



Connecticut Authors & Publishers Association
2010-2011 Jerry Labriola Brian Jud Writing Contest

Poetry

- 1st Place *My Son*, by Jim Norton
2nd Place *Smile*, by Michael Kilday

Essay

- 1st Place *To Each His Own*, by Jeannine Stauder
2nd Place *Cape Cod's Captain Courageous*, by Louis Arthur Norton

Short Story

- 1st Place *Pattern Markings*, by Hanna Perlstein Marcus
2nd Place *Exceeding the Speed Limit*, by Deborah Washington

Children Story

- 1st Place *The Little Scallop*, by Frank McKane
2nd Place *Crusty*, by Francine Morlando

My Son

A poem by Jim Norton

To check that all was well in hours late
I stole into your room to see if you were covered still. . .
Protected warm against the evening chill.
How peaceful was your sleep
With soft hair curled
Round forehead dirty still,
From battles won with broomsticks
And imaginations that only you might understand.
Your little legs so tired from journeys long
To pirates' caves in far off distant lands,
Brings joy that finds you now in dreams
That slips a sleeping smile across your lips.
And while that same contented smile,
With small hand firmly placed in mine. . .
Relieves your fears and doubts,
I suddenly realize the reassurance that you
In silent need had gained. . . was also mine.

Smile

A poem by Michael Kilday

I can't understand how
I don't understand why
How we can stand here
When the world turns on its side
I only know
Here I live until I die
Sitting in the catbird seat
Or as a face in the crowd
Surrounded by loved ones
Or in the company of strangers
I'm here to stay for awhile
A sea of smiling faces is a welcome sight
Whether you're far from home
Or leaning against the white picket fence
A friendly greeting
Kind words every day
Will keep those faces smiling
Day after day after day

To Each His Own

An essay by Jeannine Stauder

Crossroads Tavern sat on a wedge of land between a state highway and a county road. It was a half mile from my two-room grade school in a farming community and it was where I ate lunch every school day. Maybe other eleven-year-old girls had lunch by themselves in a tavern, but I was the only one at that tavern in Volo, Illinois.

The first day I approached the battered, wooden door of the building, I could smell its purpose before I stepped inside. The sweet musty odor of beer filled my nostrils.

It was a tavern and I wasn't sure I wanted to pull the door open. I remembered the conversation my Aunt Gen and I had over the weekend.

"I can't get you for lunch," she said. "Work's too busy right now. You'll have to eat at the Crossroads."

"That's okay. I can eat alone." But in a tavern, I wasn't sure. As an only child I had become content in my own company. Still I wished my aunt could have been with me. Deep down I knew she didn't really enjoy providing a home for me however temporary it might be.

I smoothed the skirt of my blue and white striped cotton dress and fingered the strap of the change purse that hung across my chest. I had my lunch money in there and I knew just how much I could spend.

My knees were starting to tremble as I pulled open the tavern door. Inside, I had to stop to let my eyes adjust to the dimness of the room. For just a moment I felt sorry for Crossroads Tavern. It must have started life clean and shining but it was dingy and worn now. The dark wooden walls and scuffed plank floor blended together giving the place a cave-like feeling. Cigarette smoke was caught halfway to the ceiling, hanging in small strands over the room. The front windows were grimy with a film of grease that barred most daylight. The overpowering smell of beer surrounded me like a cloud.

The low hum of voices from the bar stopped while the patrons, cigarettes and drinks in hand looked me over. No one sitting there had ever seen me before and I knew they couldn't identify what family I was related to. I wasn't dressed like the farm children in either overalls or a homespun jumper. The only regionally acceptable part of me was my long, stringy brown hair. To make it worse, I had a book in my hand. Trying not to look at the bar or stumble over my own feet, I slid awkwardly onto a chair at the nearest table to the door. No other tables were occupied but every bar stool was taken.

A stained typed sheet of paper was upright between the salt and pepper shakers. I pretended to read it until I sensed a person standing beside me. "Ya wanta eat, hon?" a woman asked. "Ain't much of choice though."

I stared mutely at the woman. She didn't look like any waitress I'd ever seen before. She had bright orange hair, dark red lipstick and there were little pieces of black stuff that fell from her eyelashes onto her soiled ruffled blouse. Her black skirt was so tight it gathered in wrinkles across her stomach. She looked like what my mother would have called a "floozy".

My stomach felt funny. I wasn't sure I could eat at all. Despite my resolve to be brave, I could feel the tears behind my eyes. I said softly, "I'll have an egg salad sandwich, please." That was what my mother always ordered.

She cackled and leaned in close to me. I could smell her perfume, the stuff that was sold in Woolworth's Five and Dime store: Evening in Paris. "I'd take the burger, hon, the meat's fresh, and if Earl changed the grease, you can have some fries." I nodded my agreement. "Anything to drink?" she asked. I fingered my purse; I knew I had to make a choice, a Coca-Cola or a song on the juke box? I shook my head.

