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ALDEBARAN

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Cammy Bitel
Mary-Lou Brockett
Victor M. Depta
Peggy Hendershot
Ruth Moon Kempfer
Jon Lavieri
Margaret MacColl
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Carrie lou Winter

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Cammy Bitel

ONE YEAR

after the fire,
I looked at Marisa,
her gaunt face
scarred by experiences.
Her precious hair,
once coils of black,
now thin and rusty.

I stare at her.
Her eyes do not follow me
as they did once in high school days
fluttering through crowded hallways.
She, older now than all of us,
though we have continued with our lives.

Marisa, we haven't forgot you
in that hospital bed
while we're in colleges preparing
for our own slow death.

Martin Robbins

TIME EXPOSURE

Trying to miss the light
At each cross street, I drive
Up Commonwealth, taking
My spring census. The pink
Shapes of magnolias blur
Into the lines of years
Behind me, those ahead.

My slow-speed glance passes
Sidewalks. Last year, angry
At the way you were asked,
You didn't want to pose.
I stop this frame alone,
Snap that brittle moment
Into softer focus.

Margaret MacColl

ALIEN TERRITORY

Where fields of wheat
stretch and ripple to the horizon
my ears miss the lulling slap of ocean waves
and my skin the salt breath
of the sea wind that whitens and twists
our stunted cherry trees;
my hands catch at the wood fencing,
boundaries of endless fields,
wanting the grip of weathered stone;
The gulls must be looping over
the river fishing
but my ears do not catch
their rasping, greedy arguments.

Carrie lou Winter

PUSSY WILLOW

From what field
were you plucked,
ripped down
at the joint.
Your slender, slightly
curved body I hold
in my hand,
softly caressing the
grey-white snails
that crawl along
your bare limb,
gently peeling back
the brittle half shell
to reveal the
teardrop puff
that grows within you.

Mary-Lou Brockett

BRAINSTORMS: STRAWBERRIES, WORMS, AND
A PUPPY NAMED SCHNYDER

I have the whole house to myself. What should I do? There's no one here; no one to tell me to "Stop that obnoxious typing." No one to say "Show me what you're writing." Peace, tranquility, and nothing to say. Ah for an idea—a simple thought or two, three, four, five, six, seven o'clock. It's nearly seven o'clock. Evening. Darkness falls. The T.V.'s on.

"The T.V.?!"

Yes Mrs. Young, the T.V. is on. It's blaring and I'm still typing and I'm still writing and third grade was a long time ago. You can't haunt me anymore—I watch television—I rot my brain with rays from a small video box, warp my values and do all those things you told us never to do.

"Read!" you'd shout and give us a book a week to swallow and a test every Friday so we could prove our progress.

We hated you and so we tormented you. We put worms in your lunch and screamed whenever you said it was test time. You tried to punish us, but we were a whole class—what could you do?

We refused to give up, and finally you started to cry in the middle of our math lesson on that sunny spring day. You threw your chalk at Simon and your eraser at me. You screamed out your name and ran out the door—did we ever see you again?

I tried to contact you once two years ago when Simon and I got married. I wanted to invite you to the reception—we wanted to tell you we were sorry—but nobody knew where you were. We decided you had died and left it that way.

Simon was very good at that.

He was very good at deciding things he couldn't find or figure out were dead. I ran away from him once, just to teach him a lesson.

When I came back to hear him apologize for being so mean, he was writing my obituary. When I tried to explain that I wasn't dead, he just shook his head and signed, "So young, so lovely, and

Mary-Lou Brockett

Brainstorms: . . .

she cleaned a pretty good house, too. I should call Mom and tell her I'll be home after the services."

Well, later I divorced him, and he went really crazy and got committed to a hospital.

I visited him and—yes, that's where I last saw you. "You" meaning Mrs. Young, in case you lost yourself, Ma'am. I felt terrible, you had been there since 1969. Third grade.

I recognized you immediately. You were yelling at Simon for watching the T.V. set in the ward, and he thought he was digging for worms. He was mumbling, "She won't give me another one of those stupid tests. She'll learn."

The two of you, just like it was then—some things never change. Only this time it was different, because I wasn't part of it. There was nothing for me to do except watch. Neither of you knew me. You just sat there; both of you in third grade—and me in 1979—husbandless, jobless, and familyless.

But I see that I have left things undone. Two words must stick out in mind. "Jobless" and "familyless."

I didn't have a job at the time, Simon was the breadwinner. He worked as a gas station attendant. We had been in love since third grade, we were lovers in sixth grade, and we were very careful until senior year—that's when I got pregnant, and we got married, and I had the miscarriage, and Simon beat me up for "ruining his life," and I ran away to teach him a lesson and I became dead when Simon went crazy. I became dead. So dead. And familyless, too.

Nobody talked to me anymore after the marriage, or should I say until the baby was to be? My parents were all for Simon and I getting married. Having seen him steady for nine years, they had gotten used to having him around.

We had never broken up. We were the perfect couple, the class couple, the couple most likely to succeed, most likely to marry . . . the ones who disappointed our parents, the couple totally ignored by its families, the couple most likely to go crazy, and so we did. Simon believed I was dead and so I was. But not am.

Mary-Lou Brockett

Brainstorms: . . .

Am is a different situation. It's been a year since the miscarriage, and the beating and the divorce and the crazy meeting of Mrs. Young and Simon. I still miss them both. They still live in the third grade; I do not. I live in the 1980's. It's not easy; sometimes I wish I was in the third grade, but I'm not.

