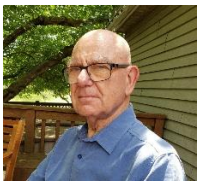
10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES

Patricia Gomes

Cindy Rosmus



Pablo Libedinsky

Paul Germano

Alaina Hammond

David Henson

Robert Scotellaro

Becky Parker

Nina Rubinstein Alonso

Zvi A. Sesling

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Welcome to Issue 43. Due to some technical difficulties, plus a last-minute story by Nina Rubinstein Alonso to help by replacing the story that was causing the problems plus a story of mine to replace another problem-causing submission. We are fortunate to able to get this issue out. We have some unique stories by nine authors who have appeared in 10x10 previously and are among my favorites for flash fiction.

So as usual, pull up a comfortable seat, get a refreshing drink and enjoy these offerings.

Zvi A. Sesling, Brookline, MA Poet Laureate (2017-2020), has published numerous poems and flash fiction. He edits *Muddy River Poetry Review* and *10 By 10 Flash Fiction Stories*. Sesling has won international and national poetry prizes He is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee. His most recent poetry chapbook is *Simple Game & Ghost of Fenway* (Alien Buddha Press). Sesling recently published *Wheels* (Alien Buddha Press), a flash fiction chapbook. His full volume flash fiction book, *Secret Behind the Gate* published by Cervena Barva Press. He lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.

Poet Laureate of New Bedford, Massachusetts from 2014 to 2021, author and playwright **Patricia Gomes** is published in numerous literary journals and anthologies. A Pushcart Prize nominee (2008, 2018, and 2021), as well as a 5-time Rhysling Science Fiction Award nominee, she is a member of the Horror Writers Association, SciFi Poetry Association, and New England Horror Writers.

The Parsimony of a Yankee

The fire in the pit burned low, more sputters than flames. The kids had gone into the house to battle each other in the latest blood-n-guts video game, leaving behind the remaining half-drunk adults still sitting, still hanging on to red plastic cups with the last of their cocktail, ice cubes melting quickly like summer itself.

This would be the last neighborhood barbeque of the year. A bittersweet night, knowing the chairs would be stacked and put away soon, the grill cleaned and covered. Yards would go as silent as a tomb.

Dotty Li felt herself dozing. Rubbing her eyes, she called to her husband, Sang, "Hey, we have church in the morning. Might be a good time to leave." Sang nodded, his belly full, and head more than a little booze scrambled. Someone else muttered something about walking their dog, and by this time I was half in the bag myself.

The oldest guest, Butchie, with his messy hair and remining five teeth motioned for us to stay put.

"C' mon Butchie; we really have to go!"

"Huh-uh, one more tale for the crickets. Well, more of a warning than a tale."

"A warning?" asked Julie, our hostess.

"Yup. The garden tool warning. Your grandmas musta shared it with you."

"My grandmother lived in a 5-story walk-up. She didn't own a single garden tool." Sang answered, setting off around of laughter.

"Wait," Julie said "I wanna hear Butchie's story." The few standing sit back down; some in chairs, some on the grass.

Butchie appeared younger by the light of the fire. Knowing he had their complete attention, his eyes glowed with performance mania.

"New England folklore, dontcha know," He began. "We're all about to put by for winter, rakes and saws, and such, so this is the perfect time to warn ya."

“Get to the story, Butch.” Matt, from down the hill said.

“Well, legend has it that if you get hurt —and I mean hurt enough to bleed — by one of your tools, that tool must be totally dee-stroyed.” Butchie nodded his shaggy head, “Yup, that tool has tasted blood. Your blood. And now it knows *you* and wants another taste. There’s no satisfying the wretched thing, neither. You gotta get rid of it ‘fore it gets rid of you!”

I looked down at my left hand. The bandaged wrapped around my fourth finger seemed to sneer at me. Standing up. I laughed and said, “Bullshit. I’m a cheap-ass Yankee who got ‘bit” by her brand new forty-three-dollar mini hedge trimmer this morning. If you think I’m going to toss it out, you’re crazy, Butch.”

“S’up to you, but I’d beat the thing into a pulp with a claw hammer.”

“Not going to happen. Luv.” I pecked him on the cheek and turned to leave, still laughing.

*****

I’m typing this out for you with my right hand. The left is no more. As God is my witness, I wish I’d heeded Butchie’s warning sooner.

