

FICTION | ESSAYS | POETRY | INTERVIEWS | BOOK REVIEWS

The Book

Smuggler's Den

December
2019

'TIS THE SEASON

2020 is upon us!

Celebrate the
holidays and New
Year with fine short
stories next to a
warm fire



PLUS

a look at next year's writing contests you
won't want to miss out on

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Letter from the Editor

And the idea of just wandering off to a cafe with a notebook and writing and seeing where that takes me for awhile is just bliss. J. K. Rowling

I don't know about everybody else, but 2019 has had some challenges. Like, say... our computer crashing, causing a delay in getting this month's magazine published!

All the stories you hear about and family traditions others share with you are some of the best stories you will ever hear. A lot of "lists" come out, making my Goodreads account full of new books to read in 2020. Polling readers what books they enjoyed gives you insight as to what to work on in your own writing. As they always say, read what you write (and read a lot).

I took a class recently about essay writing and short stories. The information the instructor presented went beyond writing a short piece. As many in the class were interested in writing a book too, she adjusted her syllabus to teach how you could use what you learned from the class to use when writing a book. I hope to some day publish a book as well, and I highly suggest to anyone else out there who is in the same boat as me to keep learning! Take a class online or read a book on writing, whatever fits in your budget, do it.

The holidays are upon us and this is a chaotic time for everyone. So a huge thank you to all of those contributed to this month's magazine. It takes a driven individual to write and submit pieces across the web, while still working or finishing up classes (or both for some!). You guys and gals rock!

Happy Holidays!

Dani Watkins

Dani Watkins

Editor-In-Chief, Book Smuggler's Den Literary Magazine

My New Year Wish to You

By Izabelle Cassandra Alexander

May your new year be wonderful
in every way possible!

May you be healthy and full of zest,
living each moment unfolding
to your and others' highest best.

Delight in the big surprises and
small miracles of life.
May joy fill your heart
and every day,
love surround you as you keep on
pursuing your dreams,
hoping,
and change for a better version of you
each morning.

Inspiration, success, and moments of silence
embedded in unsurpassable peace
may wash over you and heal
each particle of your being
exposed to sickness or pain.

A new year may recharge and liven your soul.
Be as happy as you can be, unimaginable,
like never before.

Make your mark in the world
and this new year count!

Christmas Presents

By Roger D'Agostin

I'd been sober for five years when I relapsed. Something like five and two months. You probably think that's some shit. But it's not. When you're in the rooms you hear it all the time – seven, seventeen, thirty-two. Sometimes you hear someone say if I was only three years sober or five years, I would have gone out and drank, I would've had a grand old pity party. But I've been through enough the past twenty years that I know I'll get through this. Honestly, you don't hear that that much. People disappear. Then so-and-so saw them at a bar.

I always hated Christmas. I remember when I was thirteen. I wanted this Lego set and I went with my mom to the store so she would buy the exact one I wanted, but once we got there I knew I couldn't have it. It was on the top shelf in this big box, which didn't look big in the flyer, but when you went to the store it was the biggest one. I didn't ask. I just chose another one. Still, I had to wait for Christmas and I kept thinking that maybe she fooled me and went back to the store and bought the big one. But she didn't and I knew it when I saw the box underneath the tree. I remember after I unwrapped it how I stared at the box and my mom said, that's the one you picked, remember? I still played with it, but it didn't satisfy whatever it is a present's supposed to satisfy.

Anyhow, five years and two months since my last drink, a week before Christmas I started getting really foul. My dad was in the hospital and in a terrible way I was sort of glad because that gave me an excuse to not be jolly and not get all that holiday shit – presents, cards, decorating - done. I mean I still had to shop for my daughter, Lilly, but she was fifteen and told me exactly what to buy.

But then my ex calls and asks if Lilly could fly out to visit me on Christmas Eve because she planned to spend Christmas to New Year's with her fiancé in Mexico. "It's our honeymoon engagement," she giggled over the phone, before getting down to the exact purpose of her call - Lilly needed somewhere to stay.

I was more than happy to have her, even with everything going on with my dad, and even when my ex ended our conversation with, "Thanks. But you really only get to do this once, you know."

The irony is that my ex was right. Lilly is my only child. The first ten years of her life I was either drunk, hung-over, or absent. The eleventh, my wife divorced me. By then I had three DUIs, a drunk and disorderly, and a vandalism charge because I was pissing on the side of a church and the pastor was kind enough to drop the public intoxication charge. But he still appeared at my sentencing and told the judge, no one should piss on a church, drunk or sober. That didn't help my case, especially when he added I could have pissed on a tree three feet to the left.

My exes lawyer read that statement to the judge. He felt the need to read it twice, before and after he listed my arrests. The second time I blurted, "I've attended AA meetings for two weeks straight, your honor. And I have all fifteen papers signed." I held the crumpled strips like they were lottery tickets.

"And have you remained sober?" The judge asked.

"No, sir," I replied, too loud, proud of my honesty, suddenly no longer the thirty-something-year-old who could still drink like a frat boy, but the bloated aftermath.

I don't know if I expected him to belittle or scold me. But I know I didn't expect a soft, sorry and hope that I found sobriety. He added that the court might be able to assist in this matter. I think his reply stunned me more than my wife being granted full custody, and me, limited visitations with a counselor present. That was the first day of my five-plus years.

Since then my life has not become better than I could have ever anticipated. It's better because I haven't been arrested or had my license revoked or forgotten where I've parked my car that I shouldn't be driving shitfaced anyway or have to try to figure out what lies I told my mom last night. I never think where am I when I wake up, and sometimes, more than I'd liked to admit, I am thankful I didn't drink the night before. But I still don't have joint custody and only see Lilly once a year, sometimes twice. We're on a perpetual first date. She changes so much each time I see her. I'm like a distant uncle picking her up from the airport and trying to make conversation until she is around her real relatives.

This time was no different. I picked her up without much of a hassle at the airport, didn't say a word about her hair color, or try to force conversation when she slumped into the car, plugged in her airbuds and focused on her phone. My sponsor told me to remember to take it easy. "Don't expect too much. And call me if you need anything."

I found myself mumbling those words and jumped when Lilly asked me what I was doing. I told her I was singing along to the Christmas songs on the radio and she said, Oh, and plugged her airbuds back in.

I should mention that I started having drunk dreams. I've always had them but that December, they invaded my sleep every night. Once, I walked into the kitchen sweating and thought I had to pour out the rest of the vodka before my bender got any worse, and suddenly realized I didn't have to piss and I wasn't hungover. No dry mouth, no nausea. But it still took me a few minutes to realize I hadn't drank. It was weird.

Maybe that was the moment it fell apart. At a meeting they told me it was stress, percolating for months with my sick father and then my daughter coming to visit. I was lying to myself thinking

everything was fine. But I don't know. I have my own theory. I think there are cells in my body that really want to drink. They've always been there and always will be. And when I start drinking they get more cells to join and pretty soon all of them are on board with the drinking thing. It's a party. But most of the cells aren't like the first cells. Kind of like in college when everyone gets drunk. The party starts and everyone thinks, hey what the hell. Next, you think you know someone's puking in the bathroom and there are strangers having sex in your room and your buddy wants to streak. But once the party stopped the manipulated cells decided they were sick of being dried out and miserable and embarrassed and this sober thing isn't so bad. They keep the fucked up cells apart. Sure, every so often a few of the drunk cells get together and romanticize about the good old days but the sober cells kind of get in between the slobs and the urge goes away.