I'm remarried. I married a sane person this time—at least I think I did. His name is Steph and he is an insurance agent. We only knew each other a month when he asked me to marry him. Well, I was lonely—having no family for almost a year, and I was working as a puppy-killer at the animal shelter.

God, I hated that work, but I was an unskilled laborer. My parents—my ex-parents—had planned on sending me to college—art college because they felt I could draw—but then Simon. Anyway, the only job anyone would offer me was that of a puppy-killer. It was horrible work.

We had only a week to find them a home, and if we failed, I had to put them all in the gas chamber for ten minutes. We always failed. I have no persuasive traits in me. Simon said I was soft. Simon also said I was dead.

At first it was such a game for them—all packed in like potato chips, rustling about and scratching the sides. Then I'd start the gas up. Yapping . . . whining . . . whimpers. They'd cry and cry and climb up on one another and fall to the bottom when they asphyxiated making it harder for the stronger ones to scratch to the top.

And always the one that wouldn't die—the one half asleep, but still moving and I'd take the scalpel and lift its chin carefully—it was too much to take. I was too sensitive—I loved them all so—I had never had a puppy—just a kitten—Simon gave her to me.

Her name was Mozart, a little orange kitten with an orange tiger patch, and Simon gave her to me in our junior year of high school. He brought her to school in his coat pocket. I brought her home in my shirt. She felt a lot like the baby did—maybe I was practicing. My dad said I couldn't have her—but I kept her in my room. She wet the bed—I never wet the bed anymore—her real name was Dr. Mozart Demento. I called her Mozart.

Mary-Lou Brockett

Brainstorms: . . .

I should have called her demented. She walked into walls and kept pulling my mother's wig off. Simon never knew Mom wore a wig. Mozart pulled it off one afternoon when Simon was there—he laughed for an hour—Mom nearly killed my kitten. Simon laughed, I cried. Mom broke Mozart's foot throwing her across the room. She got a cast. The vet said that the kitten wasn't a toy. I said I never said that she was a toy in the first place.

When she got better, they took the cast off. Mozart could walk again, and when I took her home, she walked away from my house, down the road, and never came back.

I watched for days—Simon called her for days. People thought he was weird, walking down the street yelling, "Mozart!" He wasn't weird—just strangely devoted. She never came back—sometimes I still look for her—even though we moved. I cried—and every day I'd cry for the puppies and so I said "yes" to Steph and we got married the next week.

At first I thought Steph was a strange name for a boy. See, his mother was filling out his birth record and for some sudden reason, she died. She had only gotten the first five letters of his name-to-be on the paper. The doctors just added his mother's last name to the paper, because he had no father—no one seemed to know who he was and no one took the credit. His mother had no immediate family. Steph was put into an orphanage and never got adopted.

Neither of us had a family, and so we decided to make our own. He hadn't ever had a puppy, and so my first and last successful attempt at puppy-home-finding happened the day before our marriage. Steph got Schnyder and I quit my job.

An old man with bad hearing took over my place. He had a green smile—I don't think he ever brushed his teeth—and the puppies would cry when he flashed it at them. I cried, too. Steph said I was too sensitive.

Steph was always right, and so when he said that Schnyder should learn to live outside, I couldn't disagree. "After all," Steph said, "he's a whole month old and should learn to enjoy

Mary-Lou Brockett

Brainstorms: . . .

the outdoors.” That night, Schnyder was run over by a truck. Steph shook his head.

Once Simon saw a run-over dog—he insisted we bury it. It was a German shepherd. We dug a hold in the back yard and just when Simon was going to drop the dog in, his father came out and beat his rear-end with a stick screaming about flower beds and lousy mongrels and Simon was screaming about bastards and shits and afterwards I soothed his welts in the woods and we made love in the wet leaves.

We were in seventh grade, and there stood Steph shaking his head. We went inside, we didn’t bury Schnyder, and no one beat Steph’s rump. He didn’t need soothing, we didn’t make love—the bed was too dry for me—I dreamed of brown moss and mud and woke up on the floor. Steph was already in the kitchen.

I’m a horrible cook, and I can’t shop for bargains. Steph knows his bargains, and only splurges on one thing—strawberries. He loves strawberries. Well, before I met Simon, I liked strawberries, too—but Simon was allergic to them. He broke out in a bumpy red rash and I developed the same reaction—out of sympathy. A week after Steph and I were married, he came home with three pounds of strawberries. I broke out and had to be taken to the hospital for a week. So now I have to knock on the kitchen door whenever Steph is in there in case he’s eating strawberries.

“Mystery girl.” That’s what he called me when we met. I was in tears having just killed more puppies, and he was standing in the spot that I was walking through. He scared me then—and now he keeps it up. He enjoys jumping out of the dark and yelling “Boo!” He makes me watch scary late night movies. He pretends he’s crazy and that he’s going to murder me; he laughs and groans, “Beware.” Sometimes I wonder if he pretends or not.

Simon never did those things. He knew I had an overactive imagination. He always protected me. So gentle—except for the beating—we never quarreled over my fears. Steph says my fears are childish—it upsets me.

So often when Steph is at work, as he is now, I think about

Mary-Lou Brockett

Brainstorms: . . .

Simon and wonder what he's doing, though I know what he's doing. Some things never change. Steph works late a lot now—Simon was never late for school and Mrs. Young liked him for that—but not for other things.

Sometimes I think about whether or not I ever enter into Simon's fantasy world—if he still remembers me or not. I do miss him so—if only I hadn't run away when I did—things might have lasted a little longer.

And if only we hadn't placed that final worm in Mrs. Young's lunch—but that couldn't be helped. It had to be done, just like the puppies and the knocking on the kitchen door.

