

10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES



Issue # 16
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In Memoriam Rob Dinsmoor



Rob Dinsmoor has had dozens of short stories and flash fiction pieces published in literary magazines, and two of his collections of short fiction, *Toxic Cookout* and *You'll Never See It Coming*, were recently published by Big Table Publishing.

The above is the picture and bio that Rob submitted to Issue 14 of 10 By 10 Flash Fiction Stories. Rob was a kind, gentle person who wrote non fiction about a comedy group of which he was part and about his experiences writing scripts for Nickelodeon. His dog Jack died on Christmas Eve and following two severe illnesses, Rob died peacefully. He was a member of several groups, including the O'Hara's Prose Writers. He will be sincerely missed by all who knew his warmth and humor.

Welcome to Issue #16 of *10 By10 Flash Fiction Stories*. This issue has several new authors and the ever popular Phil Temples whose science fiction will tickle your sensibilities.

The thing to remember if you are submitting to this publication is to follow the guidelines: Stories can be 200 to 500 words and not have been previously published, which I define as follows: Not previously published means in print, online, website, social media which includes Facebook, and Facebook Groups, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), etc., blogs or shared with any group either online or in print. It also means your story cannot have appeared in a magazine, journal, book or anthology prior to this journal.. If you have simultaneously submitted to other magazines, please notify them of the acceptance and withdraw your submission from them.

You should also provide a head and shoulders jpeg photo. Finally, include a bio of any length. Each of these three elements should be a separate attachment within one email when submitting to this publication. If these simple directions are not followed the submission will be deleted. Whether or not you have been in 10 By 10 before, fresh stories are always welcome.

I look forward to personally reading your work!



Sincerely,

Zui A. Sesling

Editor



Liz deBeer, a language arts teacher who resides in New Jersey, divides her time among many hobbies, including observing nature and experimenting with different writing genres. Liz has been published in newspapers, teaching journals and magazines and is currently writing YA novels with Project Write Now's book inc., a writing cooperative. Her latest flash has been published in *Spillwords Press* and *Blue Bird Word*. Liz's website is www.lizdebeerwriter.com.

Tea Dregs

"Town council already voted," snaps a man wearing a florescent yellow high-visibility hard hat. "She's comin' down."

Pushing back silver wisps of hair swaying across her forehead, Aspen asks, "But why?"

"Bark's peeling off," the man says, adjusting his black jeans. "Sign of an unhealthy tree."

"Or stress," she retorts, rubbing her wrinkled hands together

"Consider it done, Ma'am."

"Will you grind the stump?"

"No grinder ordered," the man replies, revving an electric saw. "Please step back!"

As the saw's angry teeth emit a growl, he calls out, "Goin' in for a forty-five degree cut."

Aspen trudges away, but the sounds travel with her: the buzzing noise, then the cracking, the rustling, the thud.

The next morning, she returns clutching a mason jar of steaming green tea. Circling the tree, she hums softly before lowering herself to the fresh tree stump. She brushes sawdust into her palm and releases it above her head, letting it dance down over her and the concentric rings: "Bless your soul," Aspen whispers as she dumps green tea residue around the stump's perimeter.

Day after day, she returns to sip her tea. Then, with gnarled fingers, she works the tea dregs into the ground to release tannic acid and magic.

Early winter winds whip away the sawdust and the pungent fresh-cut scent. When snow covers the stump, Aspen stays home, drinking tea alone, waiting like a hibernating wood frog. But when white snow drops emerge, she returns to drink her tea and remember. She hums while she strokes tiny green sprouts emerging from the tree's roots. Then she steps up on the stump, stretching arms overhead and toes downward.

"Pop, pop, pop!"

With a "snap!" green buds emerge from her ears, fingers, and elbows. "Crack!" Hairy roots descend downward. "Whish, whish, whish," her hair transforms into thin branches, waving in the wind. She opens her mouth, releasing a "Crrrrr—aaaaccckkk!"

A black and white chickadee with a yellow hat hops over, turning its head side to side, in wonder. Pecking at the bark, it releases its own song: "Chickadee-dee-dee, Chickadee-dee-dee!" Then the small bird wiggles itself inside the opening that was once the weathered woman's mouth, making itself a home in the warm crevice.



David Henson and his wife have lived in Brussels and Hong Kong and now reside in Illinois. His work has been nominated for four Pushcart Prizes, Best of the Net and two Best Small Fictions and has appeared in various journals including *10 By 10 Flash*, *Literally Stories*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Gone Lawn* and *Moonpark Review*. His website is <http://writings217.wordpress.com>. His Twitter is @annalou8.