Cindy Rosmus originally hails from Newark, NJ, once voted the "unfriendliest city on the planet." She talks like Anybodys from *West Side Story* and everybody from *Saturday Night Fever*. Her noir/horror/bizarro stories have been published in places like *Shotgun Honey*, *The Yard, Punk Noir, Pulp Asylum, The Rye Whiskey Review, Under the Bleachers*, *Rock and a Hard Place*, and *Gemini*. Her story "Toast, Jello, Tea" was nominated for both the 2025 Pushcart and Best Small Fictions prize. She is the editor/art director of *Yellow Mama* and has published seven collections of short stories. Cindy is a Gemini, a Christian, and an animal rights advocate.

SICILY

"Wow," some people say. "You're brave!"

Brave, how? Dead people can't cut you or steal your purse.

Hair-wise, I've been "doing the dead" since the 80s. Days I cut hair at the salon, but some nights I worked at Russomano's.

"Oh my God!" Arthur, the make-up guy, would say. "She's so late!" Like the "client" was a live Hollywood star. "We'll never finish in time!" If he fussed too much over the face, I'd have to rush with the hair.

First, the embalming. Before we got it, the body was drained, sewn up, dressed up nice and pretty.

We worked from a photo. Arthur chattering nonstop, applying peach lipstick, brighter than what the client had worn in life.

She'd died of cancer. As I washed it, her hair came out in clumps. Styling it was hopeless.

Arthur kept talking. “Will you shut up?” I said.

He grimaced. “It’s wig-time.”

That race against time before the viewing: family, friends, veiled Italian “wailers.” Ghouls, and the bereaved. Some grieving deeply. Clinging to what was gone forever.

“How beautiful she looks!” they said. “Like she’s just sleeping.”

Thick skin you needed, for this job. Not like a doctor, ‘cos you didn’t try curing them.

Only once did I leave there, hysterical.

Christmas week, 1987. The same night a guy was shot dead, my cousin Louie disappeared. To Sicily, we heard.

Lots of talk. When I said, “Louie,” my family shushed me. Grandma looked evil.

When I got the call, it didn’t connect.

“Daria, Thomas,” sounded familiar. “Gunshot wound to the chest” meant Sal Russomano went all out: lots of packing, and sealing. Special cotton or wool, waxed cord for huge stitches. “Tommy” needed special treatment.

Tommy . . .

Louie and I weren’t that close. But his girlfriend Asunta had dumped him for a Tommy. And it drove Louie nuts.

“No gun!” Grandma yelled. “Not in this house. Take!” They shushed Grandma too. Always protecting Louie.

Who took the gun.

Could it be?

In Russomano’s back room, I crept up to the table. Arthur had his turn; now it was mine.

God, Tommy was gorgeous. Not “alive but sleeping” gorgeous, more like Snow White in the glass coffin. Like the right girl’s kiss could bring him back.

He’s dead, I reminded myself. With a massive hole where his heart used to be, stuffed with cotton like a giant’s extracted tooth.

His hair . . . long and curly . . . was luxurious. Almost black, with parts of it red . . .

My job was to wash out the blood. Make his hair look like it did in the photo. When he was smiling and loving that girl, Asunta.

Before Louie killed him.

I wasn’t stupid. All that shushing wouldn’t stop me.

I washed Tommy’s hair slowly, careful not to tug, almost expecting him to flinch. Or his eyes to open.

“Sicily,” I whispered, like a magic word.

I swore he tried to smile.

Pablo Libedinsky is a retired computer programmer living in San Francisco, California. He wrote a few stories when he was 12 years old and then stopped, later returning to writing as an adult. His stories have been published in *Down in the Dirt, Let Me Tell You a Story, The Gorko Gazette, 10x10Flash, CommuterLit, Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *Bright Flash Literary Review*, and *WayWords Literary Journal.*

Bless You, Goodbye

I've always had a great sense of humor, if I may say so myself, though not everybody agrees.

I was talking to Carmen, a girl in my extended circle of friends. She seemed nice, and she was popular, but I'd never had the chance to get close.

We met by chance at the country club. I was walking around the lawns; she was coming out of the swimming pool. For a change, she was alone, and we started talking.

After strolling for a while in the bright sun, we found a bench under a shady tree. We sat there, sipping cold sodas to fight the summer heat.

"Are you in college?" I asked.

"Yes. I just started nursing school. And you?"

"I started engineering. I want to be a chemical…" I sneezed.

"Bless you."

"Thank you. I want to be a…." I sneezed again.

"Bless you."

I sneezed again. And again. And again.

"Do you have a cold?"

"No," I answered. "It's an allergy."

"Oh. What are you allergic to?"

I sneezed. "To girls," I said with a straight face.

Carmen looked at me, stood up, and walked away.

“Carmen!” I shouted. “It was a joke!”

She kept walking, ignoring me.

Carmen never spoke to me again.