The juke box sat across the room from my table, its red, yellow, and blue neon lights circling the machine as popular songs flowed from its speakers. I had a favorite song, it wasn't a new one, but in that

year 1949, it was still on the juke boxes. I thought the song, “To Each His Own” had a special meaning for me. I knew I had my “own” even if they, my parents, weren’t with me now. I just had to stick-it-out until that could happen.

Waiting until the people at the bar lost interest in me, I crossed to the juke box and looked for my song. It was there. Parting with my nickel I punched number thirteen. The familiar tune comforted me as I waited for my food.

My orange-haired waitress made a quick swipe with a rag on the table before she put a plate with a hamburger and fries in front of me. Then she set a glass with Coca-Cola and a straw next to the plate. “I didn’t order...” I started. “On the house,” she said as she walked away. My mumbled, “Thank you.” didn’t reach her before she took up her place behind the bar.

A lanky man dressed in a plaid shirt with rolled-up sleeves watched me from his barstool. As the song ended, he crossed to the juke box and played it again. He grinned as he asked, “Favorite song?” I wasn’t sure if I should answer him. After all he was a stranger and I knew to beware of strangers. I ate my burger and greasy fries, my eyes glued to my book as the strains of “To Each His Own” melded with the voices at the bar.

I left the tavern without notice after paying for my lunch. Conversation continued among the bar patrons. The tavern had returned to its normal state.

A month later, I was still eating lunch on my own at the tavern; my aunt never did come to join me. But now I was a regular. The bar people and I shared the parts of our lives that we wanted to and no one probed for more. They all accepted an eleven-year-old girl eating alone. Even Bea, the most grandmotherly looking of the group, never asked about my parents. In a way we were all lacking something that caused us to be at the Crossroads alone every day.

Thelma, my floozy waitress, owned the tavern with her husband, Earl, who made the best -ever hamburgers. I never thought about ordering an egg salad sandwich again. Although her appearance never changed Thelma became more attractive in my eyes and I would have defended her to my mother any time. Scotty, my friend in the plaid shirt, would hand me a nickel to play the juke box as soon as I arrived. I could pay for my own Coca-Cola then. I changed tables and sat closer to the bar. It was easier to talk and listen there. Eventually I stopped bringing my book.

I found that I played “To Each His Own” less and less although it was still my favorite song. My “own” for those months became the lunch crowd at Crossroads Tavern. For an hour each day I was with people who liked having me around.

Before the first snow fell, my parents came back, and as a family we left for a new home. As frightened as I had been on my first day at Crossroads that odd mix of people made me feel welcome and safe. The pungent smell of beer-soaked wood that usually emanates from any bar can make me smile as I remember that lonely autumn and the people who became my “own”.

“To Each His Own” Jeannine C. Stauder
Music by Jay Livingston
Lyrics by Ray Evans

Cape Cod's Captain Courageous

An essay by Louis Arthur Norton

Josiah Richardson, a pivotal figure in American maritime history, was born at Centerville on Cape Cod in 1809. He rose from cabin boy at the age of eleven to master of a coastal schooner at twenty-one. In January 1847 the thirty-seven year old Richardson took command of a packet carrying wheat from New York to Liverpool and miscellaneous freight and passengers for the return trip to America. Because of the Irish potato famine, emigrates crowded the docks in Liverpool in search of a better life in America. The frequently rough packet crossing to America was like a six-week sentence to a dungeon during a perpetual earthquake. Commanding such a ship's crew and catering to uncomfortable and sometimes terrified passengers was a challenge that few could enjoy, but Richardson's gentleness, congeniality, and religiosity made him excel in this difficult role. These character qualities stood in contrast with other eastern seaboard shipmasters.

The rise of the American clipper ship era (roughly 1845 to 1859) arguably had one foremost American marine architect, Canadian born Donald McKay of East Boston. McKay designed the *Stag Hound*, an extreme clipper ship expressly for the east to west coast "round the Horn" voyage to San Francisco then on to China and return. Richardson with his sea experience and quiet manner was selected to be the first master of the 1535-ton svelte clipper. Earning this assignment was a high professional complement and Richardson was about to make maritime history.

The *Stag Hound*, built in one hundred days, was launched at noon on 7 December 1850 to be delivered to George B. Upton and Sampson & Tappan, both Boston merchant firms. Although ship launchings in those days were not well-attended events, *Stag Hound's* official debut drew an estimated throng of twelve to fifteen hundred on that blustery cold December day. Because of the low temperature, the tallow froze on the ways. To "grease the skids," the men poured boiling whale oil heated by the forges onto wooden rails. When completed, at the command "knock away the dog shores," the graceful dark-hulled vessel rapidly entered the ice-strewn harbor in a vaporous scrim of smoking whale oil — a contrast in black and white. Along Boston's waterfront, shouts from the crowd combined with the cacophonous peal of church bells from the Boston harbor shores.

Stag Hound was indeed grand, but also an unusual ship. Sailing on her maiden voyage on 1 February 1851 for this 16,000 mile run from Boston round Cape Horn to San Francisco, her crew consisted of thirty-six able bodied seamen, six ordinary seamen and six boys. Her freight-fee for hold space on this passage was one dollar per cubic foot, an unprecedented rate.