But that Christmas Eve too many convened and no one interrupted them.

I had tried to make some Tilapia with rice for dinner – a weak take on the seven fishes theme - when Lily told me she was a vegan and the smell made her nauseous. She took some rice back to her room, so I ate dinner alone while I tried to air out the kitchen. Then I turned on the TV but I kept flipping through the channels and looking at the hallway hoping Lilly would come out and sit on the couch. She had become an indoor cat that was always scooting around corners and hiding in the room you're not in. I decided to make hot chocolate even though Lilly didn't want any and thought I'd drive around the neighborhood and look at the decorated houses to make myself feel good.

The stoplights were what killed me. If they hadn't been red and the liquor stores weren't there. Seeing those people go in and come out with shopping carts and bags of alcohol, laughing and smiling. I thought, why am I the only one that has to stay sober?

I rationalized this was my present to myself but I didn't need much rationalizing. I got home and checked Lilly's room to make sure she was sleeping and then I sat in the same chair I always sat in when I drank and stared at the TV. I watched one garbage reality show after another and even stared at the yuletide log on public access for a good while thinking about how Christmas should be: a fire, wool cardigan, slippers, dad drinking expensive bourbon from a proper glass, a thick book. Then I watched some religious show and the guy was saying that we shouldn't buy Christmas presents but make something for our relatives. He said the best present he ever received was this letter his dad wrote and he started reading it right there on television and I thought that's what I should do. I should write a letter to my daughter. So I got out some paper and sat down and wrote and wrote how much she meant to me and how beautiful and special she was and then instead of putting it in an envelope I got an actual box and wrapped it up with a bow. I even found some glitter and sprinkled it on.

That's about all I remember. That and I didn't have the drunk dream. I didn't dream at all. I woke up with a dry mouth and headache and it took me a minute to realize it was Christmas morning.

I called my sponsor. He answered on the first ring and said, “You need to go to a meeting. Should I pick you up?” I told him I’d be ready in a half-hour. “Be outside.” I didn’t get a chance to tell him I slipped, but he knew. So I went into the bathroom to shower and when I came out I saw Lilly standing over her presents with my letter in her hands. My head throbbed. I stared at her back. I couldn’t see if her airbuds were in.

“This is nice.” She turned and said. “This letter. It’s nice. Hard to read your handwriting and I don’t know about this wrapping job.” I noticed her nails. She has my mother’s hands. Certainly not her mom’s. Her mom could never grow nails. They were stubby and she was always trying to grow them but they bent back and never looked right. Then they broke.

“I have to go to a meeting.”

“Oh.” She looked surprised.

“But I’ll be back in an hour.”

“OK.” She looked down at the letter again. “OK.”

“Well, you write another one.” That’s what my sponsor said. “Honesty. Be honest with her. You tell her you slipped and you wrote the letter drunk and you write another one and give it to her.” I argued that maybe the letter was really good and I should leave things well enough alone.

“She said it was nice.”

He shook his head and said he wasn’t talking about it anymore. “And you need to share all this shit at the meeting,” he added. Which of course I didn’t want to do. That was the worst. Even when people came up to you afterward and gave you their number and told you you could beat this disease and hugged you. It made your slip up that much worse.

I wondered if it was better not to go. Leave it at that. Get out of the car and walk home. Maybe the letter I wrote was really good and the next few days with Lilly would be better and better. Maybe we’d make plans to see each other in a few months.

“Look, I know this isn’t easy.” My sponsor said when we reached the church. “I slipped too. A lot of us have. But you have to keep trying.”

Lilly was in her room when I returned from the meeting. I checked myself in the car and my eyes didn’t look too bad, but I still wanted to splash some water on my face. I didn’t want Lilly to ask if I had been crying. Thankfully, I heard her talking in her bedroom when I passed. The

loud no made me stop. I leaned against the door and heard her saying, “It was really sweet, mom. He wrote how much he loved me and wished he had been there for me. A few sentences were impossible to read. No. No. He hasn’t been drinking-”

That’s when I made my decision. I wasn’t lying. I was holding off. Just for the week. Next Christmas I’d write another letter. Tell her everything. But not today.

It's Christmas

By Ben Ellison

Damp chill, dark nights
Warm house, warm lights
Why do these bring me so much glee?
It's what Christmas is to me.
It's baby Jesus, in a manger born
It's using hot cocoa to fend off a snowstorm
It's wrapping presents as the music plays
It's seeing the joy on a child's face
It's a time of great laughter
It's a time of great fun

It's the sound of a family becoming one.

Long Nights in a Drug Store Bin

By Anthony Gibson

The same thing that made me special was also true for Rick. We weren't like all of the other teddies in the drugstore bin. All I knew was that while the rest of them were frozen like little still-life, plush cadets – Rick and I were alive, beating with nerve and wonderment, the two of us coping with our conditions in our own way. I couldn't tell you why or what plagued us. I wish I could say that my creator had whispered into my ear and delivered me some sort of gospel – granting me proof and clarity of a purpose. But I guess I was meant to always learn the hard way.

The thing was, Rick wasn't a very nice bear. He had a penchant for ripping out the glassy eyes of the other teddies. Because of this, I did my best to avoid him – to hide the fact that I too was like him. I'd listen to the bears tear around me like I was in the eye of some demented plush tornado. To comfort myself, I'd stroke the few strands of silver, defected fur beneath my chin, and on the occasion when I could feel him drawing near, I'd carefully crawl through the sea of my polyester comrades and pray he wouldn't solve the life in me.

There was a moment once, where he was too close for me to safely move out of the way. I kept still and lifeless like the others. When his eyes met mine, he looked right through me with a familiar longing. It hit me that behind each unhinged eye, he was searching for the same truth troubling my own existence – though something dark and oppressive colored his loneliness. He skipped on me that day and used my sturdy head to prop himself up to the next bear, whom he utterly ruined.

There were moments where us bears were up for selection – where human children and adults alike would filter through our sewn faces, determining which of us was worthy of their love. I did my best to keep near the top of the pile. I figured my deepest purpose in life was to give myself entirely to someone. To offer my cuddles to someone and share a warm joy, where inside my stitches they could find the purest, most unconditional love: teddy bear love. If I was a teddy, then I was love.

I never once noticed Rick at any selections. My guess was that he hid at the bottom of the bin for the sake of his own protection. Perhaps he didn't feel like he was meant for someone like I was.

One day I routinely began my ascent to the top of the pile, preparing myself for another selection. Roughly one layer of plush before my button nose reached the top of the bin, I felt some of the lifeless teddies around me begin to shutter. Their movement grew more intense as if my own nerves radiated from my cotton core. I fought my body for stillness. I shook from fear to shock, and my awareness finally drew to the tight grip clenched around my left foot. Rick jerked my body down as he took his next paw and climbed up my body. I kicked him and pulled away. In a gust, I reached the top and clung to the edge of the bin. I stared down a strand of light reflecting off the linoleum floor and turned around to see a burst of bears erupt to Rick's anger. He heaved with hate.