Sometimes when I see a worm after the rain, I just want to pick it up and drop it in the strawberries.

No, not without Simon. Besides, it's his turn to get the worms. I did it last week.

Sometimes when I think of worms and such, Steph comes home and wakes me from what he calls, "That trance which we're going to have to see a doctor about very soon. A psychiatrist you know." And he asks me where I've been and I say I don't know, but I know and you know, too, don't you Mrs. Young?

I've been in the fields watching Simon pick worms and soon Steph will be home again, but this time I've left instructions to be placed into the institution with you and Simon and the worms and—is today Friday? No—then there aren't any worms yet, but the television is getting louder and there's books to be read and recess is very soon.

Do keep a look out, Steph, for a little white kitten with an orange tiger patch, and don't let Schnyder pull her tail.

I'm sorry I'm late for school, Mrs. Young. I know it is bad of me and yes, I'm reading my book. May I sit down now?

And Simon, did you bring the worms? Yes, it's not Friday yet, but I thought you'd bring them early. I can't wait to hear her scream—I hope it eats into her apple this time. I want to hear her scream—she'll scream again and again and again and again.

Peggy Hendershot

DREAM DANCE

In gold gown
I dance
to Swan Lake
inside a ruby
tinged cloud
Orange pekoe
aromas spiral
from gold samovars
on jade tables
The ancient gypsies
in opalescent robes
their malachite
earrings ringing
in the wind
surround me
As my husband
holds an ivory
handled cane
reaching
to earth

Peggy Hendershot

SESTINA WRITING

I nibble	at my nails
extract	my hair
in colossal	clumps
I require	an entire box
of tissues	At night
I awake	to my thundering
stomach	Hurling the words
into flame	I relish
the sestina	smoke odor

James Bezner

AN INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN BEZNER

Kevin Bezner is a freelance bookviewer, working out of the Washington, D.C. area. A graduate of Roger Williams College, in which he received a Bachelors Degree in American Culture Studies, Mr. Bezner attended graduate school at the University of Maryland. Upon receiving a Masters Degree in American Literature, he has taken residence in the Washington, D.C. area, in order to work as a book reviewer.

Among Mr. Bezner's accomplishments to date, has been to interview Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, and to be voted editor of the *Washington Book Review*, by his peers. His reviews have been published in such newspapers as the *Baltimore Sun*, and *Providence Sunday Journal*, while his interview with Norman Mailer has appeared in the *San Francisco Review of Books*.

This interview took place, unfortunately, through the mail. The questions were mailed to the subject, who returned them with his interpretation and answers. While the answers reflect the questions, I feel a spontaneous person to person, question and answer session, would have resulted in more interesting details. Unfortunately, it was not possible due to scheduling problems.

- Q. What is the purpose of a book reviewer? Is it a more individual, or a more people conscious job?
- A. I imagine that each book reviewer has his or her own definition of what a book reviewer is and what one does as a book reviewer. For me, it combines elements that are both individual and people oriented. By individual, I mean that I sit down at my typewriter and write my feelings about a book I have just finished reading. It is highly personal because I say how I feel, and write about what appeals to me. On the other hand, book reviewing is also people oriented. I think of myself almost as a water tester. I will feel out a book and tell other readers how it is before they take the plunge into reading. Someone will read my review and figure out whether they want to read the book.

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Now it does not matter whether a book review praises or criticizes the book. I really do not think people pay attention to whether it is a good review or a bad review because the tone of the reviewer is quite important. A reader will look at a bad review, for example, and might take an immediate dislike to the reviewer, might think that the criticism is unwarranted. The reverse might also be true. In any case, it is important that the reviewer try to capture some of the essence of a book so that a reader can make up his or her own mind about the book. I know that every time I read a book that I am not going to be objective. The concerns of the book might not appeal to me, and the writer's style might not appeal to me. It is my job to say that, but it is also my job to give enough of a picture of the book so that a reader can decide for himself or herself whether they want to read it. I do not want to impose my prejudices on someone else. A book review is not a soap box.

I also think that a good reviewer owes it to the writer to give the book a fair review. You see, the book reviewer also has the curious function of speaking to the author, since authors read reviews. Recently a friend of mine told me about a poet who was so devastated by bad reviews of his first book of poems that he pretty much gave up writing. I would never want to do that to a writer. I think a book reviewer must also act as somewhat of a guide for a writer, so that the writer can try to produce the best work he is capable of doing.

Q. When reviewing a book, what exactly do you look for?

A. I look for characterization. I like books that have real people doing real things. I want to get a sense of how people live their lives. If a book can make me get a feel for the character's life—then I am happy with the book. I also like a good story line. I like a book that will take me from one place to another by building small pieces of detail that ac-

Bezner Interview

cumulate to give one a sense of the whole world that the writer is trying to create within the confines of his particular book. Writers like Richard Yates and Tim O'Brien speak to my literary sensibilities because they give one a good idea of what their characters are doing with themselves, but also tell a story. They spin tales. That is very important to me.