Defiant

After our daughter, Betty, leaves with our grandson, Lois and I linger at the kitchen table, drinking lemonade and watching Henry, the young, red-haired boy across the street wrestle with his kite in gusting wind. The kite appears to be winning. When the lemonade puckers my lips, Lois swirls her finger in my drink to sweeten it. The day shimmers with playfulness.

“Someone should show him how to do it,” Lois says. She sips her drink, the slice of lemon trembling on the liquid’s surface. “When I was young, I could fly a kite like nobody’s business.”

That doesn’t surprise me. My wife always beat me at tennis, but I enjoyed the love. She taught me to dive into the depths and led us to the land of orange throwers. She pushed us to fall from the sky to mark silver. I’m anxious to see what she unveils for gold.

“I remember long ago with my grandpa,” she says. “He was helping me assemble a kite, and I noticed how his hands were wrinkled and liver-spotted.” Lois lifts her own hand and stares at it. “Some mornings I can’t believe it’s my

hand that comes out of the sleeve.” She sighs. “Sometimes I’d like to flip the bird to Father Time.”

I step behind my wife and press down gently on her shoulders.

“What are you doing, Michael?”

“If you’re refusing time, I figure you might refuse gravity, too.” I kiss the top of her head. “I don’t want you floating away.” She laughs, and we clink our glasses together.

The kite crashes again across the street. Henry continues trying to get it airborne. “That’s one determined kid,” I say.

Lois heads for the door.

“Where are you going?”

My wife smiles but doesn’t say anything.

I go to refrigerator and refill my drink. When Lois doesn’t return after a few minutes, I cross the street and ask Henry if he’s seen her. He *whoops* as Lois, holding the string, jogs around from the back, the kite dancing higher.

I grab my phone, go through the steps my daughter showed me, then call her. “Betty, check the video I just sent you.”

“What is it, Dad?”

“Your mother defying gravity.”



A. Molotkov is an immigrant writer. His poetry collections are *The Catalog of Broken Things*, *Application of Shadows*, *Synonyms for Silence* and *Future Symptoms*. His novel *A Slight Curve* is forthcoming from Running Wild Books; he co-edits *The Inflectionist Review*. His collection of ten short stories, *Interventions in Blood*, is part of Hawaii Review Issue 91. Please visit him at AMolotkov.com

Claustrophobia

"We always go home, all of us." I leave you at one of the street corners. The gap between the Earth and the sky remains, otherwise I would have been crushed. I head home; the street reads my verdict. I know where my home is. It will embrace me. One day it may suffocate me, but that's part of the deal we both understand.

I've walked a while. I begin to doubt that my home is where I think it is. Too easy. I have no evidence to assert my claim. Maybe I'm headed in the wrong direction? I'll enter any building. I'll knock on any door. Any door may be installed specifically for my sake, may open for me. I'll see the face I know from dreams – your face.

I remember knowing where my home was – but did I, really? Both sides of the street are identical. I close my eyes. If the buildings take advantage of my temporary blindness to play leapfrog, I'll never know. The residents won't notice either. Spat out the doors in the morning, they are forbidden thoughts of their own until their jobs spew them out at night. The residents can't tell themselves from

others. They will open identical doors and enter the same apartments as before, finding their favorite slippers in the same corner.

A while ago I thought I'd lost my way home. Now, it's getting clearer. There *is* no way home. I've never believed in such a way, really. And if so, could my home itself exist? The street bends before me, a wriggling earthworm shaking its stone skeleton.

We don't need a building for this. Immersed in a commitment that has become inevitable, I enter. Your face meets me at the door, deformed by crooked mirrors: red, blue and green lights in a fluid mask. No bodies, only glimpses – merging, breaking into pieces. We float in this. The goal is clear: to find, to feel each other in this cacophony of symbols. But how, if it's impossible to tell an object from its shadow and from the shadow's shadow? Where do I end? Where do you begin?

None of this is true, of course. I'm in my room. I haven't left in quite some time. The walls offer no remedy. My only way out of this is through the door. The door is a tunnel. I dive under its vault – it collapses, trapping me in.

How will you get through to me now, my only friend?



Gloria Mindock is editor of Červená Barva Press. She is an award-winning author of six poetry collections, three chapbooks and two translations into Romanian and Serbian. Her poems have been published and translated into eleven languages and her recent book, *Grief Touched the Sky at Night* (Glass Lyre Press, 2023), won the International Impact Award, the Speak-up Talk Radio International Firebird Award and the Independent Press Award. www.gloriamindock.com

Monster

This path is walked on by many, myself included. It is a shortcut to get home for me. Sometimes I am alone on this path with beautiful trees, plants, a full-fledged woods. I take the route before 5:00PM. It was 4:45PM and I decided to take the shortcut. It would be ok. A white van was parked off the trail almost hidden by the trees.