The clipper encountered a heavy gale six days out of Boston causing her to lose her main topsail and three topgallant masts. She reached Valparaiso under a jury rig in sixty-six days that missed the existing speed record by only one day. This feat was credited to the new ship design and, in no small measure, to her master's seamanship. Shortly after repairs were made Captain Richardson and his men rescued the crew of a distressed merchant ship off the coast of Brazil. For his unselfish deed Richardson received a personal letter of thanks from the Russian Ambassador to the United States sent by way of the then Secretary of State, Daniel Webster. In spite of stopping to assist another vessel in distress, *Stag Hound* went on to complete the passage to San Francisco in a record 107 days at sea.

After receiving great acclaim in California, *Stag Hound* sailed for China to take on a cargo of perishable tea. She returned to New York in ninety-four days, an unprecedented sailing time, particularly in the stormy winter season. *Stag Hound* completed her maiden voyage paying for her building costs and earning a then sizable profit of \$80,000.

With this success Richardson resigned his command of *Stag Hound* to spend more time with his family at their Massachusetts home, but this well deserved respite only lasted three months. A man with his

skills and reputation could not be allowed to rest ashore for long. Donald McKay was completing the building of the 1817-ton, 240 foot *Staffordshire*.

The *Staffordshire* was very commodious, but many did not consider her likely to be quite as swift as *Stag Hound*. Boston's Enoch Train, the owner of *Staffordshire*, was a good and competitive businessman. He reasoned that a ship of this considerable size with a very large hold should be very profitable both in the round-the-world trade as well as the lucrative California freight run. What he needed was a skilled and competent master, so Train recruited Richardson to this new maritime challenge. The captain sailed from Boston bound for San Francisco on 3 May 1852 with one hundred and twenty passengers and a freight list paper that measured thirteen feet in length. The passengers found Richardson gracious and accommodating. After disembarking, a group of the wayfarers presented him with a silver pitcher as a token of respect for the many kind attentions they received, and for his many considerations while conducting them through the long and perilous voyage.

This record passage in an imposing vessel made Richardson the center of attention on the San Francisco waterfront, but the deeply religious captain used his newly acquired prominence to address a children's Sunday school meeting. This inspired the following published comment: "Here is an anomaly...A clipper-ship captain beats the fleet round the Horn to California and spends what time he can spare from the ship's business in port, to bring the Word of God to Sunday School children. What, one wonders, has become of the mythical swashbuckler of the quarter-deck, whose word was an oath, and whose pastime was caving in skulls of sailors with iron belaying pins?"¹ The remainder of this voyage was notable in that he took *Staffordshire* from San Francisco to Singapore, then on to Calcutta and finally back to Boston where he completed the final leg in a mere eighty-three days. To this day, this record has only been exceeded four times.

By 1853 the California trade boom had subsided with the end of the 1849 gold rush. The *Staffordshire* was therefore now used as a packet. Train ordered Richardson to sail to Liverpool and sell her if he could get a good price. The ship crossed the Atlantic, but a suitable buyer could not be found in Great Britain. Richardson decided to return home and left Liverpool's Mersey River on 9 December 1853 to return to Boston with two hundred and fourteen passengers and a cargo of freight for an early winter crossing.

The *Staffordshire*, unfortunately, was lost on Blonde Rock four miles off Sable Island, Cape Sable on the early hours of 29 December 1853. According to the detailed account from the Chief mate Joseph Alden, a gale struck late in the evening of 23 December that heavily damaged the ship's rudder, carried away the bowsprit up to the knight heads and stripped away much of the foremast rigging. In spite of the danger, Richardson went aloft to assess the damage. Upon his descent he slipped on some ice and fell to the deck about thirty-five feet below. Richardson sustained multiple serious internal injuries as well as a fractured spine and ankle. Although confined to his berth, the captain directed Alden in the repairs and gave navigational suggestions. The *Staffordshire* sailed on to the westward under a double-reefed main topsail. On the 29 December at 8 PM encountered another storm. Because of the accompanying extreme wind, the damaged rudder, and her compromised rigging, the *Staffordshire* was slow to respond to the helm. The great vessel struck a rock, then bouncing off it several times before slipped off the shoal stern-first. The mortally wounded ship took on water much faster than the crew could pump it out. The *Staffordshire* was sinking bow first, her deck covered in ice. As boats were lowered to save passengers and crew, a violent snow squall descended upon the disaster scene. When Alden went to assist Richardson to safety, the captain refused to leave his cabin and requesting to be allowed to go down with his ship. Mr. Alden, who jumped over the stern to swim to one of the small boats, said that the Captain's last words were, "If I am lost, God's will be done."² Captain Josiah Richardson perished with one hundred and sixty-nine others on that December night. Forty-four lives were saved including a woman who had kindly washed and dried the men's clothing in the galley during the trip.

Clipper ships, the noblest of all sailing vessels, disappeared with the finality of an extinct beautiful bird. A man with strength of character and proficiency in seamanship — a good and gentle man — “crossed the bar” in the best tradition of the sea.³ With his passing the nation lost both a pioneer and a courageous sea captain.