“So, you’ve been hiding from me.” His stitched smile turned sinister. I looked back down at the ground.

“Let me see what’s hiding in there.” He lunged forward, grabbing ahold of my head and gripping my right eye. As soon as the tension pulled at my face, a family walked up to the bin. From what I could hear, it was an adult with a child. Rick froze and released his grip from my eye. I was left with my head dangling over the edge, my body teetering out of balance.

“Mom, this one! Avery will love this!” The little child curled a hand around my body and hoisted me from the ledge.

“Okay babe, put it in the cart. You can surprise her with it tonight when she gets back from soccer practice.”

The child set me into the cart, and as they wheeled up to the check-out counter, I watched Rick lift himself against the rim of the bin. I followed his eyes until it was too difficult to distinguish his pain beyond my own experience of it. I was now free.

Her lavender pillow tickled my synthetic fur. The sensation crawled through my brown wisps and into my stitches. I fought the impulse to giggle so as to not give way to the surprise and wiggled my bottom against the fabric. Excitement swirled behind my sewn smile – dimples like the ends of a rainbow beside my button nose. No more lonesome nights in a gloomy drug store bin. I’d finally have someone – and she would have me.

From what I gathered from her brother, if I waited right there under the soft white light of her ceiling fan, the love of my life would open the door and greet me with a loving embrace.

I put my hand to my chin and smoothed out the strands, making sure they were neat. I considered the texture of my body, hoping she’d enjoy my touch and disregard the small patch of silver beneath my chin.

I wanted to be the perfect bear for her and do anything she wanted to do. I was up for anything, and as I sat there pondering our lives together, I heard a door open outside of the room. There were a few muffled voices that I couldn’t make out. After a minute or so, I heard steps begin to creak up the staircase.

Hopeful it was her, I listened to the quiet dip of the floorboards as each step drew her closer. I could barely contain myself. I wanted to jump right out of the bed, skip the surprise her brother laid out for me, and melt into her arms. Her pillow began to tickle again as the butterflies stirred inside my stuffed body.

A shadow swayed inside the thin line of light glowing just below the closed door. It had to be her. I needed it to be. My stomach churned into a slurry of anxious joy. My eyes were glued to

the knob. I kept getting images of us in a ball pit – the sweet smell of the technicolor plastic, my head nestled into the bend of her arm.

Finally, the knob began to twist. I fought myself for stillness. The door opened, slowly revealing her. There she was – brown hair sticking to the sweat on her face, mismatched socks inside of worn-out sneakers, blue gym bag hanging over her shoulder and a cell phone in her right hand. She was perfect. I knew this was it. The fated moment of our lives. She would leap into bed, throw me into the air, and snuggle me into eternity.

She stood there, still in the hallway, staring down into her phone. She looked up at the ceiling fan. I kept still. Her eyes sifted through the contents of the room. I fought all the impulse to shout. My nerves boiled my insides. The pressure built behind my smile – and then, she saw me. I fell forward and screamed, “I LOVE YOU!” My face lifted from the duvet. She dropped her bag and her back slammed against the wall behind her with a sucking force. Her shrieks filled the house.

“It’s lovely to meet you!” I wiggled my way into a seated position and threw my arms into the air, ready for my embrace.

“Mom!” Her chest heaved with terror and she threw her phone, grazing my left ear. I flinched and wiggled forward.

“It’s okay, I’m not going to hurt you.” Desperate for something, anything, I continued twisting forward, smiling as wide as my stitching allowed.

She darted towards me and slammed my face with a fist. I flew back against her headboard as she burst out of the room.

I was left alone and empty. No, requite of love. No soft snuggle into the night. I stared down into the duvet. Why didn’t she love me? I put my sad excuse for paws to my face, dragging them below my chin. If she didn’t love me, then maybe there was no point. Maybe I never really had a purpose.

I ripped out a few strands of my defected silver hair in a last-ditch effort to deserve her love. My eyes began to burn – the adhesive holding my eyes together began to drip down my face. I continued to rip away my fur. I didn’t even stop at the silver strands. At this point, I wanted to remove any proof that I was once a cuddly, loving teddy. I didn’t deserve to look like something someone would love. Soon my eyes drooped down to my chin, my fur like patches of shrub fighting a desert night. My body, limp and sullied.

It didn’t take long for her to return to the room with her mother. They stared into the mess of my vegetative state. Her mother rushed over to the window and flung it open. She punched out the screen and returned to the bed. I felt the two of them linger over my body. Her mother pinched my ear and as she lifted me toward the open window, I took one final look at Avery. My eyes barely clung to my face, but I saw her. I saw the hate reflect against the tears in her eyes, and I knew then that there was never actually any hope for a bear like me.

As I flew through the air, I couldn't help but think of Rick – how he was probably right to keep to the bottom of the bin. My face planted in the asphalt and over the course of the cold and lonely night, my eyes still stuck to me, retrofitted to new parts of my face. I propped myself up and watched my shadow walk inside of the orange streetlight. Me, the only little thing in the big and quiet street.

Seeing my body move as a shadow, the loose fibers fleeing my patchy self and hanging in the air around me, I couldn't believe I was still alive. Mangled and stripped of my only purpose, I couldn't wrap my head around the point to which my body still moved. My legs surged forward as if my shadow spoke to me to say: this is what we do. Maybe I was still for love after all, and for someone's loving. I would be okay, I decided - the night and my shadow leading the way.

Smiles Are Free

By Kenneth Kapp

Harry almost missed breakfast. The volunteer behind the serving counter gave him an extra scoop of oatmeal. “Harry, there’s a good chance of rain. You hurry up and get to that shelter.” While they were cleaning up, Sally told Clara, “When the weather’s bad, it’s a shame they can’t just let them stay here.”

Clara shrugged, “Been telling my partner, cover Camp Randall and let them stay there. Football is just an excuse for the kids to get drunk and for the University to hit the alumni for donations.” Sally made a face; she had finished almost three semesters at the U and still followed the Badgers. “I don’t think that will fly even if it is what you say, using Camp Randall for the poor.” Harry shuffled along Regent Street, slowly making his way to a shelter on South Park Street. He was able to cross Charter Street without much trouble but Mills Street was always a challenge. He waited for a break in the traffic. He didn’t look up at the overcast sky. Sally never lied to him, treated him fairly. He always felt good when she served. It never felt like begging or anything like that. He was hungry; she served.

Too many cars were turning. He grew cold standing there and started to worry he’d get wet or arrive at the shelter too late and miss lunch. That was mostly what he did – trying to keep in mind places to eat and places to sleep. Long ago, he had started two mental lists: his E-list for places to eat and his S-list for places to sleep. They got bigger when the weather got nice since he could find things to eat behind grocery stores or upscale restaurants. There were overpasses and abandoned buildings he could use as squats that he added to his sleep list. In his head, he was always plotting routes between E’s and S’s to keep his walking down. Shoes didn’t come cheap.

Still more traffic. Students could skip between cars. He wasn’t young anymore and knew he wasn’t fast on his feet. He was getting cold and muttered, “They never stop for old men, don’t even see me. Doubt anyone would call 911 if I got hit. Say it was my fault anyhow. Always blaming Harry. Called me Hard Luck Harry year I got back from ‘Nam. Yeah, and the best they suggestion they had at the Milwaukee VA Hospital was to “get an education.” I told them I didn’t need it but came to Madison anyhow. I can’t remember who gave me money for the Badger Bus.”