Q. How do you go about choosing which book you wish to review?

A. I don't always choose a book to review. Most of the time the book editors I write for send me a book because they think it has material that I can handle. A good book editor tries to match books up with his reviewers. He tries to give a reviewer a book that will keep him or her interested enough to read the whole thing and write a review. Sometimes I ask for a book to review. Usually it's the novel of a writer that particularly interests me. Sometimes I look in *Publisher's Weekly* to see what is coming out, and a book by a writer I've never heard of will spark my interest. Generally when I request a book it's for a first novel by a writer who I've never heard of, a writer just starting out. I understand that most reviewers don't like doing first novels. I'd choose a first novel any day. I want to be a reviewer who grows up with a writer. It's been pleasurable for me, for example, to have read Tim O'Brien's first book, *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, when it first came out. I was thrilled when he won the National Book Award. Or George V. Higgins. I read *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* when it first came out, and have been reading Higgins ever since. I feel as if I've grown up with these guys, in a literary sense. It's similar to the way Malcolm Cowley grew up with Hemingway and Fitzgerald. I think it's quite important for a book reviewer to have a sense of himself as part of a particular literary generation, because I think the times dictate how one really feels anyway. I think it is important to realize how much a part of your times you are growing up with a writer that has a par-

Bezner Interview

ticular meaning to you. It works the other way, too. It is interesting to watch a writer mature with every work he writes.

Q. You've had book reviews appear in the *Providence Sunday Journal* and the *Baltimore Sun*. An interview with Norman Mailer appeared in the *San Francisco Book Review* and one with Kurt Vonnegut in *The Washington Book Review*. How did you get those assignments?

A. With the Norman Mailer interview, I wrote to Mailer and asked him if he would do an interview with me. I had a legitimate publication to write for and when I wrote, I stated what I hoped to accomplish through the interview. Initially, I requested the interview for *The Washington Book Review*, and it was also published there—but with a few differences. Since *The Washington Book Review* is only distributed in Washington, publication in it wouldn't affect the *San Francisco Book Review*. I wanted desperately to interview Mailer. No one at the *Washington Book Review* was really interested in trying to find out how to contact Mailer, so I asked them if they wanted me to try for an interview. They said sure, since no one would refuse a Mailer interview, and I began trying to get the interview. It took me about two months, because I had to convince the publicity department at Little Brown that I wasn't just some kid trying to meet a great writer. That is pretty much the way I got the Kurt Vonnegut interview too. With the book reviews, I wrote to the respective editors. For quite some time, since about 1973 when I first read Malcolm Cowley as an undergraduate, I've wanted to review books. I didn't know if they paid or how much they paid, I just wanted to do it. After living in Washington for a year, I thought I might contact the newspapers here — the *Post* and the *Star* — and see if I could talk with the book review editors. I thought that they might be able to give me some advice on how I might get started. By that time I had written a review for *The Wash-*

Bezner Interview

ington Book Review and done the Tim O'Brien interview as well. The *Post* was very unreceptive to me. They don't have one person there who reviews each week, which I think weakens their book review, so I just had to try to talk with the editor. They didn't want to see me and just told me to keep trying. I had mailed them a sample of my writings and a cover letter explaining that I was trying to get a start, didn't expect to break in with them but would like some advice. It might have been a little idealistic on my part to think that they would be willing to help a young writer get a start. I also sent a letter to Jonathan Yardley at the *Star*. He reviews a book each week in the *Star's* book section which I read and like. He agreed to see me and spent about forty minutes with me. He gave me a lot of general advice and also told me I should contact the book editor, Stephan Hunter, at *The Baltimore Sun*, that it might be possible that he wanted reviewers for the paper. I sent my writing samples to Hunter and he later agreed to give me a chance to review books. I've been reviewing about one a month for the past five months.

Q. Being young and inexperienced, how did Mailer and Vonnegut treat you?

A. Both Mailer and Vonnegut treated me very well. It's been said before, and I think it's true, that older and more established writers feel quite fondly toward younger writers just starting out. They may think of themselves at a younger age, or just react favorably to the enthusiasm of someone whose career stands before them. Also, I was sympathetic to them. I was there to hear them talk, to ask them specific questions about their books, and not to antagonize them or criticize them or call them to task for what they had written in the past. Mailer, at the end of the interview said to me, in fact, "I knew you weren't from *The Washington Post* after five minutes. Those guys go for the jugular." And it's true. I wasn't going for the jugular. I wasn't trying to harm either

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writer or to write about their private lives. I just wanted to talk about their writing. Mailer was quite interesting. It's probably the difference between public persona and private persona. He didn't feel, I think, that he had to perform for me. Of course, he did perform once or twice. At the beginning of the interview, Mailer told me that he liked unfavorable reviews that were written well more than favorable reviews written poorly. He began to move around the room in a boxer's stance, threw a few left jabs, and said that he liked something to be up against, he liked things that he could fight intellectually. I think he was just trying to let me know that he was Norman Mailer.

Q. How and why did you choose the Washington, D.C. area to work as a freelance reviewer? Why not the New York City area?

A. I didn't really choose D.C., I just came here. I went to graduate school at the University of Maryland and had quite a few friends here. I also like the area very much. There are a good number of jobs available here, and a writer can get work pretty easily, though it may not be work the writer particularly wants. The government and many of the corporations that have offices here hire lots of editorial assistants, so one can at least be paid for writing every day. Also, there are public interest groups here that hire writers. Communications have become quite important to these people and thankfully, they're picking up liberal arts majors, those who are able to write, to work on brochures and speeches and the like. I came down here and took a job with a former professor who had left the university for a position with a corporate government relations office. I didn't enjoy the work, but I learned quite a bit about writing for different audiences. Oddly enough, I also learned to do interviews in that job, since part of my job was collecting information from "experts" on subjects that interested the corporation. I also learned to be a reporter in that job. Kurt Vonnegut

Bezner Interview

and Richard Yates used to tell writers at Iowa that corporate jobs weren't all that bad, they could at least give you money and keep you from starving. It also didn't hurt me any to be under the intense and watchful eyes of a former English professor. You'd be surprised how many English Ph.Ds are working in Washington. They're probably only second to lawyers.