¹ Henry C. Kittredge. *Shipmasters of Cape Cod*, (Cambridge MA: The Riverside Press, 1935) 113-114.

² *Ibid.*, 119

³ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "*Crossing the Bar*," in *Demeter and Other Poems* (London: UK, Macmillan and Company, 1889) pp. vi, 175.

*Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;*

*For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.*

Pattern Markings

A short story by Hanna Perlstein Marcus

I was seven and had been attending the Lubavitcher Yeshiva School for almost three years when the accident happened. Many of us children of Jewish immigrants who had arrived in Springfield, Massachusetts after World War II were students at the Yeshiva, our parents hoping to retain our Jewish identity lest we assimilate too quickly into a Christian America. It was February 17, 1955, just a few months after my mother received her Certificate of Naturalized Citizenship, the culmination of five years of study in Adult Civic Education at the Chestnut Street School. I remember the time as one of great pride for my mother, a single parent who was born in Hungary, but had experienced the horrors of war, and relieved to finally call herself a real American.

We used to take the school bus every day from the corner of Osgood and Dwight Streets in the north end of the city to the Sumner Avenue mansion across the street from Forest Park that was occupied by the private Jewish elementary day school. The bus rides were typical of the time: the boys were pulling braids, hurling spitballs, making wisecracks, talking loudly, and the girls were rolling their eyes, pretending to ignore the boys, playing cat's cradle, chatting, and giggling.

Some of the boys on the bus, like Simon and Joseph, were rhyming my name as they pulled hard on my braids. I pretended not to notice them, and continued talking to some of the other girls on the bus, who had started to giggle as they were also teased, but on the inside I was saying to myself, *Don't these boys have anything better to do than to bother me?*

"We're gonna have some fun when we get off the bus. Look out for some snowballs!" I heard one of the boys yell, as all the girls cringed.

It was the kind of February winter day children dream about. Light snow flurries earlier in the day added to the snow pack that was already on the ground, yet the temperature in the afternoon was slightly above freezing, so it was comfortable to be outside playing. I had already decided, though, while I was still sitting in my seat, that when I got off the bus, I would go directly home to avoid being the victim of any snowball attack.

It was close to 4:30 in the afternoon by the time our bus pulled up to the curb near our corner, still a good half hour of daylight left for outdoor activity. When the bus door swung open, I tried to be one of the first to disembark, but too many boys pushed ahead of me. I looked up as I stepped off the bus stairs, and quickly glimpsed at the billboard of Miss Rheingold, as I always did, her smile beckoning, *My beer is Rheingold, the dry beer. Think of Rheingold whenever you buy beer.* I loved looking at Miss Rheingold, the epitome of American beauty.

As I moved my gaze past the Esso station toward our apartment building and took two or three steps forward, I heard a loud, piercing scream behind me. Quickly wheeling around, I saw the bus driver, his face contorted in a tortured wail. In his arms was the body of a small boy, his snowsuit, hat, and crushed face covered with blood in the pattern of tire tracks, his eyes closed and arms hanging lifelessly by his side. I immediately recognized the child as little Benny.

I don't know why, but I must have been the first to run back to the Osgood Street apartment building, where many of the refugee families lived, to spread the news about Benny. It didn't stop with telling my mother. With my adrenaline flowing, I might have been the one to tell his stunned parents what had happened to their son, and I kept right on going until I had told the news to everyone in the building.

It's a blur to me as to what happened during that period of a few minutes, but I must have sounded as if I had actually seen the accident. Maybe I thought I did, but the fact of the matter was that I only saw what happened in the split second after it was over. I had already started running toward the apartments when the driver ran back into the bus with Benny, some children still on the bus clinging to their seats in

disbelief, and sped south toward Carew Street to Mercy Hospital. Four year-old Benny died an hour and a half later of a fractured skull.

Nevertheless, I was identified as the key eyewitness to the accident, so when the police came to do their investigation, I was offered up to describe what had happened. I guess I told a convincing story because for the next several years, as the case wound its way through the legal system, I was constantly drawn out of school to go over my hapless account with attorneys and other representatives of the court. I was never sure on whose side I was, or who the defendants or plaintiffs were, but I continued to tell the story I had heard from other children who actually saw the accident.

“Yes, Benny got out of the bus and went around back to pick up some snow for a snowball, and fell. He just fell under the bus and the driver ran over him.”

“Did you actually see him bend down and pick up some snow?” asked an attorney in a sleek gray suit.

“Yes, I did.”

“Did you see him fall?”

“Yes, I did.”

“What happened then?”

“All of a sudden, he was under the bus.”

“And then what happened?”

“The driver started to pull the bus away and then someone screamed.”

“What did the bus driver do then?”

“He stopped and ran out to the back of the bus. He picked Benny up in his arms. Then he brought him back into the bus and drove away.”

Finally, after years of telling this story countless times, an attorney crafted his line of questioning so that I blurted out the truth. I hadn't seen the accident at all. I had only been doing what I thought was expected of me once I was identified as an eyewitness. I was excused from the case, and it never came to the point of my testifying in court. My story may have been the truth, but I never saw it with my own eyes.