He looked across the street. A big oaf of a student was looking at him. *Whatcha looking at? You’re not pretty either.* Harry stepped back. The kid was crossing, coming at him. *He’s at least six inches taller than me.*

The student smiled. “Hey, great day we’re having. How you doing?” Then he paused and adjusted the heavy glasses that had slid down his nose and gave him an even goofier look. “Say, you look cold. You going to Park? I’ll help you cross, those buggers in the cars are afraid to hit me; worried I’d probably knock the radiator into their lap. There’s a coffee shop ahead and I can buy you a cup of coffee or tea if you want. Got an hour to kill before my first class.”

The kid's face was still covered with teenage acne. Harry looked at him as if he were crazy. *Strange, wasn't I just thinking about panhandling a student for a cup of coffee?* He knew school didn't come cheap, and this kid wasn't wearing any of those brand-name things. *Shit, he doesn't have a smartphone out and earplugs or whatever they're called in his head.* However, he was cold and reluctantly admitted, "Yeah, I'm going to Park. You sure about the coffee?"

The student smiled again. "Sure, I got time. Let's cross first. We come to the coffee place, you want to go in, fine; if not I can walk with you to Park, got to head up to the library anyhow." They crossed and went on slowly; the student bent over and said he was called Adam. "Funny, got this name so you'd think I'd be at the beginning of the line but then I got big and in grade school, it was always by size, small people in front, so I was always at the back of the line."

Harry grunted, "Hard luck." *Just like me.*

As they came to the coffee house, he built up his courage. *Been under fire – I can do this.* "Tea. Tea would be nice. Maybe green tea."

Adam opened the door and motioned to a table in the corner. He put his backpack on the seat. "Be right back. Can I get you a roll?"

Harry shook his head telling himself not to push his luck. Cups clattered in the back and he flinched. Too many sounds reminded him of *incoming*; loud sounds at night would wake him in a cold sweat – "Incoming, Harry, incoming, get down!"

Adam returned with a pot and two cups. "I hope you don't mind the pot. Cheaper this way and you get more tea. I'll pour in a minute, give a chance for the flavor to come out. It's an orange-green tea; I hope you like it."

Harry took the seat in the corner and caught the stares as other students came in or left. Adam was facing the window and didn't seem to care if the conversation dropped when people walked around them. He poured, filling Harry's cup and only half of his own.

Smiling again, he said, "I like spring, you know. I thought I saw a cardinal fly by when you sat down. Did you ever hear them call: ta-weet, weet, weet, and then another answers: weet, weet, t'weet. You can do the call yourself, you should try it when you're outside and there are lots of trees. I thought about it though and then I learned that they do that to find a mate or if they have a mate, to meet up again. So now mostly I don't do that, you know whistle. I wouldn't want to confuse them. Unless I'm feeling down, and then I'll do it maybe once, just to say hello. You know, I just thought of this. You think I'm so big that maybe one of those cardinals will think I'm a tree and land on my head?"

"Say, you should maybe drink your tea before it gets cold."

Harry picked up his cup and sipped slowly, enjoying the smells of the orange blend. *Maybe the kid is an oaf, smiling all the time.* But he thought about it. Some VA counselor had told him it

takes more muscles to frown than to smile – “by a long shot.” Harry put his cup down and smiled. *“By a long shot?” Probably not a good choice of words – had a friend that was a sniper.* Adam finished sipping from his cup, waved it towards the street, and said, “You know, I’ve already seen lots of crocuses coming up. Bet the daffodils will be next. This year I’m going to check to see if there’s any difference between the white and yellow coming up first. Keep track. The first to get to ten wins. Think that’s a good test?” He poured the rest of the tea into Harry’s cup.

Kid may be an oaf but I guess it doesn’t hurt to smile. “Maybe. But you’d have to know how many of each kind were planted and then there’s the sun and soil to consider. Not everyone starts out the same.” Harry surprised himself. He hadn’t had an intelligent conversation since he left ‘Nam. Then he suggested, “You can probably ask online, or maybe someone in the Ag School would know.” *Jees, Harry, what do you know about online, something you heard somewhere?* “Good ideas. I guess I can. I’ve already got a long list of online questions in my back pocket. Someone pickpockets that thinking it’s my wallet’s going to get a headache reading them all. Serve them right. You know, I don’t think there’re any easy answers in life. What do you think?” Harry chuckled, finished his tea, and answered. “You’re probably right, but if we don’t leave you’ll be late for your class.” He stood up and looked around for a place to take his cup. The return table was by the side door.

When they were out on the sidewalk, Harry thanked him. “I see you like spring and smiles.” Adam nodded and rocked back and forth. “Yeah, spring’s nice but it comes and goes every year. But smiles...smiles I think stay with you forever. That’s why I like to smile, and you know, smiles help. That’s why I stopped. You seemed as if you could use one and smiles are free.” He stopped and continued in a softer voice. “OK, OK. You know we’re all in this world together and sometimes it’s like a game of tag – with the smiles, I mean. So now, you’re it. I tagged you and you have to smile at someone else – pass it on. OK?”

Harry had to smile; he’d just been tagged. Before he could answer, Adam said, “Now I’m late, sorry you’ll have to walk on to Park by yourself. Have a good day and I hope to see you around.” There was sincerity in his voice that was impossible to miss. Harry started to laugh as Adam moved down the side street towards the campus. He laughed louder and watched as Adam began to skip and sing, “Yes, yes, yes!”

Smile Softly

Whenever a new nurse came onto the Terminal Care floor, the conversation in the nurses’ breakroom came around to Dr. A and how wonderful he was.

“He’s so kind with those poor patients. They cheer up whenever he comes into their room; he’s always smiling softly.”

A nurse that had been there forever concurred, “It’s his smile. He’s just so accepting of the challenge; it’s as if he’s saying, ‘Don’t worry, we’ll be able to get through this together.’ I don’t think anyone believes there’s hope, that’s why they’re here on TC. Not that I’m cynical, but I

think everyone's aware that the only move from here, if it's not to the morgue in the basement, is to hospice care."

There was always a nurse who would add, "Well, hospice could be considered a plus." Then the new nurse would remark, "And he's so handsome, rugged, and distinguished. Even those faint acne scars add a certain character."

"And it doesn't hurt that he's six-four."

The silence would hang until someone coughed and said, "All right, ladies, it's time to get back to work."

Dr. Adam Maylor was at the end of a two-year residency in Terminal Care medicine at Mt. Sinai Hospital in one of the poorer sections of New York City. He saw the cumulative effects of poverty and a failing health care system on people who received medical attention only when it was too late. But he was determined to do his best by them.

When he felt tested, he reminded himself that this was one of the reasons he had decided to become a doctor – to work with those with little hope. After all, he had what he considered his secret weapon – his smile. He never forgot the enlivening effect it had had on the vet with PTSD. He was convinced it was his smile and not the mugs of green tea he had bought for the homeless man when he was an undergraduate in Madison.