I didn't go to New York because it's just too big. A friend of mine was recently told, as he wandered from advertising agency to television studio, that New York just isn't the place to get a start. I think that's true. I think one should start elsewhere and make a name in a smaller city or town, if they have their eye on the city because you can get swallowed up. There are too many qualified persons looking for work.

- Q. As a freelance book reviewer, what is the hardest problem that faces you? Is it important to establish connections?
- A. Connections are very important. By connections, I mean someone at a newspaper or magazine who will give you assignments, because getting an assignment is the hardest aspect of freelancing. As you get to know the publications that will be interested in your work—and that comes with time—you establish yourself with the editors at those publications. The other thing is money. Sometimes it's very hard to collect your pay from a magazine publication after your story has run. If you rely on paychecks and don't have money set aside, it can cause you to have some pretty lean times. Also, the money isn't really terrific. I've focused on literary journalism, as it is called, and there just isn't all that much of a market out there for my kind of work. Publications would rather pay someone with a reputation for a story or review. So getting established is very important and it takes time. One just has to realize that the time it takes to become established cannot be quantified. You never know how long it will take you to get in print and

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to finally be a regular writer for one or two publications. It means this free-lancing, sacrificing economic security—hopefully postponing that sort of security—until you establish yourself. I really don't recommend freelancing as an end all. I think it's one way to get enough bylines so that you can approach someone for a job. Or, if you are a fiction writer, aspiring novelist, to buy you time to write the works that are more important to you.

Q. You are the editor of the *Washington Book Review*. What do you expect from your writers? What do you look for in their reviews? What do you edit, and why do you edit certain passages? If the writer of the review doesn't agree with your decisions, how are they solved between the two of you?

A. I look for reviews that are well written. A lot of people think that they are going to be the next great writer down the pike, and you generally get very flash writing from such people. They think they're creative and that they're highly original. Most of these kinds of reviews read like watered-down Kurt Vonnegut. I prefer reviews that read well, are knowledgeable, interesting and straight forward. Chatty reviews or reviews that are more about the reviewer than the book being reviewed annoy me. I like to see reviews that show admiration and respect for the writer. Generally, we don't choose books to review that have no merit. Sometimes one or two will sneak in, and you hope you've assigned the book to someone whose critical judgement you can trust. Too many people think that critic means criticize. That's not true. One can praise a book and be informative at the same time. I'd like to think that the book reviewer is pointing out the good books that one can read. I hope that reviewers are promoting reading. One thing that really bothers me, though, are sentences in reviews that say, “. . . Here's the next F. Scott Fitzgerald!” or “the best book yet to come out of the Vietnam war. This one will be read forever!!!!”

Bezner Interview

That's just public relations. Respect for the writer combined with the knowledge that a book isn't perfect or necessarily great just because it is in print should shine through every review, along with a general love of reading and writing. Generally I just try to smooth out sentences. Delete the unnecessary words. If I delete a paragraph it's normally because it's repetitious. I also don't like long and extended quotes. I don't like to rewrite, and don't think it's my function to do so. If there is a problem with a review, I'll send it back to the writer and tell him my problems with it and see if he or she can rewrite it to my specifications. If they rewrite the material and I like it, I'll print it. If the writer doesn't like my suggestions but feels he or she can rewrite it in a way that might appeal to me, I'm just as satisfied as if they took all of my advice. I'm not all-knowing. Writers generally have a better feel for what they're trying to say than an editor does. One other thing is that I sometimes ask a writer to give me more material, to further develop some of their ideas in a review, that is, with a longer review.

One thing all writers should realize though, is that when you write for magazines, you are going to be edited. Sometimes there are space problems, other times reviews are too wordy. Sometimes a writer has had to put together a review hastily in order to reach deadline. One piece of advice about writing for newspapers and magazines is that you should keep it short. Get as much as you can into each work, and leave out those that are unnecessary. Write tightly contained, terse sentences. That will keep you in print.

- Q. What experiences do you require to be a book reviewer?
- A. As broad as possible. A reviewer should be an avid reader, someone who just loves to read as much as possible. But the reviewer should also be someone who knows the difference between good writing and bad writing. A good liberal arts

Bezner Interview

education would be helpful. Lacking that, or if the focus has been on sciences for example, a great amount of un-directed reading. There are really no special ingredients. Primarily it is the desire to write about books.

Q. Is it enjoyable to be a book reviewer? What would you recommend aspiring book reviewers?

A. Read as much as possible, write as much as possible and don't expect to become rich from book reviewing. I think it is enjoyable because it's part of the writing process. For someone with intentions to write a novel it lets him or her see what books are being published and forces the reader to think about why a particular book works or doesn't work. Also, you are one part of the publication process. Writers and publishers rely on book reviews as guides—although some ignore them and think every book reviewer is a moronic, frustrated novelist—while the reading public looks for reviews to help them choose what to read. It's an interesting position, because as a book reviewer, you are reaching out to everyone involved with books from reading, to writing, to publishing.

One piece of advice I have is to write for anyone you can. School newspapers are always frowned upon by students, but they can be quite helpful to you because they give you published writings to show to editors. I don't think that there's an editor around who will give you a chance to write for his or her paper without first seeing samples of your published work.

I recently interviewed Malcolm Cowley for the *Baltimore Sun*, and his feeling is that writing for local newspapers is a good experience. They'll give you assignments and probably even pay you. But write for anyone. That's a good way to learn to write and to become a writer.

