards do not go on death row. He explained that the inmates’ meals are delivered through a secure set of doors. He further explained that the only time the guards would go on the tier would be in extreme incidents, where an inmate may be in danger. He said that when they did go on the tier, they went in as a four-man team with full body armor, but no weapons other than batons and gas grenades. He explained that death row was an entity of its own, an isolated heavily secured section of the prison. If an inmate needed to come off the tier, he would go through a series of doors, each one locking after he entered it. When he entered the second section, he would remove all his clothing, move to the next section and then be allowed to put his clothing back on.

As the guards were preparing to open the series of doors, I can tell you that I was scared. My heart was racing and I could feel the sweat on my back. While we were waiting to go in, our crime lab technician showed up. We briefed him and I can remember him saying, “Are you serious? We are really going in that place.” As the doors were about to open, I told my investigator and the technician that we needed to go in, ignore the inmates, check the body, take photos, measurements, and get out. As you can imagine, we were not about to ask the death row inmates what happened. Usually on a murder investigation, you would look for witnesses, canvas the area, and just hang around to see if anyone would come forward with information. There would be no hanging around death row. It could be presumed with certainty that most on that tier knew what happened. It could also be presumed that no one would tell us anything.
We entered the tier and went directly to the cell. The victim was on the floor. He still had the sheet around his neck. We observed plenty of blood on the victim which was definitely not consistent with a hanging. The tier was on a second level of the cellblock that contained approximately twenty cells. We made a cursory examination of the body, noting the marks where there was blood. There was nothing in the cell to recover as evidence, other than the sheet. It appeared that the victim was beaten, probably by more than one person. When he died, they used the sheet to make it look like a suicide. When we were done in the cell area, we went to the bottom portion of the tier. The technician was attempting to take photos from different angles, having the murder scene included in the photos. He asked one of the inmates if he would move out of the line of the photo. The inmate, a man about six foot five, weighing well over two hundred pounds, with tattoos all over his body, would not move. He used some pretty descriptive nasty language on us and said, “If you want me to move, you’ll have to move me!” The technician looked at me for guidance. Knowing that we were in hostile territory, I told the technician to just move and get a different angle. As we waited for the photos to be taken, I could hear some rumbling coming from the inmates. I heard one of the inmates say, “He got what he deserved.” I also heard others saying, “What a shame that he had to die.” I knew from the tone of their voices that they were mocking the situation. No one on that tier cared much about what happened.

As I looked around at the six by eight foot cells, I could not help but think, *how in the hell can they keep their sanity in this place.* They were surviving day-by-day under horrible conditions. The music blared throughout the tier with anything from rock and roll to rap. Most of the music was undistinguishable to me, but the inmates seemed to enjoy it. These were hard-core men; most of them had been on death row for long periods of time. Till this day, I can only imagine what they thought when they started their day: *I’m never getting out, I’m just waiting for the day they kill me.*

Prior to living on death row, the inmate that was murdered was in the main section of the penitentiary. He was described as a tough guy with an attitude. Apparently when he went on the death row tier, he tried to push his weight around and it didn’t work. He was no pushover; he was a weightlifter while in the main section. It was obvious from our cursory exam of him in the cell, that he was well built.

We will never know what really happened, but it would have taken several death row inmates to overcome this guy to the point of beating him to death. You have to remember these inmates were in for horrendous murders. Killing someone that did not fit into their death row lifestyle was not a problem. They know that they’re going to be executed or at the least they will spend the rest of their life in prison.

The murder was never solved. You can imagine what we were up against trying to solve a murder on death row. Every time I drive into Baltimore City, I can see the prison from the highway. The little structure is still on top of the prison. Executions have stopped in Maryland. I don’t even know if there is such a place in the prison designated as death row.
It has been thirty-three years since that murder. Those inmates that were on death row are old now, if they are even alive. Wouldn't it be interesting to go into the prison and find whoever is still alive and see if they will tell us what happened? From my observations back then, I would estimate that the average age of the inmates on death row was probably thirty to thirty-five years. So, thirty-three years later, if they are alive, they are in the mid to late sixties. Do they sit around and tell the new inmates about the time a tough, well built, weightlifter got murdered on death row? Would they remember me, and how terrified I must have looked back then? As the death penalty in Maryland has been abolished, do they cherish each day, knowing that death won't come in the little shack on top of the old prison. But, it will come to them, like it comes to everyone: just old age.