During those years, my mother and I avoided discussing the case; just another secret that we never dared to share. We tended to keep our feelings inside, from the world and from each other. Our bond stemmed from my mother's talent as a fashion designer and seamstress and my role as her model. That was our pattern as sure as the markings she made with her marking chalk to assure transfer of the pattern to the fabric.

I never revealed to her my guilt and fear about lying. She may have thought that her daughter was doing the right thing, cooperating with the authorities. Maybe she was proud of me for being such a young witness in such an important matter. One of the children of our community had died, and her daughter was a key figure in the case.

She never questioned me about my actual involvement, never stood up to the officials in charge to ask that her daughter not be tangled up in a legal case, nor did I ask her to relieve me of that burden. As I think back about the chronology of things, I realize that the accident occurred just three months after my mother earned her citizenship, the most important thing that had happened to her since arriving in America. Perhaps she felt she was being a good new citizen, a good American. And I was being a good daughter.

Many years later, my mother and I attended the funeral of one of the members of our immigrant community with whom I had grown up on Osgood Street. We were still sitting in our folding chairs at the end of the service, talking to other attendees we hadn't seen for a while, when a short heavy-set woman with auburn hair and melancholy eyes approached us. She looked at me, closely studying my face, and quizzically said my name. I stood up and nodded, “Yes.” With tears in her eyes, she hugged me very tightly, and then walked away without saying another word.

As I fought to collect myself, my mother leaned over, and asked softly in her melodic Hungarian accent, “Do you know who dat vas?”

“Yes, I do, ma,” I responded, almost unable to speak. “That was Benny’s mother.”

As I gazed back into my mother’s sympathetic eyes, I felt a measure of warmth and tenderness between us – finally, a shared understanding of our feelings about a horrifying event that had happened a long time ago.

Exceeding the Speed Limit

A short story by Deborah C. Washington

“West, Maple, Rockwell,” Elizabeth read the street signs as she passed by. “Where the heck is Baldwin?”

“Darn picky clients,” said Elizabeth talking to herself. “If I knew this bakery with ‘croissants to die for’ was 85 miles away, I would have charged more.”

Elizabeth was a well known event planner. Her calendar was filled with everything from corporate functions, to weddings to even a dog’s birthday party if the price was right. By most standards, she was successful.

Elizabeth never knew how to slow down. She passed on that trait to her daughter, Cassandra, who at boarding school was involved in dance, theater, tennis and horseback riding. Even in marriage Elizabeth had chosen Jonathan, a successful partner in a law firm. It was hard to remember the days when they met and dated and made time for each other. Each one was driven to succeed professionally. That seemed to be the only thing they had in common any more.

“Baldwin!” Elizabeth shouted. She glanced quickly at the directions, “Five miles; turn left on Hope Road.” Five miles till the next turn, she could now make up a little time. She stomped on the accelerator.

Almost immediately she saw flashing lights in her rearview mirror. “You’ve got to be kidding me,” she thought as she pulled over.

“Hi, ma’am.”

“Hi, officer.”

“In a hurry?”

“Well, yes. I wasn’t sure of the speed limit.”

“May I see your license and registration?”

She nervously located the documents.

Officer Johnson wrote on his clipboard then said, “Okay, now please follow me.”

“What?” asked Elizabeth.

“You need to come to the police station.”

“What?”

“Follow me.” He went back into his cruiser with her license and registration. She felt a knot in her stomach, “What if he’s not really a cop? What if he’s a stalker? What should I do?” She realized her only option was to follow him.

It wasn’t long before they were in front of an old brick building with a sign above, “King’s Valley Police Dept.” Elizabeth was anxious. This wasn’t her first speeding ticket and she never had to go to a police station before.

As she followed Officer Johnson up the steps, she asked, “Is there something wrong with my registration?”

“No.”

“My license?”

“No.”

At the counter was a short, pudgy woman officer.

“We have a speeder, Josie.”

“Oh,” smiled Josie. She took the paperwork and read the name, “Elizabeth. Is it Liz, Lizzy, Beth?”

“Elizabeth,”

“Really?” said Josie. “My full name is Josephine, but I’ve always thought that life’s too short for long names.” Elizabeth was puzzled by the comment.

“Follow me.”

“Where are we going?”

“To the cell.”

“What!” Elizabeth stopped.

“In King’s Valley speeders have to spend one hour in jail for each mile per hour over the speed limit that they were going.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me! That can’t be legal.”

“It is here.”

“How fast was I going?”

“Says here 45 mph.”

“What was the speed limit?”

“35.”

“Well, everyone knows that cops look the other way if you are going nine miles over the limit. So, I only need to spend an hour, right?”

“Sorry, ten miles over, ten hours.”

“No! You can’t do that.”

“I’m sorry, that’s the law.”

“You can’t just put me in jail. My husband’s a lawyer.”

“How nice. Sorry, we don’t waste time, money and paperwork on speeders. This is how we solve the problem in King’s Valley.”

“How about I just pay a fine?”

“Donations are welcome, but not necessary.”

“But I must be allowed one phone call.”