David E. Scott

LIFE AND OTHER FOUR-LETTER WORDS

tire iron
 melting
 in
pool of blood
blind man writhing
 in
the street
 german shepherd bleeding
 around
 dirty white cane
 life
 his
 slowly
 secreting
marquee red lights flash. . .flash
Live Entertainment
Live Entertainment
Live Entertainment
 Live Enter tainment
Live Entertainment
 Live
 Enter
 tain
 ment
 inside imprisoned smoke
dancer
 desperate breasts
 straining against black
 silk
 leotard
siren routinely providing melody
cop
siren
dog
flies
 driver's license marked "Organ Donor"

David E. Scott

EASTER

I remember how
Mired beneath the milky bed sheets,
I searched the black labrynth
Of your blue eyes

The eyes that reigned
In cobalt sovereignty,
Over the veneer nightstand,
The strewn clothing,
And the Picasso print on the wall.

And with an anchorite's thirst
I suckled, imploringly at your breast.
And I remember a smell,
Like that of wax apples,
And I remember the taste
Of the dry, brittle, flesh
Around your nipple.

Jon Lavieri

HERE IN HELL

There is gold:
tons of it buried deep and hard to get at.

If the prospector
can dig that far he can trade it all
for one snapping second of lucidity.

He's been at it for hours, years, ages;
supported by a team of faithful cheerleaders.
But his only response is,
"G-G-Grit your t-t-teeth and k-k-kiss my ass pal."

He is tired of shovelling the slop and mire
from a convex hole to a concave heap.

So the claim goes unclaimed,
the unowned wealth lies bequeathed to worms;

and the prospector sits in hateful fear,
gripping his shotgun,

waiting for squatters.

Victor M. Depta

THE ESCAPEE

Just beyond reach
is the dying wasp on the casing.
The goldenrod's in a blush
just as the sky distracts me

and the wild, silent fires
in the maple trees;
but no alarm, no fervent
volunteers to free

with ladders one twig in flames.
Mice gypsy in the closets
yet at an open door flee
from the host, and crickets close

to the stove laconically complain
in elegies till I pass by
and then in fear refrain
from expositions on dying.

Ruth Moon Kempher

FAMOUS NAVAL HISTORY: THE STAR FLAG
(Chapter 20 of *St. Augustine, Sunday*)

Beth Henry, still known most often as Het, absolutely knew that her father was the bravest and would turn out to be the most famous Chaplain in all of World War II. He was certainly the tallest, handsomest and bravest already. The rest would somehow fall into place.

That all of this becoming famous wouldn't be easy, she was beginning to know. In the first place, he couldn't get famous at home. He had to go. That, for starters was hard. But then she and her mother were able to follow him to Virginia, where he clearly led his class—and looked the part, sharp in his officer's whites—learning how a famous hero-Chaplain behaves in war. But now orders had come again. The inevitable packing and sorting had begun. And she was moving, too.

"You'll like Trenton," her father said. "You'll have sidewalks there, at Nanny Tower's. Not just old sand."

"I'll hate it." At eight-going-on-nine, she could be totally sure of a great deal, including how it would be at her grandmother's. "It will smell."

Her father tried another tack. "My new ship's named for Thomas Jefferson, you know? You'll have to study hard so you can tell me all about him, that is—you can write to me, from Trenton."

"No."

"Don't push her, Les," her mother said. Her dark eyes were shadowed, sorrowful. "It's not as though you were leaving for some two-week sabbatical, you know."

Les Henry shook his head. He had standards; they should reflect well in his only child. "You're not being very brave, Beth, you know."

Her bottom lip pushed out. "I don't feel like being brave." That was the wrong attitude for a hero's child, she knew. It was still the truth.

Ruth Moon Kempher

The Star Flag

Before the family went its separate ways, Het promised that at least she'd try to be the bravest she could be. That was the best—still sticking to the truth—that she could do. Her father went off to Norfolk and his ship, and she went to Trenton with her mother, to Nanny Tower's newly-purchased home.

The very first night at Nanny Tower's, she wished she'd never promised anything. She'd promised only to try, but that was bad, obviously a lie. She wasn't going to try, at all. It ought to be easy to try. She had a room of her own at Nanny Tower's, a newly-golden-wheat-patterned-papered room that smelled of furniture polish, mahogany, and the dusty furze of thick grey carpeting. Propped in the pillows, looking out of place or even scared in the elegant room, was her own beloved Panda Bear, his stomach skinnier than ever before. He has a right to be scared, Het remembered. Remember when Nanny Tower visited us, and he got thrown out? Had to be hauled out from the trash can, and put to bed in shock? No wonder he's scared—Nanny Tower's perfume, Elizabeth Arden's Blue Grass, seems everywhere . . .

"I told Daddy it would smell," she said, trembling, to the Bear. "You see, it does."

Nanny Tower came in, looking around the room that she had chosen and decorated especially for Het, smiling a thin, contented smile. "Oh, I dreamed of seeing you here, dear, and looked forward so to tucking you in every night. Isn't this the loveliest room you've ever had?"

It probably was the loveliest room, ever, so far, but Het was loyal still to all the other rooms of the past. She stuck out her lip and said, "Maybe," uncommittingly. She was remembering something her father had said, before his departure, about Nanny Tower and this house. "It must be nice to be able to go out and buy a house big enough to be a hotel in the middle of a war. Not everybody can do that." And her mother had snapped back, "She did it mostly because she was thinking of me and Beth. What's so awful about that?"

Some sense of awfulness was there with Het. It was awful that Nanny Tower should be tucking her into bed, with poor

scared Panda Bear cringing too.