Dick Ellwood, having served with the Baltimore Police Department for twenty-five years, has written several books since retiring. He resides in Baltimore County with his wife.
Memoir:

From Academic Sociology to Radical Journalism: A Professor Learns to Write

The political activism of the late 1970s competed with the scholarly writing that I was supposed to be doing as part of my job as a college professor. Although I taught sociology at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, I lived with my girlfriend, Natalie, who taught sociology in New York City. My weekly commuting left little time for activism in either Baltimore or New York and I felt something was missing from my life.

*The Guardian: An Independent Radical Newsweekly*, not to be confused with the better-known British *Guardian*, was beginning a New York bureau so I thought I’d try my hand at radical journalism. Founded in 1948, it had become the largest radical newspaper in the country that wasn’t affiliated with a left-wing political organization like the Communist Party USA. By 1967, *The Guardian* had a circulation of around 20,000 and was a major source of news and analysis for what was called the “new left” in America. I had been giving a monthly contribution to *The Guardian* for years and I traveled with them to China in 1972.

My first *Guardian* assignment was to photograph a New York City demonstration in support of Joann Little, a black woman who was imprisoned for killing a white corrections officer who raped her while she was incarcerated in North Carolina on another charge. Little had escaped from prison and relocated in New York where she was re-arrested as a fugitive. She was appealing North Carolina’s attempt to extradite her; William Kunstler, a movement hero at the time, was her attorney.

When I arrived at the courthouse on a cold February day, I saw about 50 people walking in a circle at the bottom of the steps. They carried signs and chanted “Free Joann Little” and “Free All Political Prisoners.”

*What am I supposed to do now? I thought. I wish I had taken Photo Journalism 101 in college. Get your camera out, Fred, and take some pictures.*

Being New York City, the sidewalk was jammed with people trying to navigate around the demonstrators. Getting a clear shot of the demonstration in this crush of people seemed impossible, even with my wide-angle lens. Everyone was moving and I couldn’t ask them to pose for a picture. When I climbed the steps to get a better view, a police officer immediately rushed up to me and said, “You can’t stand here.”

“I’m a newspaper photographer,” I said, haltingly.

“Oh yah,” he said, “Let’s see your press pass.”

*Oh, shit. “I, I must have left it in the office,” I said.*

“Right. Get off the steps,” he said, increasingly annoyed. I obeyed. Somehow, I shot an entire roll of film [pre-digital camera] and returned to
the Guardian office. I gave the film to Jack Smith, the editor.

“Why don’t you write a short article on Joann Little,” he said after taking the film.

“What! I don’t really know that much about the case.”

“Here’s some articles,” he said, pushing a manila folder toward me. “Make it about 400 words, triple spaced.”

“Ok, I’ll take it home and get it to you in a few days.”

“Can you do it now?” he said. “Deadline is tomorrow. We have some typewriters that aren’t being used.”

“You want me to do it NOW?”

“Do you have the time?”

“Yes, but...”

“Great, give it a try.”

He led me to a large room with about a dozen beat-up desks, each with a typewriter. Personal computers would come ten years later. The large, noisy typesetting machine clinked and clanked as the individual letters fell into place. My desk showed numerous stains from spilled coffee and grease. The ribbon on my Royal manual typewriter needed replacing weeks earlier.

“Let me know if you have any questions,” he said.

After reading the material and making several unsuccessful attempts over the course of two hours, a two-page, triple-spaced article finally lay on my desk. I walked over to Jack and handed it to him. “Thanks,” he said, “just put it on this pile” and returned to his work.

“Aren’t you going to look at it?” I asked, meekly.