“Oh, yes, one call,”

Elizabeth took out her cell phone. She paused. Should she call Yvette, her assistant, to tell her she wouldn’t be coming with the croissants? Should she call Jonathan? He was in court all day and wouldn’t check his messages until late. She decided on Yvette.

The phone rang three times, Elizabeth’s heart sunk. “Why did I call her? She has a habit of misplacing her phone.” After the recording, she spoke as quickly as she could.

“Yvette, I am stuck in King’s Valley. Please tell Jonathan to call the King’s Valley police station as soon as possible. Please!” She closed the phone and a feeling of helplessness fell over her.

“Okay,” said Josie. “I’ll take that and your pocketbook.” Although Elizabeth towered over Josie, she obeyed and hopelessly handed them over. They stopped by a locker and Josie put the items inside. “Here you can have the key.”

Josie led her to a corridor labeled, “Speeders”. There were closed wooden doors on either side. “Here you go, Cell 9”.

She unlocked the door. Elizabeth felt dizzy and surreal as she entered the unexpected room. It was painted in a soft shade of blue. There was an overstuffed couch and a recliner with a large coffee table. To one side of the room was a water cooler with hot and cold water. On the wall was a TV.

“What kind of place is this? This is a cell? I expected cement floor and cots.”

“Oh, we have those for the serious criminals.”

Josie pointed out a basket of tea bags and cups for water or tea.

“Any chance for coffee?” pushed Elizabeth.

“No, we don’t allow coffee for speeders. I’ll bring lunch by at noon.”

“Do I really have to spend ten hours?”

“Yes. Your papers show time of admission as 8:45 am, you’ll be out by 6:45 pm. Maybe we’ll fudge it a little and come at 6:30 pm.” She left locking the door behind her.

Elizabeth threw the locker key on the coffee table next to a half finished jigsaw puzzle of wild flowers in a field. A large lavender candle scented the air. Next to it was a stack of books, a pad of paper and pens and the remote for the TV.

“Well, might as well make use of the time,” she thought. She picked up the pad and a pen and began to make a “to do” list, but was lost without her day timer.

She began to pace like a lioness. “It can’t believe this—a day of my life wasted.” Reaching for the remote she thought she’d catch up on the news. A tranquil ocean scene appeared on the TV with waves crashing the shore and seagulls flying overhead. “Must be a nature channel,” she thought.

She changed the channel. There was soothing music as the screen took on the image of colorful tropical fish in an aquarium. The next channel was a fireplace with romantic music. Another channel was a waterfall and the sound of the water flowing steadily down. “You’ve got to be kidding me.” She shut it off.

She looked at the stack of books. There was a Bible, a collection of poetry, a joke book, a book of trivia and a cookbook.

As she thumbed through the cookbook she wondered, “What’s the big deal with those croissants?” A chapter on making homemade bread caught her attention. She remembered as a child helping her grandmother kneed the dough. She always thought that she would teach Cassandra, but now it just seemed too time consuming.

She picked up the trivia book and found herself intrigued by some of the facts and wrote a few down. Then she skimmed through the joke book and actually found herself chuckling.

She decided to try a cup of tea. She fingered through the various flavored bags and finally chose chamomile. The warmth of the cup felt good on her hands as she sat on the couch. She turned the TV back on choosing the fireplace channel. She vaguely remembered the dating years when she and Jonathan would take time to enjoy each other’s company in front of a roaring fire—no cell phones, no TV, no other distractions.

She picked up the book of poetry and stretched out on the couch covering herself with a soft fleece blanket. After reading a while, she fell asleep.

The next thing she knew, Josie was waking her, “Here’s lunch.”

“I must have dozed off,” said Elizabeth.

“Your body must have needed it,” said Josie. “See you later,” and she left as quickly as she came in.

Elizabeth looked at the tray—a cup of creamy tomato soup, macaroni and cheese, a glass of milk, bunch of grapes, and a croissant.

Elizabeth started with the soup. It didn’t taste like any canned soup. She savored each spoonful. The macaroni and cheese was equally delicious. She eyed the croissant—her evil nemesis. She savagely ripped off a piece with her teeth as if to seek revenge. She couldn’t believe the flaky texture that nearly melted in her mouth and the taste that was “to die for”.

As she finished eating, she thought she saw the proper place for a puzzle piece. Soon she was engrossed in hunting to find more pieces that fit together.

After a while, she needed to use the restroom. When she opened the door, she was shocked. There was a bathtub. She saw a bottle of bubble bath and a towel. “When was the last time that I had a bubble bath?” she thought. Should she or shouldn’t she? She couldn’t resist the temptation and ran the warm water, loading it with bubbles.

Elizabeth took the longest, warmest and most relaxing bath that she had ever taken. When she was done, she dressed and went back into the other room. She decided to curl up with another book.

The only one left that she hadn’t looked at was the Bible. It had been years since she had touched one. She leafed through the pages stopping at a few Proverbs and jotting a couple down on her pad. She reflected on some of David’s Psalms as he rejoiced in God’s blessings. In the book of Luke she reread the story of Mary and Martha when Jesus came to their home. Martha busied herself doing everything she could

to make his stay special, yet Mary just sat, listening, engulfed in his presence. She was the one who Jesus praised. Elizabeth finally understood the story. She had been a Martha.