Nanny Tower tried to sooth her. "In a few weeks, school will start, and you can invite all your little friends to come . . ."

Tears seeped into Het's eyes. She turned her head, pretending to be wiping the sandman away. Nanny Tower pursed her lips, perturbed. This was not at all the warm Homecoming of the Child that she had pictured for herself. Just a thin, scrawny face, weeping, turned away. "Sleep tight," she said, with false gaiety. "In the morning, everything will be so beautiful."

Sleep? Het shuddered. The sheets around her were slick percale, chilly, and because she'd been tucked in so tightly, it was like being back on the operating table for tonsils again. Another new school. Other little friends. Dear God. She could feel goosebumps rising on her arms, and even down her legs.

But then Della, her mother, came in, and Het felt better right away. Della had on her old blue flannel robe that made her look like Jesus's mother, Mary. It looked more like home. But she looked lonesome, too, even though she tried to smile. "What's going on in here? Am I missing anything?"

Nanny Tower scowled, her intended scene evidently going from bad to worse. But she kept her disappointment under control. "Beth's about to say her prayers, aren't you, dear?"

Het bit her lips. "Yes, ma'm." She didn't want to do it with Nanny Tower right there, but after all it was mainly God who heard. She squinched her eyes tight shut, keeping back the tears, and dashed through her "Now I lay me," skipping over the bad part about dying before you wake, and slowing down finally, seriously, when she came to the "God bless . . . Bless Daddy and Mommy and Gramma and Grampa Henry and the girls on the Farm, and Nanny Tower and all the crew of the Thomas Jefferson, amen."

"My goodness," said Nanny right on top of Het's "amen." "That's not a very nice prayer. It's not polite, at all." She had trapped Het in the act of favoritism, of course. Het had long ago worked out the order of her blessings, very carefully. Nanny Tower didn't like the order, at all. "All the ladies should come

Ruth Moon Kempher

The Star Flag

first," she said. "You should pray bless Mommy and Nanny Tower and Gramma Henry, and then Daddy, because . . ."

"No." Het was adamant.

Deila tried to calm the storm. "Nanny's just teasing you, Dolly." Her long, slim fingers fluttered toward the bedside lamp, to switch off the light. "You mustn't take everything so seriously. You'll make yourself sick." The warning was either for Het or Nanny Tower, Het couldn't be sure. "Sleep tight, wake up bright . . . Okay?" In the sudden darkness, she leaned down and kissed the child.

Going out, Nanny Tower slammed the door.

In the dark, Het redid her prayer, defiantly. "God bless DADDY and GRAMPA and all my Uncles and all the crew of the Thomas Jefferson, and Gramma HENRY and the milkman and the mailman and all the farmers in the world and the Doctors, and Bob Hogan and Glen Miller and people in airplanes, and all the telephone people and Tom Mix and cows and horses, and Mommy of course, I forgot Mommy, but that's ALL." She flopped over onto Panda Bear. The sheets were warming up. "Amen."

Het's conscience wouldn't let her be quite that mean. Just before she fell asleep, she relented. "And Nanny Tower, too, a little bit."

The next day, for no clearly apparent reason, Nanny Tower offered young Beth a dollar for anything she wanted to buy. Het took it happily, knowing there was one thing she really did want to have, especially now. With the dollar safely tucked in her hand, she jiggled up and down, elated. "When can we go to town?"

"Just as soon as you can put your coat on, and Otis brings the Buick around." Nanny Tower smiled benignly. "Look how excited she is," she beamed at Della. "She must take after you. Loves to spend!"

"Chocolate chunks," Della guessed. "We haven't had chocolate chunks in weeks."

Nanny Tower pursed her lips. She always liked to know Het better than her own mother did. "Dolly socks," Nanny Tower guessed. "Francine looks like she could use some nice, new

Ruth Moon Kempber

The Star Flag

socks." Het, busily putting on her coat, heard their guessing and knew: they were both wrong.

Otis was a stocky man, with smooth brown skin and wiry hair that was almost white. He had worked for Nanny Tower for years, but now there was gas rationing, and the Government didn't seem to care that it took a great deal of gas to run a Buick, so he was more of a handy man now, than chauffeur. His uniform had been put away for the duration. When he opened the car door for them, Het noticed that he looked somewhat bigger and healthier, wearing his own clothes instead of the uniform.

"I could drive," Della offered.

"Don't be silly, Jennifer," Nanny Tower said. "This war will be over someday. We don't want Otis forgetting all he knows."

Het scrunched back deep in the corner of the wooly-smelling back seat, thinking how funny it was that everybody every place else called her mother Della, but Nanny Tower and Nanny Tower's Trenton friends all called her by her middle name, Jennifer. It was a silly thing, but another point to fix on that made Trenton seem . . . not unfriendly, exactly, but out of kilter, somehow.

What they call you, Het knew, makes a difference. At that first awful school, the children had called her Hen-er-y-Pen-er-y, and that had not been nice at all. They did not like her, and that name had made it clear.

Riverside Avenue, with the canal on one side, slipped by, house by house, and she kept thinking about names. What you call a person shows what you think of them, or what relation they are to you. Gramma Henry was Gramma to Het, but Mother, to Daddy, and Mother Henry to Della, Jennifer. But she must have a first name of her own. Whatever it was, Het didn't know. That somehow made her sad. Gramma Henry, up on the Farm

Closer to town, the houses were pushed together. At the corners now, there were grocery stores; a boy ran out of one, slamming the screendoor, waving a bag of bread by the tail of the bag. Het hardly noticed. Her mother called Nanny Tower "Mater" now and then, and they talked a lot about "Pater" who had died a long time ago, in Florida, soon after Het was born.