“Can’t do it right now,” he said. “I have to finish the editorial for a meeting in 30 minutes. I’ll look at it later and let you know.”

“Okay,” I said, and left the office, a little bewildered.

That was weird, I thought to myself. I wonder if the article was any good. This journalism thing is certainly different than scholarly writing.

I never heard from him. The next week I eagerly opened The Guardian when it came in the mail and saw my first byline, along with a photograph. I never wrote something that was published so fast. This is great! As I read the article, I recognized about eighty percent of it as my writing, rearranged and shortened. Twenty percent was new, including the first paragraph which I learned was the lead. The accompanying picture, showing the entire picket line, was someone else’s.

Guess my writing was mostly okay but I have to work on the photography. It’s really hard to take pictures of a demonstration. How did the photographer get all 50 people into the picture?

A few weeks later I wrote a second article about a protest against budget cuts at a local community college, also from second-hand sources. Is this really journalism? I thought to myself. Shouldn’t I be going to things and interviewing people? When the article came out in the next issue, I recognized ninety-percent of the writing, including the lead. Progress, I thought.

I finally got my chance to cover a real event by attending the daylong conference “China: 1978: The New Long March” sponsored by the Philadelphia
Chapter of the US-China People’s Friendship Association (USCPFA). Mao Zedong had died three years earlier and the Chinese government said that it was still following his revolutionary principals. Although the mainstream American press speculated that China was moving away from Mao Zedong Thought, the USCPFA agreed with the Chinese government.

I had a great lead: “‘China has not been de-Maoified; in fact, it is being re-Maoified.’ This comment by one of the speakers seemed to reflect the opinion of most of the participants who attended the day-long conference ....”

I described some of the speakers, interviewed several of the organizers and wrote about the atmosphere at the conference: “The audience reaction to most of the sessions was lively and the questions came from a wide range of political perspectives.” One of my main themes was the half-hearted attempt to have some controversy about China in a USCPFA event. Most participants seemed to have a vested interest in supporting whatever the Chinese government said. Because of this lack of controversy, I had quit the organization the previous year.

I can do this, I said to myself. Ninety-five percent of my writing was untouched by the editor. The people at the USCPFA will have to address some of my comments. Maybe I can be a real journalist.

A few months later, I went to San Francisco to cover the USCPFA national convention that was attended by 1100 people. I described it as “the largest and the stormiest [convention] ever” and discussed how different factions in the organization looked at the post-Mao leadership. I interviewed people from different sides and tried to accurately explain the different viewpoints.

I concluded: “How viable is this type of mass organization where the dominant attitudes seem to be promoting China and protecting China’s image? How much can one really learn about China in the USCPFA?...How valuable is it to the U.S. left if ‘friendship at any cost’ becomes more important than political understanding and analysis?”

I was finally finding my political voice, combining reporting and analysis. Being a major participant in the national debate about China among those on the left felt wonderful! Thousands of people are reading my ideas. I get compliments from people I respect. I’m not a celebrity, but I’m finally being noticed.

Soon, I became The Guardian’s China-watcher and wrote several columns a month. In March 1979, I wrote a two part series on changes in China’s education policy based some of my own research on the same topic that also resulted in a scholarly paper. In August, I wrote a four-part series on larger political changes in China. These more in-depth articles were particularly gratifying since I was combining my academic and journalistic skills to reach a mostly non-academic audience.

I did this writing as a stringer; i.e., someone not on the full-time, paid staff. I refused any pay for my articles and continued to send a monthly check to support the paper. Although writing was my major political activity, I still had my academic job to pay the bills.

Things were going so well that I arranged to take an unpaid leave from UMBC to work full-time for The Guardian in the fall 1980. I would receive the
same sub-minimum salary that all other Guardian workers received. I was finally a full-time political writer/activist, something I had always wanted to experience. I would also have a reprieve from commuting and get to be with Natalie, full-time. It was also the first time I had a five-day-a-week, nine-to-five job without the flexibility of academia.