Elizabeth began a new “to do list”:

1. Bake bread with Cassandra.
2. Sit in front of a fire with Jonathan.
3. Buy bubble bath.
4. Drink more tea.

Just then the door opened.

“Well, I bet you thought it would never end,” said Josie.

“What?” said Elizabeth.

“Time’s up.”

Elizabeth’s heart dropped. She could not believe this was the end of her sanctuary, her respite from the world of chaos that she had created. She couldn’t remember the last time she had felt this relaxed.

“What time is it?”

“6:30 pm. Oh, I see you made good progress with the puzzle.”

“Yes, kind of wish that I could finish it.”

“Oh, don’t worry. The next person will do that. Don’t forget your locker key.”

Elizabeth pretended to look for it. “I don’t remember where I put it.”

“Why, you silly. It’s right there on the table.”

As Elizabeth followed Josie out, she looked back. The fireplace was still on the screen, the music softly playing.

When they retrieved her belongings from the locker, Elizabeth asked, “Can you tell me, was that croissant made here?”

“That was from King’s Valley Bakery. Wasn’t it delicious?”

“To die for.”

“That reminds me. They heard that you were here and dropped off an order I guess you were going to pick up.”

“How...?” Elizabeth started. Josie just smiled.

“Well, I really hope that you’ve learned your lesson about speeding.”

“Yes, I did.”

“Good. By the way, second offenders get the bars and cots.”

Elizabeth took out a \$100 bill and placed it in the box labeled, “Donations.”

Then she turned and gave Josie a hug, “Thank you.”

THE LITTLE SCALLOP

A children's story by Frank McKane

Waves pounded hard against the beach as the hurricane unleashed its fury on the coast. The swift tide and turbulent surf grabbed hold of Little Scallop and ripped it from its underwater sanctuary. Each surge of water brought Little Scallop closer to land until a final wave sent him flying through the air.

"Oomph," Little Scallop said as he slammed onto the hard packed beach sand.

"Hey, I'm out of the water!" he cried. "I can't breathe!"

Another wave came to shore engulfing Little Scallop. Panic overwhelmed him. He snapped his shell open and closed trying to propel himself deeper into the water. He was almost successful, but another sea roller tossed Little Scallop high into the air and further up the beach.

As he lay sprawled on the dirty sand, the ocean teased Little Scallop by sending small tentacles of tide up to tickle him.

"Oh, Mother Ocean, why do you torment me so?" Little Scallop cried.

Slowly the tide ebbed away and no longer touched Little Scallop. Mother Ocean abandoned him on the dry beach.

His shell opened and closed in a vain attempt to breathe. But the exhausting effort was useless as Little Scallop could take no oxygen from the air. He would have to wait for the next high tide. In Little Scallop time, that was an eternity.

The beach was dark as night covered the sand and storm clouds concealed the moonlight. Little Scallop could still hear the waves smacking against the beach. But no light or water came near him.

"Eich, eich" something said from the distance.

Fear swirled around Little Scallop. He had never heard such a noise. It was creepy and it was coming closer. Worse still . . . it sounded hungry.

"Sniff, sniff," the mysterious creature did.

The creature picked Little Scallop up and turned him over and over. Little Scallop trembled and held his shell extra tight.

"Sniff, sniff," the creature did again.

Teeth and claws tried to pry open Little Scallop's shell. Twice he felt the sharp point of canine teeth intrude into his shell fortress. He held firm. The creature gave up and dropped Little Scallop back on the sand.

He opened his shell just enough to peek through a tiny slit. The creature, a giant by scallop standards, was holding something in its paws. Sadness gripped Little Scallop as he watched the hairy beast, with its long bushy tail and a black mask over its eyes, devour one of his friends.

A salty tear seeped from Little Scallop's corrugated shell. He saw the scallop-eating monster ambled away as hints of sunlight peered over the dune. Soon, it would be hot and harsh.

Up came Father Sun. He burned the sand. Little Scallop could hardly stand the heat. The comforting water he trapped inside his shell was slowly evaporating.

Little Scallop grew weak. His grip upon the shell loosened as the heat increased. High tide was still hours and hours away – a lifetime for Little Scallop.

"Awk, awk," some other creature said.

The new creature came from the sky. Little Scallop, tired and hot, clamped down tight once more. This fiend scared him more than the furry beast. He shuddered when the flying beast grabbed him in its vice-like beak. Little Scallop felt his shell flex as the beak attempted to crush him. His cracked, but held.

"Whoosh, whoosh," the flying creature did.

Little Scallop went up into the air - higher in the sky than he ever went before. He realized his tormentor was carrying him off. Away they flew.

"Please take me back to the sea" Little Scallop cried.
But the flying thing said nothing. It just flew higher.
"PLEASE," he pleaded.

Little Scallop's cries were cut off when his attacker dropped him. He tumbled from the sky. Peeking through a slit in his shell, he could see the water below. Little Scallop smiled. His winged friend was indeed kind. He would be in the water soon.

Thud!