There was no more time to ponder names. The business part of town sprung up, store by store, and there was the wonderful 5 & 10, and like a miracle, there was a parking place right in front. Het could go in alone, they decided, because they could sit right there and look in the window to be sure she wasn't abducted, or even approached in an overly-friendly way. "Otis will stand right by the car, if you need help," they told her. Otis was a hero, too, of course, Het remembered. Otis had given her Panda Bear long, long Christmases ago.

It was the first time she had ever been allowed to shop alone. And shopping is not as easy as it looks, with a whole dollar of one's own. First of all, right by the door was a candy counter that reeked and positively shouted chocolate smell. You could swim in the chocolate odor there; it would keep an elephant afloat. Het skirted that, and headed for the back of the store. There was a whole counter heaped with clothes for dolls. Everything came in little squares, covered with shiny cellophane, marvelous to feel. Slick. Neat. And they did have socks in Francine's size. Het checked to see. But she knew what she wanted most in the world, after all, and the 5 & 10 was the place to find it, she was sure.

Up at the farm, Gramma Henry had a star flag in her window, right by the front door, with three blue stars to show that she had three sons fighting in the war. One was for Het's father, of course, but you couldn't tell which star was his, and which were the uncles'. It was Het's conviction that the most famous Chaplain in the war needed to have a star flag with one star, all his own.

The choice was harder than she'd expected. All the one-star flags looked much alike, and there were hundreds of them stacked on the counter. She wanted something special, after all. Finally, there it was, in her hand, a star distinguished by two crooked points so that it looked bolder, jauntier than the others. It danced. That was the one she wanted, couldn't wait to pay for, dug out of its bag wildly, back at the car.

Della Jennifer giggled, when she saw Het's pride. But Nanny Tower sat herself upright, firmly in the seat. "How nice," she smiled weakly, gesturing to Otis to drive back home. "You can

Ruth Moon Kempher

The Star Flag

hang it in your bedroom window, and . . . ”

“Oh no! It goes in the front room, so everyone can see!”

“Wait ‘til we get home,” Della said, trying not to laugh. “We can talk about it better, there.”

It seemed to take forever to get home. But once they were out of the car, and in the wide white front door, Het ran to the tall strip of window by the door and yanked the opaque curtain back. “Here! It goes here!” She hung the little flag temporarily from one finger, jamming the thin gold string down on the narrow window frame, to show. “The whole world can see it here!”

Nanny Tower sternly said, “That’s nice, I’m sure. But no.”

Het backed off. Her heart felt like it was leaking down to her shoes. “No?”

“No.” Nanny Tower looked stern; the same stern look she sometimes put on when Lowell Thomas was telling about that man Roosevelt. Something scoundrelly going on. She was taking an Official Stand. “We did say that while you were here, there would be Rules.”

“That’s right, Het,” said her mother. “No books or toys downstairs. We agreed, remember?”

“A flag is not a toy,” said Het, carefully. She really did not want to cry. It was part of being brave, and she had promised. “A flag is for grownups, too.”

“Het,” her mother began, and “Beth,” said Nanny Tower, and the words began to spill. The flag would be a breach in the decorum of the very properly trim living room. If it were allowed to hang there, Mercy knew what else would follow. “Mater,” said Della, cautiously, “We also knew some adjustments would have to be made. There would be some things . . .” Nanny Tower scowled, her mind more set than ever. “Now, Jennifer . . .” She was a person used to telling the Dean at the Cathedral in just that tone that pink gladiolas on the altar would not do. There, the pink gladiolas would have to go. But here, Het would not budge.

Het cried; Het sobbed. “We’d better go into the pantry,” Della said, warningly. “Mater, you don’t want her being sick all

over your nice Aubusson rugs.” Nanny Tower hesitated, glaring at young Beth, the interloper in her home, the present Enemy. “I don’t like being in the middle like this,” said Della, as the weeping Het dug her head into her mother’s stomach, sobbing. “Couldn’t somebody else arbitrate?”

Otis was called in to officiate. Nanny Tower knew he was one of Het’s favorite people, and she didn’t hesitate to try to use him now. “Otis,” she prompted. “Don’t you think it would be splendid if Miss Beth had her little flag all to herself, upstairs in her lovely room?”

Het choked, working up to really being sick. But she should have had more faith. Wasn’t Otis a hero? Wasn’t it Otis who had given her Panda Bear?

Otis was true blue. Taking his little tack hammer, he drove a nail, boing, spang into the front window’s framework, before he bothered to answer his employer. “Most folks hang ‘em right by the door, Miz Tower.”

Het stopped crying right in the middle of a sob. The breath came out—a long, smiling sigh. Good old Otis. She should have known.

Nanny Tower was right, of course. The little flag clashed with the rest of the impeccable room. It would never hang straight no matter how you tweaked it. Het loved it. She never left the house without saying “Good-bye, star, I’ll be back soon,” and never came back without a “Hello, star,” passing by. Good old Otis. Nanny Tower would make his life miserable for a while.

Thinking of that, realizing that Nanny Tower might remember the connection between Panda Bear and Otis, soon after the flag was first hung, Het went upstairs to her room, and picked up Panda Bear from his comfortable lounging place on her bed. Very gently, she tucked him away in the bureau drawer where there was a bed of underwear. “You have to go away on a sabbatical a while,” she told Panda, not quite sure what the word meant, but recalling it from somewhere. “It’s something like going away to war.”

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