I took the subway to 23rd Street and walked to the Guardian office. Everyone welcomed me, enthusiastically. Since I was now on the full-time staff, I learned about my day-to-day activities that included editing other people’s articles and writing short pieces about a variety of issues. I would continue with my China-watcher responsibilities.

My first writing assignment was a small article about demonstrations in South Korea, another topic that I knew nothing about. The editor handed me yet another manila folder with some clippings and told me to have something ready later that day. After turning it in and going on to something else, the editor came up to me and said, “Good article, Fred, but it has to be a little shorter.”

“Oh,” I said. “How much do I have to cut?”

“Figure out how to cut five lines without having to do additional typesetting.”

“What?” I exclaimed. “It’s bad enough that I can’t use footnotes and that I am writing about something I’m not familiar with. How can I cut something without having it reset? Is this some kind of initiation prank?”

He sat down on my desk and explained how the deadline was approaching and there was no time for more typesetting. He showed me how to take a few words off of the ends of a few different sentences. The rest of the article would then be re-pasted so it would fit in the desired space. After successfully carrying out this task, everything else seemed easy. Ironically, I soon became the go-to guy for short articles on South Korea.

Working at The Guardian was wonderful and I felt like a full-time radical. I learned how to write good “leads” and to get the important material in at the beginning of the article, quite the opposite of scholarly writing where you gradually lead up to the conclusion. Proofreading, in spite of my poor spelling, and editing other people’s writing took up a few hours every day. My most valuable lesson – no words were so precious that they couldn’t be edited. This also helped my scholarly writing.

Tuesday nights the paper went to the printer, a 30-minute subway ride away. The Guardian provided pizza and soda for everyone since the last-minute work proceeded far into the night. I got home at midnight that first Tuesday, exhausted from a full day’s work. I had put in 12 hours that day and I didn’t want to think about what that meant in terms of an hourly wage. But, the paper got out and we began the cycle for the next week.

After a few additional late Tuesday nights, Natalie convinced me to talk to the editor about not having to work so late each week. We agreed that 8:00PM would be quitting time for me; still a 10-hour day.

Soon, I had both the education and China ‘beats’ and was thrilled to write about what I knew. I did a series on the growing influence of what was then called “the new right” [conservatism, 1980s style] in the area of American
education. The Heritage Foundation was the new kid on the block. Toward the end of my stay at The Guardian, I wrote a 4-part series on the state of the American student movement that was based solely on telephone interviews with activists around the country.

I think I know what I am doing, finally, and I’m really making a difference. Activists depend on me to know what’s happening on campuses around the country. I am part of a larger movement for social change.

I even contemplated a career change. Although I couldn’t financially afford to work at The Guardian for very long, maybe a journalism degree along with my PhD would open some doors. I made an appointment with the admissions office at the Columbia University School of Journalism, one of the best in the country. I brought my vitae and some of my Guardian articles and explained what I was thinking.

The J-School admissions officer, a woman in her thirties, dressed in a grey suit, was initially impressed when I mentioned writing for The Guardian. Her expression soured when she found out that my Guardian was not the well-respected English publication.

“If I got a master’s degree in journalism, along with my PhD,” I asked, “would I be able to get a job at one of the major newspapers or magazines?”

She smiled, looked at me and said: “You would have to start out at a small newspaper somewhere and work your way up. Journalism is a very competitive field these days.”

“I thought my PhD might make some difference.”

“You would need to use your personal connections to break into some of the major publications,” she said. “If you have these connections, you don’t really need a journalism degree.”

Great. I can’t see myself as a cub reporter in some small town, and I certainly don’t have any of the high-level connections that she was describing. Academia isn’t such a bad place after all.

Before leaving The Guardian, I was selected to lead one of their tours to Cuba in December 1980, almost two years after my first trip. Even though we were there during Christmas, there was no commercialism and very little evidence of the holiday. This was such a contrast to all the hoopla in New York. We literally missed Christmas.