Little Scallop crashed back on the hard sand. He felt his shell crack a little more. Dazed from shock and pain, he relaxed his muscles and allowed his shell to slip open. He cried. Hope faded. The flying creature again landed next to Little Scallop. With its sharp beak, it tried to bite Little Scallop through the opening in his shell.

In the distance, Little Scallop heard yet another animal cry out. The cruel monster stopped pecking at him.

"Look at that bird. It's trying to eat the pretty scallop," the latest beach creature said.

The beaked marauder took off leaving Little Scallop at the mercy of the newest threat. This strange visitor picked Little Scallop up and turned him over and over.

"Mommy, I think it's still alive," the two-legged creature said.

"That is so sad. It will die up here on the beach, just like all the other scallops we saw," another larger biped said.

"At least this one won't die," the smaller of the two strangers said.

Without a sound Little Scallop went flying through the air once more. He was too tired now to care. All his hope was gone. He expected to crash on the hot sand again so this attacker could eat him.

Splash!

Little Scallop smacked down on the water. He opened his shell to allow the salty brine to flow into his disheveled home. As he looked back at the beach, he saw the two upright rescuers waving to him.

He snapped his shell back at them before settling down on the bottom, alive and ready to enjoy the sea.

CRUSTY

A children's story by Francine Morlando

March, march, march! Crusty liked to march up and down the shoreline from the gray salt washed pier to the tan rock jetty. This was his home and taking care of it was very important to him. He protected the younger crustaceans from the seagulls, fish and people.

Blue, blue, blue! Crusty is a big blue crab with a pie-crust edge in front and two eyes perched on stalks. They stick out from his hard shiny shell. He also has a pair of small feelers between them. Crusty was wise and has lived for many years.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh! Crusty listened to the whoosh of the ocean's tide as it was going out. The cool water went over the top of his shell. Soon, Crusty would be back in the deep water. He wanted to look along the shoreline one more time. Walking sideways, he looked for young crabs so no one would be left behind.

Empty, empty, empty! The shore was calm and empty so Crusty started to turn and go into the water. Suddenly, Crusty's feelers went up as a small golden haired boy walked underneath the pier and distracted him. He tried to hide behind a pole so the boy would not see him.

Trouble, trouble, trouble! There would be trouble if Crusty did not get back into the water soon. When he turned to enter the water the tide had already gone out. Now he was stuck on a hot sandbar.

Dig, dig, dig! Crusty had to dig in the sand and bury himself to stay cool. Halfway down into the darkness of the wet sand Crusty was being pulled upwards. He was taken out of the cool sand and looked eye to eye with the golden haired boy.

Snap, snap, snap! Crusty did a quick snap with his claws. He was upside down dangling from the little boy's hand. The boy dropped him. Crusty thought he was free, but he never reached the sand. He had been dropped into a net.

Bounce, bounce, bounce! Crusty began to bounce up and down in the net as the boy walked along the shore. Crusty noticed the pier and jetty becoming smaller and smaller.

The little boy brought Crusty from the shoreline up stairs he was never able to climb. He was taken into a house and plopped down on the shiny floor.

Hiss, hiss, hiss! Crusty heard a cat hiss. The calico cat walked in a slow circle around him. Crusty did not like when the cat hissed at him. The cat sniffed Crusty once, twice, then decided he was not interested in him anymore. He gave his tail a swish as he went outside.

Watch, watch, watch! Crusty was happy to watch the cat go outside. Suddenly he had an idea. The cat used a small square opening with a soft flap at the bottom of the back door to go outside or come inside. This will be very useful for Crusty.

Wait, wait, wait! Crusty would have to wait for the right moment to try his idea. The little boy saw the cat leave through the opening in the door and ran after him. He shouted for him to come back. He had forgotten to feed the cat.

Crawl, crawl, crawl! Crusty knew now was the time to crawl to the opening at the bottom of the door. He reached up with his claws and pulled himself up and through the soft flap to freedom.

Tumble, tumble, tumble! Crusty flipped himself outside and started to tumble down the wooden stairs. His old hard shell protected him as he met each step. He landed with a thump at the bottom of the stairs in the smooth sand. Crusty was a bit dizzy, but he scurried toward the shore as fast as his ten legs would carry him in the sand.

Swim, swim, swim! Crusty had to reach the water and swim fast to get away from the cat and the little boy chasing him. He heard shouts and felt pounding on the sand behind him. The cat and the little boy were getting closer and closer to Crusty. The tide was high so he did not have far to go.

Waves, waves, waves! Crusty was now near the foamy waves lapping at the shore. He leaped into the water. Splash! The cat skidded to a stop and would not go into the water.

The boy ran past him and dove in. The waves washed over Crusty and the little boy. They tossed and turned in the salty water. The golden haired boy tried to grab Crusty over and over, but each time Crusty was able to slip through his fingers.

Home, home, home! Crusty loved being back home in the water among the seaweed, clams and fish. He was able to swim out to the end of the pier where the water was deep and the small boy could not reach him anymore. Crusty peeked above the water as it rippled toward the shore. He watched the cat and the little boy walk back to their home and was grateful he was back in his.