Later, in the news, there was a report of a murder on the path at 5:00PM. The whole town was nervous and on guard. At the end of the week, they found another body of a girl north of town. This did not help matters. Everyone was freaking out.

One day, while walking home, a man jumped out of the bushes. He said, “What do you think I’m going to do, murder you? I ran. No one was outside in their yards to ask for help. I cut through a field to get to my house and fell, getting

grass stains on my pants. Worried that he would catch up to me, I got up and continued running as fast as I could.

Once home, I locked the door to keep the monster out. The murders were never solved. I moved away knowing it could have been me.



Jon Hunter lives in Tooting, south London. After a career in music and education, he's been writing micro, flash and short stories for the past four years. Pieces have been published in *Short Magazine*, *Fictionette*, *Centifictionist* and by *Blink Ink* among others.

Ellie

Ellie knots her legs together beneath her chair. She drags the peeler against a potato, curls of speckled skin drop onto newspaper - she prides herself on length of peel and minimal waste, honouring her late mother in this small way.

A football strikes the kitchen window, a punch that takes her breath, the sting of her brother's laughter. Working faster, hacking now, clumps of peel hit the floor, she doesn't really care.

Ellie stores resentment like bile - her chores are always indoor, her brothers' are outdoor, usually unfinished. Her father and brothers, run around laughing, the mower abandoned to the side of the lawn, an unwilling spectator.

At her grandparent's home in Derbyshire, Ellie has the run of the countryside, she skins knees climbing trees, cuts feet paddling in streams, grandmother patches her up, feeds her grandfather's sweetly sinister bonfire toffee. She plays Scrabble, teaming with her grandmother, laying tiles precisely, adding the scores, bathing in attention.

There'd be a warm welcome, she's sure.

Ellie checks the map, wonders how long it would take to cycle, ‘if I left now, just walked out’. She’s saved pocket money, made lists of what to take. She rehearses words to tell her father, sorting them into sentences, at times blunt like stone, other times, reasoned, polished like glass.

Two cyclists stop at the road’s end. Ellie marches over, squinting up at their helmeted faces.

“Hello. Where have you been?” She asks bluntly.

“The Cotswolds” says the one in dayglo orange.

“How long would it take you to cycle to Derbyshire?”

“Twelve hours at least.”

Ellie nods like that’s what she’d have reckoned. Obstacles spill into her plan, rain, hills, punctures. She wonders if she’ll need dayglo gear.

Tinny announcements of place names and platform numbers reverberate as Ellie waits on a station bench, a small backpack on her lap, plan B underway. Trains roar past trailing diesel fumes that remind her of ice cream vans, a smell that promises a ninety-nine.

A smartly dressed boy, her own age, walks over. It’s Charlie Spencer from Ellie’s class.

“Hi Ellie.”

“Hi Charlie, what are you doing here?”

“I’m collecting train numbers.”

“What?”

“Train numbers, I spot them and write them down. See?”

Charlie holds up a spiralbound notebook filled with spidery numbers and letters.

“Come. I’ll show you if you like.”

At the platform end, Charlie shows how to find the number of an approaching train. He flicks through a grubby paperback, to relay facts about the train. Ellie falls into the easy rhythm of it, sitting on her backpack, calling out numbers. She borrows Charlie’s binoculars to inspect engines in the sidings. In between trains, they talk about school, comics, and television.

“Mum’s buying pizza for lunch, do you want to come?”

Charlie waits knotting his fingers together.

Ellie hesitates, remembering plan B, the train to Gloucester, the connection to Derby. She looks at Charlie’s mum, reading the paper – her face warm, gentle, open – like mums are supposed to be.

“Yes please.”