The highlight of the trip was hearing Fidel Castro speak at one of those huge rallies at Revolution Square in Havana. Over 1 million people attended, about 10% of the entire country.

The festivities began with representatives from elementary school student groups giving small talks and worked it’s way up to more high ranking political representatives. People around us paid varying degrees of attention to the initial speakers. One of our guides stood behind Natalie and me and offered a simultaneous translation.

When Fidel was introduced, everything changed. The people around us were quite engrossed in what he was saying. He had this “call and response” style and virtually everyone around us responded to him. Fidel would say something like “Will we let the American imperialists defeat us?” and the crowd
would respond with a thunderous “No.” From everything that I was able to see and experience, the people around us held Fidel in high esteem.

My article on the rally contained the phrase “Special from Havana” under my byline. Far out! Me reporting from Havana! Just like all those bylines that I see in the New York Times and Baltimore Sun. Who would have thought! This was my only article as an on-site foreign correspondent.

Several weeks after returning from Cuba, I boarded a train in New York and headed south to begin the spring 1981 semester teaching sociology in Baltimore. I continued writing as a Guardian stringer for several more years.

Dr. Fred L. Pincus, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of Maryland Baltimore County, www.fredlpincus.com
Drama

A Play in One Act: Do Carrots Prevent Cataract?

[In a small den, about 10’ by 10’, Maria and Martin are seated across a bistro table. On the table are: a plate of sliced bread and cheese, a bottle of red wine, circles of carrots and two forks on another plate. The rectangular desk behind them is piled with books – in no particular order. Martin is a physician; his wife Maria, a teacher. Martin picks a carrot on a fork and is about to put it in his mouth.]

Martin: All I do is work and…
Maria: heal the sick and eat…
Martin: [munching a carrot slice with gusto] and sleep…
Maria: at home, at work… Don’t chew so hard, dear. You could crack…
Martin: Crack! I have no use for it…
Maria: Why! I am a teacher. I know you are useful.
Martin: I exist to be used.
Maria: an existential existence
Martin: I read Camus after finishing college. Camus said, “Hell is… other people.”
Maria: That would be Sartre. He existed, too.
Martin: I exist. You exist. We all exist.
Maria: Exist, and then exit.
Martin: The inevitable exit makes existing meaningless.
Maria: A mean existence…

Martin stands up, and then abruptly sits down.

Martin: A mean, meager, meaningless existence – note the alliteration – unless [pauses] one’s political pals permit pillage and plunder.
Maria: Nine to five… pillage and ponder by the pond.
Martin: Ponder and wonder – wander in a circle, each man bound by his own radius of connections. NO EXIT from your circle. Try to stretch the radius and it snaps… you snap and shrink back to your own restricted circumferential boundary.
Maria: shrink back to your private shrink…
Martin: who cheats on his tax.
Maria: You tax yourself needlessly, dear. The radius and
its elasticity are mere scientific curiosities.

Martin: Life is easier for a scientist...answer taxing questions but not much
tax to pay...find the answer to one question at a time...such as [munching
audibly on another slice of carrot and then rather loudly] ...Do
carrots prevent cataract?

Maria: The key to universal vision!

Martin: A vision of the universe – one answer at a time.

Maria rises from her chair. She waits.

Martin continues, his voice harsh but low.

Martin: How painfully obscure life is...

Maria: And death no less.

Martin: I see my patients get ill, suffer, then suffer no more...and close their
eyes forever. Does the play end after the curtain falls on Broadway?

Maria: [In a soothing voice] There is always next season, Martin.

Martin: Painfully. Slowly. You come to know much you need not know.

You never get to know what you desperately seek to know. Perhaps that is
why death is so painless.

Maria: Less painful if you ask me.

Martin: If you never ask! Never ask questions that have no answer. Don’t

Maria walks across the den.

Martin, watching her, shifts to her vacant chair.

Maria switches off the light and returns to occupy his empty chair.

Only two silhouetted figures are now visible to the audience.

Martin: No answers...only darkness.

Maria: Darkness...no light...and yet we exist...

Martin: Essentially.

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