His residency had three more months to run when he accepted a staff position at the VA Hospital in Milwaukee starting in August. Sarah would be teaching part-time in a bilingual school in a southside neighborhood where there was a large Hispanic population. She couldn't wait. Their daughter would be old enough to start pre-school.

On July 3 an old man with a long grey beard was moved onto their floor. He had a bad cough and there were other complications from old age. He kept two black boxes with attached leather straps on his nightstand. During the day he would hold the straps in his right hand on his lap. Daily, a rabbi would come by and place one box on his arm and the other on his head. Together they would mutter a few prayers. The rabbi told the nurses that the boxes are called *tefillin* and contained handwritten scrolls on parchment with verses from the bible.

When a nurse tried to remove the straps from his hand, he summoned the strength to whisper, "Please, these tie me to *olem hazeh*, to this world," and so they let him hold them during the day. Dr. A read Mr. Klein's chart at the station outside the door. He appeared to be dozing when the doctor came to his bedside. He gently lifted the patient's hand along with the straps to feel his pulse. Mr. Klein momentarily opened his eyes and a weak smile crossed his face before he fell back asleep.

When the doctor came back in the afternoon, Mr. Klein was awake and said softly, "You are the doctor with the kind smile."

The next day when he visited there was a thin book on the nightstand. The old man turned his head and said, "It's *Pirkei Avot*, Ethics of the Fathers. We read a chapter each week between Passover and Shavuot. Simple teachings, so much wisdom. It says we should greet everyone with a pleasant face. Your smile is just fine." The effort exhausted him; he closed his eyes and lay back, his head floating on the pillows.

The next day when the doctor visited, Mr. Klein smiled and with a finger asked him to sit and then to move his chair closer.

"For a story, I need more time." Then he began a story about a rabbi from long ago, who when he was a little boy told his tutor, 'Saying l'chaiim, one person to another as equals, *heals* the world.' The verse says *it brings forgiveness* but it seems much the same to me now." He was too tired to offer any further explanation.

The following morning, Mr. Klein was unable to talk but held on to the straps of the *tefillin*. He clenched them with a remarkable strength when a new aide tried to remove them.

He smiled when Dr. A came in the afternoon. Again, he motioned him to the chair next to his bed. "I had a thought that connects the two matters we have already discussed."

Dr. A smiled. Apparently, Mr. Klein's mind was still active. "Yes?"

"Greeting one another as equals, with a smile, is surely as effective as the very best vodka or scotch when one says l'chaiim. And just so you know, this is true for all – Jews and non-Jews alike. Don't forget."

Mr. Klein died peacefully in the early hours of the morning.

When Dr. A came by the next day, the room was empty. He stood silently at the foot of the bed. A nurse was passing as he came out and wished him a good morning. Later she reported that there were tears in his eyes and a sad smile on his face.

In the breakroom that afternoon someone asked how Dr. A still manages to smile.

The senior nurse answered. "I asked him once and you know what he said?"

One of the nurses said, "Well, aren't you going to tell us!"

"He said, 'My wife makes this wonderful chicken soup every Friday night – and we're not even Jewish!' And I swear there were dimples in his cheeks when he said it!"

The Doctor and his wife moved to Milwaukee at the end of July.

His smile was ever-present when he made his rounds in the VA hospital. His reputation had arrived weeks earlier via the nurses' grapevine. Things were not very different – poverty and PTSD both destroyed the body and spirit.

During the second week in September, he stopped at the bed of a new patient. The nurse had told him he was sedated. Dr. A read the chart: Harold Stillman. *Harold refuses to eat and hasn't said a word in weeks.* He sighed and stared at the sleeping soldier. *I'll just have to work harder.* As he left the room, he had a feeling that Mr. Stillman looked vaguely familiar.

While they were eating supper that night, his wife Sarah saw that he was troubled and most likely it was one of his patients. While he rarely talked about his patients, she decided that this time she would ask.

"I'm puzzled, that's all. There was this one sleeping soldier whose face looks familiar, but much older. I can't think of from where or when. That's all. I suppose it will come to me."

It was Friday, and Sarah got up, kissed him on the forehead, and returned with another bowl of chicken soup. "I found a Jewish cookbook at a garage sale and promise that next week, I'll make matzah balls for the soup. That should do the trick."

Adam laughed. "We leave New York, and *now* you start with the Matzah Ball soup. *Oy gevalt!*" He was smiling when he took the empty soup bowls to the sink.

Mr. Stillman was awake the next time Dr. A stopped by. He returned a grimace for Dr. A's smile.

"Anything I can do to make you more comfortable?" Dr. A paused, frowned. "Now that was a stupid question. I guess if I jumped in the therapy pool that wouldn't work either, just get me wet. Be a big splash though."

Dr. A thought the grimace lightened a bit. "Look, I'm going to give you a break from my stand-up, complete my rounds, and come back with some new material. Don't hold your breath, comedy writers don't come cheap."

Three hours later, Dr. A coughed at the foot of Harold Stillman's bed. Harold's eyelids rolled back; they were bloodshot. A horse voice asked, "You trying to get me sick?" The grimace was locked back on.

Dr. A smiled. "A voice his own mother wouldn't recognize. OK, I suggest we both get a good night's sleep and some new writers. We'll continue our debate in the morning." He was now convinced that they had met before and he was sure that Mr. Stillman had placed him from the get-go.

He greeted Sarah with a kiss, then picked little Berta up, rubbed her up and down on his chest, and lifted her high overhead saying, "OK, Berta-the-balloon gets stuck on the ceiling. Static electricity."

“Don’t be silly, Daddy. Electric is always running like water; it’s not static!”

“OK, down you come then.”

Sarah was happy. She guessed Adam was getting close to remembering the connection with the unknown veteran.

On Tuesday, Mr. Stillman’s bed was empty and his chart gone. Dr. A went immediately to the central nurses’ station. “Harold’s vitals dropped last night. We had to move him to the ICU. He’s stable now. Doc there says he asked for you – the smiley doctor. They guessed it was you.”

Dr. A went directly to the ICU the first chance he got. Mr. Stillman was propped up. When he felt Dr. A at the foot of his bed he opened his eyes and said, “Yeah, I know I look the worse for wear, but you’re a couple of sizes too big...” He wheezed and it was a while before he finished,

“Just like you were back then.”

The doctor went closer. He was almost there...

“Yeah, same goofy kid, less acne and no green tea on your chin.”

Then he remembered the homeless man trying to cross the street and the green tea.

“You went skipping off like you were in La-La land. And now you’re my doctor. Who’d think?” Doctor A grabbed his hand, went shh. “Don’t strain yourself. I remember. Yes, yes, yes. I was so happy to have made a friend. How sad we never met again until now.”

Harold found the strength to draw the doctor closer.

Doctor A crouched so that his patient wouldn’t have to look up.

Harold struggled and finally was able to whisper, “Not that sad; we have now.”

Their eyes opened wide and for a moment a smile hung in the space between them. Then Harold’s grip went slack.

A nurse came running when the alarm went off at the central station. Adam wiped his eyes.

“We were old friends. He just wanted to say hi one more time before he...” His voice trailed off.

“I need some fresh air; I’ll be back.”

As he walked around the hospital grounds, the doctor remembered what Mr. Klein had said and hoped indeed that healing would come into a world where it was so desperately needed.