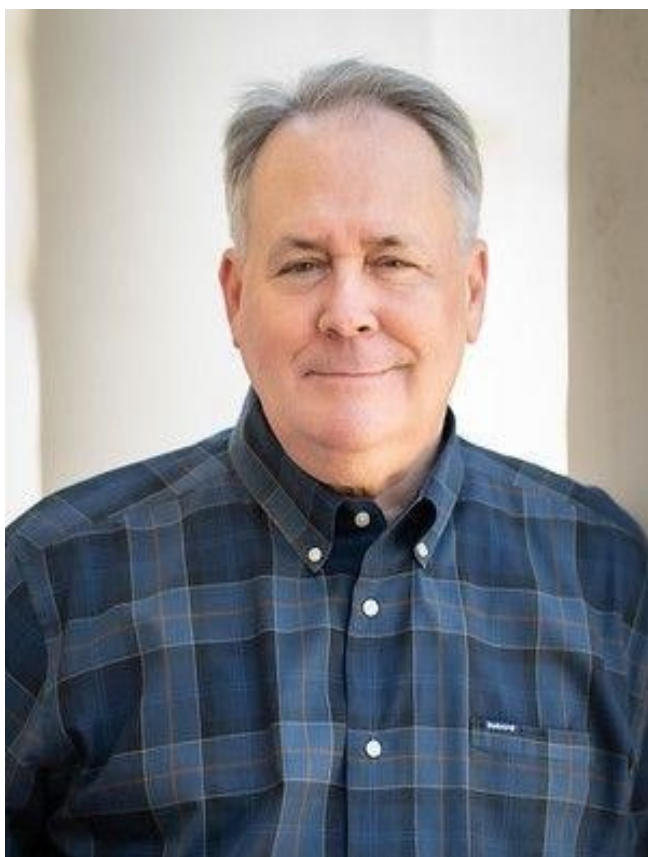


Marie Cloutier (she/her) is a writer and poet. Her work has been published in *Scribes *micro* fiction*, *Bare Back Literary* and elsewhere. She is at work on a memoir. Connect with her on her website, www.mariecloutier.com.

Date Night

Lev stares at the phone on his office desk as light from the sun setting on the quad outside brightens his gray hair to white. He checks his watch. He pictures Amy waiting for him on the other end of the line, in her dorm. He wonders what she's wearing. He hopes she isn't off with her friends, off with someone else again. He purses his lips and forces a breath out through his nose. He calls. It goes to voicemail. "Dammit," he says, kicking the desk's leg. In another minute his phone rings and he jumps. His wife asks when he'll be home. His eyes fall on a stack of papers. "My students turned in essays today. I need an hour or two." "Fine," she says, "your dinner will be in the refrigerator." He hangs up. His nostrils flare. A knock and the door opens. Lev bangs his thighs on the drawer as he stands and winces. The janitor drags a large barrel with one hand, nods, and grabs Lev's trash with the other. The janitor nods again and leaves. Lev paces near the window, the light fading, still smarting from the collision. He checks his watch. He slumps into his chair, picturing a cold stew at home. He calls again. She picks up. He leans forward. "Hi," he says. He cradles the phone so his pale lips touch the receiver,

open. He takes off his glasses as she talks and lets them rest on the essays. He rubs his eyes. He listens, smiling, listening, as his breathing slows and his eyes go blurry.



Niles Reddick is author of a novel, three collections, and a novella. His work has been featured in over thirty collections and five hundred publications including *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Muleskinner*, *New Reader*, *Cheap Pop*, *Citron Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Nunum*, and *Vestal Review*. He is a five-time Pushcart, a two time Best Micro nominee, and a two time Best of the Net nominee. His newest flash collection is *Who's Going to Pray for Me Now?* and his novella is *Forgiven*.

Porch Shopping

I wondered why the package of vitamins I'd ordered in bulk from the infomercial weren't on the porch. I ordered in bulk because it was cheaper, and they told me UPS would deliver by the end of the week. There was no hold up in delivery since the holidays were over, and brown trucks were back to the normal speed limit in the neighborhood.

I could have missed them when I was sitting on the back porch, so I reviewed the recording of my camera at the front door. The UPS guy delivered to the porch and placed it on the welcome mat, and then a hooptie pulled to the curb. Fellow in a ski mask just as cool as he could be snapped up my package like an all-star quarterback and sprinted back to his old Crown Vic, a hubcap

missing on the back left wheel. He drove down the street, his head swinging left and right shopping other porches for packages.

The 911 operator didn't consider my report an emergency given the wrecks, domestic violence cases, and robberies and said police would be along by and by. I wondered if the porch shopper would throw away the box full of fish oil, fruit gummy multi vitamins, and chewable vitamin C tablets or give them to what I assumed would be his churchy grandma who wouldn't believe he found vitamins.



Margaret Sefton's work has appeared in *Best New Writing*, *The Dos Passos Review*, *The Journal of Radical Wonder*, *Atticus Review*, and other literary journals. She received her MFA from Seattle Pacific University and lives in Central Florida.