When he came home, Sarah was in the kitchen preparing supper. He hugged her tightly and tears fell on her head.

“You remembered.”

“Yes. And perhaps this Friday you can make an extra matzah ball in memory of Harry.”

Ms. Sandy

By Nicolette Pearl

It was 2012 around midnight and I was sleeping in my bed peacefully. I woke up to being shaken and sirens going off. I thought it was just because my lawn caught on fire again in the middle of the night because someone threw a cigarette on our trash can. But no, it was way worse. It was something that would change my life.

I grew up in Manville, New Jersey. My family had a house that myself and my cousins grew up in. Our house was the house to go to if you wanted to see family because family was always there. My grandfather built me a swing, I would play on it almost every day. I would make my cousins eat the leaves off the tree because the swing would reach the tree. Then, I got older. So, of course, my grandparents had to buy me a Barbie jeep. That was my new favorite. My house in Manville was the house that would bring the family together on special occasions. Holidays, birthdays, and so much more, until midnight of 2012.

As my dad wakes me up around midnight I was frustrated and confusion on why I couldn't just sleep and why everyone was in such a panic. My dad starts packing me clothes and toys and put warm clothes on me and tells me to go downstairs. As I go downstairs, the power is off but our old radio was on but its a lot of static. We were being told to evacuate. I was seven, I didn't know what that was but I knew it wasn't good. My grandfather starts to board up all of the windows and is yelling at my grandmother and aunt to get out of the house with me before its too late. It was too late. The road was flooded and the bridge was shut down. I looked outside the window and my barbie jeep and favorite swing set was submerged underwater. My whole backyard was a pond. My basement had filled up with water too.

When we were ready to go with things packed up we were stuck with no vehicle. My dad had to get the canoe and canoe my grandmother, aunt, and I to a shelter. My grandfather stayed back. I was really sad to be leaving my dad and grandfather but I knew they were helping out the other people on our street.

When I got to the shelter I was looking around and I was scared. There were no beds and it was cold. The shelter gave you a cot which is not very comfortable but at least it was something. I was waking up in the middle of the night and I was scared but my grandmother and aunt could not fall asleep because they were worried about my dad and grandfather. We had to stay in the shelter for a couple days. When the water was low enough to walk in the streets and it stopped raining my aunt, grandmother, and I walked to Walmart. I remember walking over the railroad tracks and seeing all the damage that was done and being very cold. When we got into Walmart the store was almost vacant and there was nothing on the shelves, people had taken it all. As we were walking back to the shelter with empty hands, I saw all of the damage that was done. So many houses, parks, and schools were ruined. Our town needed to be rebuilt. That day we also checked into a hotel and my dad and grandfather came to stay. They would go back every day to our broken home that no longer held our family gatherings. They fixed it up and we were ready to go back to try and live our normal life, but that just was not possible. Our house was still

ruined and everything was wet. Our neighbors' house were ruined. That is when we had the idea to move to Vermont and we started to repair our family in a new house in a new state.

I still go back to my old house seven years later. My street is still ruined, the park I would go to is still ruined, my house is still ruined but the memories will last forever. Now my street is filled with broken vacant homes and the homeless have now made the broken houses theirs. Hurricane Sandy was a devastating loss and the loss is still being repaired. But, I am now safe and sound in a new home.

Vacation in Darjeeling

By Sandip Saha

It was a winter morning
the train was crawling up the hill
zigzag path between the bushes
we were nearing to queen Darjeeling.
The train was so small
it had two engines back and front
still it was so slow
we walked with it, what a thrill!
It was passing through a wonderful loop
almost touching the mountain edge
fear engulfed us looking at the gorge
as we were inching towards the top.
Tea gardens were around
girls plucking the leaves
baskets were full on their back
rolling sun made beautiful surrounding.
My eyes were dragged far away
what a wonder on my way
snowy picks were peeping with a smile
welcomed us with great joy.
Oh! It was really a marvelous terrain
God appeared to me omnipresent
the calmness and peace amused me
bringing the feeling as if I am in the heaven.

Snowfall

By Anthony Salandy

As night descends on the villages
And snowfall begins to grow
One can only gaze at the frigid skies above,

Skies which grace the barren Earth
With a silky blanket of hoary decor
As if the season was innately decorative,

But as the snowy sky descends
Upon the frozen lakes
And thatched houses in every direction

All that can be seen is the smoke
Which laments its escape
From the snow adorned chimney tops

Which act as barriers to the frigidity
Of the cool temperament of winter
Where only frosty blizzards now act

As silent barriers to the evening
And to the brief moments of sunshine
Above the blanketed Earth,

But just before dawn
Does snow fall stop momentarily
To give glimpse of the star speckled sky-

That exists just above the clouds
Which bellow and holler tempestuously
Below the northern star,

But snowfall begins to endure once more
Above the dimly lit homes of humanity-
So blissfully unaware of the weather-

For which they alter in severity.

Letters from Max by Sarah Ruhl and Max Ritvo

Reviewed by Melissa Gaiti

Where does a person turn when facing stress, grief, or pain? In *Letters from Max*, we witness connection through writings between Sarah Ruhl and Max Ritvo as their relationship evolves from professor and student to friends. Just as the title suggests, letters are used to tell the narrative and take readers through the journey. Ritvo's cancer is revealed in the introduction, adding urgency to their correspondence. The exchange of poems and thoughts brings the reader into these private moments and conversations about topics of spirituality and the afterlife. By the end, the reader has witnessed how this friendship was built upon Sarah's as she recollects her time with Max.

The majority of this book takes the form of letter correspondence, with the exchange of poems as well. The letters elevate the personal and reveal how comfortable Sarah and Max become with one another. Their budding friendship extends beyond the mentor or peer relationship that began with their writing lives. Both of their writing lives are glimpsed, but their exchange of poems shows an exchange of ideas. The poems are artfully placed throughout to strengthen the characters' relationship in the mind of the reader.

Poetry sometimes connects two letters and reveals how Sarah and Max are feeling and how their experiences have influenced them. The poems create an intimate space for the readers and for the characters themselves and offer a moment to think. It is almost like Sarah and Max are letting the reader join the conversation and think about the events of the characters' and the reader's own lives. The poems draw readers into these lives, despite how similar or vastly different our lives may be. The poems have strengthened the journey for their relationship, but it also gets readers to see the comfort and support pass between them.

Letters from Max shows the value of art in bringing people together and allowing them to share ideas and find comfort. Of course, Max's cancer is ever-present, and while it is addressed, the weight of this book rests with going through Sarah's and Max's lives and witnessing their thoughts. The book is split into four parts, each part of which dives further into the friendship. The letters and poems are interrupted to provide context and transitions between the parts. Each part also brings a new moment in relation to Max's cancer as letters examine serious topics, including spirituality and the afterlife. The poems and letters gain this underlying urgency and seriousness in the last two parts.

Readers who enjoy poetry and creative nonfiction will find this book's combination a worthwhile read as. In addition, *Letters from Max* doesn't shy away from dark or sensitive topics, which can be comforting as we each face our own questions regarding spirituality or mortality.

Writing Contests & Guest Post Opportunities

There are many sites that allow guest posts, too many to list here! Rather, visit [Advanced Web Ranking](#) for a list of over 150 websites that accept guests posts. Categories ranging from health and fitness to finance and more.

Writing contests are one of the ways the Book Smuggler's Den encourages writers to gain confidence and get your work in front of as many readers as possible. Contests are also a way of building a report and can help you attract the attention of an editor. Plus, contests are a blast! Below are some upcoming contests that we encourage you to submit to.

[The Diana Woods Memorial Award in Creative Non-Fiction](#) Creative nonfiction essays of no more than 5,000 words on any subject, are eligible for consideration for this award. Works must not have been published elsewhere. Award winners are required to submit a 100-word biography, recent photo and a short note thanking the Woods family for their generosity and support. *Deadline: February and August of each year Fee: None Prize: \$250 and publication in Lunch Ticket*

[Erma Bombeck Writing Competition](#) The Erma Bombeck Writing Competition, sponsored biennially by the Washington-Centerville Public in conjunction with the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop, pays tribute to Erma Bombeck, one of the greatest humorists of our times. Previously unpublished personal essays of 450 words or less that capture the essence of Erma's writings will be accepted in the humor and human interest categories. Entries are accepted from anywhere in the world, and all will be blind judged by a panel of accomplished authors, columnists, screenwriters, stand-up comedians and writing teachers. Bill Bryson, best known for his humorous books on travel as well as a variety of other genres, including the English language, science, history, and non-fiction, will serve as the finalist judge for the humor essays. Jess Montgomery, a columnist and author of historical mysteries, will serve as the finalist judge for the human interest essays. *Deadline: 01/06/2020 Fee: \$15. Prize: Four winners will receive \$1,000 and free registration to the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop.*

[Non-Fiction Writing Contest](#) Share your non-fiction writing to enter this contest. Share your writing on any topic. Can be a funny piece, serious, true story or informational. Any type of non-fiction is welcomed. *Deadline: 02/21/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100*

[100 Word Flash Fiction Writing Contest](#) Can you share a complete story with only 100 words? That is the challenge of this writing contest. Enter a story but use only 100 words. Cash prize to the winner. *Deadline: 02/28/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize \$100*

[2019 Accenti Writing Contest](#) The contest is open to prose works. Entries can be fiction, non-fiction or creative non-fiction. Entries must be previously unpublished and not under consideration by any other publication. Entries must be original and not a translation of a previously published work. *Deadline: 02/03/2020 Fee: \$30.00 Prize: \$1000.00 (CDN) and publication in Accenti*

[2020 Killer Nashville Silver Falchion Award](#) Since 2008, the Killer Nashville Silver Falchion Awards have recognized the best stories from the previous year told through various media utilizing the elements of mystery, thriller, and/or suspense. Judges are professional writers, book reviewers, librarians, academics, and—in specialized cases—specific industry peers. Focus is on quality, not popularity. *Deadline: 06/01/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$250*

[Arizona Mystery Writers Mary Ann Hutchison Memorial Story Contest for Youths](#) All writers 9-16 years of age (at time of entry) can enter – and anyone can win! Send in your short story in mystery, suspense, or thriller style. Entries may be up to 2500 words (about 10 double-spaced pages). It's loads of fun and a good exercise of your writing skills. You can submit more than one story if you like. Entries are judged “blind,” that is, without the judges knowing who wrote the stories. Everybody is equal before the panel of judges! Therefore **DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME OR ANY IDENTIFYING INFORMATION ON THE STORY**. If you're too old for this contest, give the information to your children or grandchildren. *Deadline: 02/01/2020 Fee: None Prize: 1st Place - \$50*

[Daisy Pettles Women Writers Writing Contest](#) The Daisy Pettles Women Writers Writing Contest is open to women writers, age 40+, published or unpublished. Fiction or Non-Fiction writing projects are eligible. Poetry is excluded. *Deadline: 02/15/2020 Fee: \$45 Prize: Grand Prize \$1,000*

[The Jeff Sharlet Memorial Award for Veterans](#) This creative writing contest for U.S. military veterans and active-duty personnel is hosted by The Iowa Review and made possible by a gift from the family of Jeff Sharlet (1942–69), a Vietnam veteran and antiwar writer and activist. The contest is open to veterans and active-duty personnel writing in any genre and about any subject matter. *Deadline: 05/31/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$1,000 plus publication in an issue of The Iowa Review*

[New Voices Award](#) This award is given for a previously unpublished children's picture book manuscript (of no more than 1,500 words) written by a writer of color. *The 2019 deadline has passed, please check back for updates Fee: None Prize: \$1,000 cash and a standard publication contract*

[The Cosmos Prize](#) First Fandom Experience is a cooperative publishing project whose goal is to honor, preserve, and bring to life the story of the “first fans” — the pioneers who were instrumental in defining, driving, and growing science fiction and fantasy in the 1930s and beyond. First Fandom Experience is so-named because we hope to capture — or even recreate — the sense of what it was like to participate in the inception and early growth of organized science fiction fandom. To this end, we're pleased to announce our first writing contest: The Cosmos Prize. *Deadline: 01/15/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$500 cash prize pool as well as copies of publications*

[This Story Starts With This Sentence](#) Write a story with the sentence: We heard something. You can write about anything – just start the story with the provided sentence. Cash prize to the winner. *Deadline: 01/07/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100*

[Writer's Digest Competitions](#) One of the longest-running writing competitions, this contest spotlights up and coming writers in a number of categories, including Memoirs/Personal Essay, Print or Online Article and Genre Short Story. *Deadline: See link for multiple deadline Fee: start at \$20 Prize: The Grand Prize winner gets \$5,000, a feature in Writer's Digest magazine, a paid trip to a writing conference and more*

[Young Lions Fiction Award](#) This award recognizes “young authors,” which the rules define as any author aged 35 or younger. Submit any novel or short story published or scheduled to be published in the calendar year. Works must be written for adults; children's or YA pieces are ineligible. *Deadline: 2020 date TBA Fee: None Prize: \$10,000*

[15 Syllable Writing Contest](#) Write a poem that only has 15 syllables to enter this poetry contest. You can write about anything. You can write a poem of any type. The only requirement is that the total number of syllables in your poem is 15. What can you write when you only have 15 syllables to work with? *Deadline: 02/10/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100*

[3 Line Poetry Contest](#) Share a poem that only has three lines to enter this poetry contest. The syllable count for your poem should be 5-7-5 or 5-7-7. So the first line has five syllables, the second line has seven syllables. The final line either has five or seven syllables. The topic is open – so write about anything. Cash prize to the winner. *Deadline: 01/23/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100*

[Faith Poetry Contest](#) Share a poem of faith. How does your faith impact you? Your lifestyle? Write a poem of any type. *Deadline: 01/10/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100*

[James Laughlin Award](#) Offered since 1954, the James Laughlin Award is given to recognize and support a second book of poetry forthcoming in the next calendar year. *Deadline: Submissions are accepted January 1 through May 15 each year. Fee: None Prize of \$5,000*

[Love Poem Poetry Contest](#) Share a love poem to enter this poetry contest. Your poem can be about anyone (or even a special pet). Write it any way you choose. *Deadline: 03/25/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100*