The Wooden Man

In the forest, the wooden man serves cinnamon tea at a broken piano. We speak of old dreams, memories, things we will never do while the year's remaining leaves susurrate in the breeze. No airs are involved in our meetings, and I am never considered late. His carved wooden hair is charming, like an acorn cap, and I feel less self-conscious about my wild-as-straw pate. Hugging when we say goodbye is not warm or soft, but then again, it is not confusing or uncomfortable. We keep it rote, simple, a matter of fact. I suffer no separation anxiety. I know where to find him in the future.

One day, there is another woman with him, and I hide behind a tree to watch. They do the same thing as we do, and he treats her just the same. I check my heart for jealousy, but there is nothing. I close my eyes and lean against the tree. I allow my face to absorb the sun on a cool November day. Soon I may not come back here, I think. I guess I am relieved not to feel upset, but I want him to burn for me in a way that threatens his wooden existence. Still, when I think of how long one could be with a wooden man--forever--this has its own comfort.



Scott MacLeod is a father of two who writes in Central Florida. His work has appeared in Punk Noir, Every Day Fiction, Bristol Noir, Coffin Bell, Frontier Tales, The Yard: Crime Blog, Short-story.me and Gumshoe Review, with more forthcoming. He can be found at <http://www.facebook.com/scott.Macleod.334>

Butterfly Stings

It had been part of Sir Petrick's legend forever. For so long that no one could remember its genesis. Or legitimacy. Was it uttered by a gnarled soothsayer? Or a fortune cookie? In any event it had become inseparable from him. "Only a monarch can kill me." His calling card. And as the years passed, regardless of its origin, it proved true. He had been impossible to kill.

Now as taglines go, Sir Petrick's was perhaps trite but quite honestly if you held it up to the sun it was impressive indeed. As a practical matter it amounted to a boast of total invincibility since, after all, heads of state typically do not traipse around dropping bodies; wet work generally is outsourced. So to say only a king could kill you meant as a practical matter you were claiming to be bulletproof, er, arrowproof.

A genuine threat, however, arose in the person of King Archibald. He liked to be called "Archi." Churchill in the war room and all five tools on the battlefield, where he did not fear to roam. Teamed with his son Archibald II, who answered to "Baldi", they mowed down everything in their path. It seemed that path soon would include Sir Petrick, as his peacocking had grown tiresome to the crown.

Especially if Petrick continued on his current path. For while ruler and son mayhemed about, Petrick was playing on even more dangerous ground. He was dallying with Archi's wife. This seemed destined to cause an eventual regal showdown that would put the knight's apparent invulnerability to the test.

Lady Fern was no mere consort but rather the king's equal in wisdom and valor, if mostly without opportunity to exercise them. She charmed Petrick in their few public meetings.

To such an extent that once Archi and the prince were away on campaign, he visited the palace and sought to return the favor. He was surprised to be granted a private audience and relaxed on the shared divan strumming his lyre, dreaming of escalating the relationship. He was more than surprised by and by when she ended his serenade by running him through with a slim silver foil, puncturing his personal brand along with his liver. As he sputtered blood and looked up at her dumbfounded, he received, too late, a final lesson in royal nomenclature and the dangers of patriarchal thinking.

"A queen is a monarch too," explained her highness.



Phil Temples resides in Watertown, Massachusetts. He's published five mystery-thriller novels, a novella, and four story anthologies in addition to over 230 short stories online. Phil also likes to dabble in mobile photography. He is a member of GrubStreet and the Bagel Bards. You can learn more about Phil by visiting his website at <https://temples.com>.

Science Project

Four hundred and eighty five days into the Mars Perseverance Rover-Ingenuity mission, scientists made a startling discovery—one which confounded their best minds. NASA invoked total secrecy on the project until they were absolutely certain that their findings were correct. On the day of the press conference, there was stunned silence followed by hundreds of simultaneous questions shouted by reporters, when the world learned that the Ingenuity helicopter had taken high resolution color images showing the remains of... cattle and cowboys strewn across hundreds of meters of the Martian surface. Markings on one sand-blasted saddle revealed a “rocking chair” brand belonging to the Big “L” ranch in South Texas. Many were calling it the biggest hoax perpetrated upon the scientific community of all time, while others argued it was “proof positive” that aliens had visited Earth and abducted people and property.#

Little Zophex Gagglemorf’s science project hadn’t gone quite as he’d expected. Instead of bringing beings from Sol 3 to his home world, his homemade teleportation device had instead plopped them down the surface of Sol 4. His teacher waved a half-dozen tentacles as if to communicate, “It’s no big deal. Leave them.” He instructed his budding pupil to try again after making some minor

adjustments to the circuitry. Zophex was rewarded on his third attempt when primitive creatures from Epsilon Eridani's second planet materialized in the classroom's special holding pen.