[Tanka Poetry Contest](#) What's a Tanka? A Tanka is a poem that only has five lines. Each line has a specific syllable count. That count is 5-7-5-7-7. So the first line of your poem will have five syllables. The second line will have seven. The third line will have five again. The fourth and fifth line will have seven syllables. Cash prize to the winner of this poetry contest. *Deadline: 02/02/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100*

[The Tufts Poetry Awards](#) Based at Claremont Graduate University and given for poetry volumes published in the preceding year – are not only two of the most prestigious prizes a contemporary poet can receive, they also come with hefty purses: \$100,000 for the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award and \$10,000 for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award. This makes the Kingsley Tufts award

the world's largest monetary prize for a single collection of poetry. *Deadline: The 2019 deadline has passed, please check back for updates Fee: None Prize: \$100,000*

[Two Line Poem](#) Our two line poem is fun and a bit of a challenge. Write a poem that only has two lines. The twist is that there should be an internal rhyme and an end rhyme. See an example in the contest announcement. *Deadline: 12/02/2019 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100*

[Wingless Dreamer Poetry Contest](#) This is an open letter to all the aspiring writers around the globe to participate in our Wingless Dreamer Literary Contest 2019. After a huge success of our first edition, "Passionate Penholders" we are happy to announce that we are seeking submissions for the second edition of Wingless Dreamer. We give emerging writers a platform to gain recognition through their Literary submissions disregard of their nationality, gender, age, disability or race differences. *Deadline: 11/01/2019 Fee: \$5 Prize: \$500*

[Dream Quest One Poetry & Writing Contest](#) Open to anyone who enjoys expressing innermost thoughts and feelings into the beautiful literary art of poetry. Welcome to all, having the ability to dream. Write a poem, 30 lines or fewer on any subject, style, or form, typed or neatly hand printed. Also, all entries must be either typed or legibly hand-printed. *Deadline: 12/28/2019 Fee: \$5 per poem Prize: Poetry First Prize is \$250*

[Minotaur Books / Mystery Writers of America First Crime Novel Competition](#)

Writers 18 and older who have never had a novel published (in any genre) are eligible for this prize, awarded for an original book-length manuscript where murder or another serious crime or crimes is at the heart of the story. *Deadline: 01/03/2020 Fee: None Prize: a publication contract with Minotaur Books and an advance of \$10,000 against future royalties*

[PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction](#) Honoring the best work of fiction published by an American author in a single calendar year, this award has been given to the likes of John Updike, Philip Roth and Ann Patchett. *The 2019 deadline has passed, please check back for updates Fee: None Prize: \$15,000 and an invitation to read at the award ceremony in Washington, DC.*

[The Restless Books Prize for New Immigrant Writing](#) Looking for extraordinary unpublished submissions from emerging writers of sharp, culture-straddling writing that addresses identity in a global age. Each year, a distinguished panel of judges will select a winning manuscript to be published by Restless Books. We can't wait to read and share what the new voices of the world have to say. Fiction manuscripts must be complete. Nonfiction submissions must consist of either a complete manuscript, or a sample of at least 25,000 words and a detailed proposal that includes a synopsis and an annotated table of contents. All submissions must be in English (translations welcome). *Deadline: 03/31/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$10,000 advance and publication by Restless Books in print and digital editions*

[Tony Hillerman Prize for Best First Mystery Set in the Southwest Competition](#) Each potential entrant must not be the author of a published mystery novel and must not be a party to any agreement with a publisher pursuant to which a mystery novel written by the entrant may be published. For purposes of these Official Rules, "mystery novel" means a book of fiction in

which murder or another serious crime or crimes is at the heart of the story, and emphasis is on the solution rather than the details of the crime. of at least 40,000 words and “published” means a work that has been published or made publicly available, in whole or part, as a print book, e-book or in any other media. *Deadline: 01/02/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$10,000*

Contributors

Izabelle Cassandra Alexander was born and raised in a little village in Hungary and now resides in Des Plaines, Illinois. She's a single mother. Nature and animal lover. She writes short stories, creative nonfiction essays, flash fiction, plays, and poetry, currently working on a few novels and a series of children's books along with illustrations. Her work has been published in Spark, 2016, 2018, and 2019, ISPS Anthology Distilled Lives, Volume 4, 2018, Yearning to be Free, 2019, by The Scarlet Leaf, 2018, WOW! Women on Writing, 2019, and more. You can find her work on her website at izabelle2012.wixsite.com/izabelle and on Patreon at www.patreon.com/IzabelleAlexander

Roger D'Agostin is a writer living in Connecticut. His most recent work has appeared in Fiction SouthEast, Pif Magazine, and Spelk. He is currently working on a book of short stories.

Ben Ellison is a student at Illinois Central College and writing and reading as much as he can.

Melissa Gaiti is a current graduate student at Chapman University working on earning an MFA in Creative Writing. She received a BA in English with a minor in Sociology from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She writes prose in fiction and creative nonfiction, which have been featured on the Life Out Loud Podcast.

Anthony Gibson is a writer and poet with a BA in Literary Journalism from UC Irvine. In 2019 he was awarded an Individual Artist Program Grant from the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. His work has been published in Crowded Zine, Look at This, and Shareably. He takes classes at StoryStudio Chicago and lives with his fiancée, Chloe and their two rabbits, Radish and Wizard.

Kenneth Kapp was a professor of Mathematics, a ceramicist and a welder. Then he traded his shop apron for a white shirt and suit, working at IBM until he was downsized in 2000. He now teaches yoga and writes. He lives with his wife and beagle in Shorewood, Wisconsin. He enjoys the many excellent chamber music concerts available in Milwaukee. He's a home brewer and runs whitewater rivers with his son in the summer. Further information can be found on www.kmkbooks.com.

Nicolette Pearl lived in New Jersey when Hurricane Sandy struck her house and town. Nicolette is currently taken some steps to become a better writer. She is enrolled in a creative writing class and some poetry classes.

Sandip Saha is a chemical engineer and doctorate (PhD) in metallurgical engineering from India. He has got three awards for his scientific work and 33 publications on his scientific research work including three patents. He is a winner of Poetry Matters Project Lit Prize-2018. He has published one collection of poems, "Quest for reedom" available in amazon.com. He is published in many poetry journals including North Dakota Quarterly, Peregrine, Poesis, Better Than Starbucks Poetry Magazine, Pif Magazine, The Cape Rock: Poetry, Las Positas

Anthology-Havik, Pasadena City College Inscape Magazine, Shot Glass Journal, The Wayne Literary Review, Tiny Seed Literary Journal, felan, Oddball, Door Is a Jar, Snapdragon, The Ghazal Page all USA, in VerbalArt, Phenomenal Literature, Tajmahal, The Criterion, India and in The Pangolin Review, Mauritius.

Anthony Salandy is an aspiring poet who likes to focus on the contrast between nature and humanity but also the many similarities that bring the two together. Anthony enjoys the pastoral as well as the depth of human sentiment and action and tries in earnest to express this in his poetry. Anthony travels frequently and has spent most of his life in Kuwait jostling between the UK & America. Anthony enjoys writing about the impact of multiculturalism in his life as well. Anthony has been published four times in such literary journals as The Kuwait Poets Society's Ink & Oil Zine (June 2019), The Showbear Family Circus & Dream Noir Literary Journal. Anthony is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Sociology at The University of Amsterdam.