Which was unfortunate, because I was beginning to like her, even if she didn’t have a sense of humor.

Paul Germano lives in Syracuse, smack dab in the center of New York State. His short fiction has been published in over 75 literary magazines in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Asia. You can find him online at his website (**https://sites.google.com/view/paul-germano-writer/home**). His flash fiction collection, *Quick*, is forthcoming from Anxiety Press.

Summer Mojitos in October

It's a busy Friday night at Mamie's Fish Fry where all the tables have blue checkered tablecloths and silk flower centerpieces. The lighting is soft, the chatter is loud and the jukebox is earning its keep. Outside, a furious wind demanding attention, rattles the windows. Abruptly, the rain comes tumbling down.

"I just love a good storm," white-haired Martha Bauer tells her gray-haired husband, "especially when we're inside." Jim Bauer laughs loudly. "Still gonna love it when we leave and get soaked?" He smiles; she smiles. They refocus their attention on their plates, piled high with fried clams. They don't look up again until their waitress, a willowy brunette in her twenties, coffee pot in hand, swings by to refill their cups. "Thanks Valarie," Jim says. "Before you rush off, I'd like to order Summer Mojitos from the bar for me and Martha."

Two tables over, a slender sour-faced woman in a bright white cocktail dress and a double-string of pearls, raises an eyebrow and nudges her husband. "Summer Mojitos, can you believe those two?" Her husband delivers a "so what" snarl. She offers an explanation. "It's a summer drink and we're in the tail end of October. I could see if they ordered a Gin and Tonic, also a summer drink, but they might not know it. But a Summer Mojito? For Christ's sake, summer is right there in the title." She crosses her arms in a huff, proud of her pronouncement.

"I see your point," her husband says. "I don't give a rat's ass about it one way or another, but I do see your point."

When Valarie returns with the Summer Mojitos, Martha says "thanks honey" and taps at Valarie's arm. "Today's our anniversary and this is our special drink. I met Jim, not long after my divorce. I had just moved into my new apartment and there was a bar down the street. On an especially hot afternoon in July, I decided to just stroll right in. Jim was tending bar. He was so cute back then, still is. I asked what he'd recommend." Martha pauses, laughing lightly. "I

was trying my best to flirt with him. He suggested a Summer Mojito and well, one thing led to another. By October we were married. And here we are, eleven years later, still together."

"What a sweet story," Valarie says, truly meaning it. "Congrats!" Valarie shouts as she hurries off to tend to other customers.

Jim munches on a fried clam, then takes a forkful of coleslaw. Martha, her eyes open wide, taps at her husband's hand. "Look over there, but don't be too obvious." Slowly, Jim turns. "Oh, I see her, all decked out in white." Jim's face sours. "Wearing white after Labor Day. She should know better," Jim says with a snort. "Absolutely," Martha says. Jim smiles; Martha smiles. Jim raises his glass. "Here's to us," he says loudly. They click glasses, joyful and content, sipping at their Summer Mojitos.

Alaina Hammond is a poet, playwright, fiction writer, and visual artist. She's a four-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize, all in the category of fiction. @alainaheidelberger on Instagram.

Let The Legends Be

The 97-year-old comedian is near-hysterical. "You have to save him!"

We're at the mansion of his 96-year-old comedy partner, who is lying on his own carpet. He was already gone by the time we'd arrived.

"Sir, I'm so sorry. There's nothing more we can do."

"I was talking to him and he just fell out of his chair! Just keeled right over! Am I that boring? Impossible! It's the critic who's to blame!"

"It seems that he had a heart attack."

"I know he had a heart attack! He's had several! So have I! Heart attacks aren't special! Why should this one be different?"

"I really am sorry. Is there anyone we can call?"

"Call his oldest son. No wait! I'll call MY oldest son, and he can help me figure out what to do next. Do you have to take him, just yet? Can I stay with him for a bit? Don't take him away. I'm still talking to him. I'm not done talking to him. Damn it, Charlie, I'm not done with you yet."

The two of them talking to each other has won them multiple Emmys, and paid for both their mansions. My supervisor nods. They can talk a little longer, even if it's one-sided.

When the living comedian's oldest son arrives, twenty minutes later, his father is still on the floor, holding the dead hand of his comedy partner. I can hear a bit of Yiddish, interspersed with profanity. But we're not actively listening. We're doing our best to let the legends be.

The son is sad, but stoic. "They've known each other since they were teenagers," he says. "This is going to destroy him even more than my mother's death did."

I don’t tell him that I used to have his mother’s black-and-white glamour shot as a poster in my college dorm. And the things I did beneath her visage. There are some things better left unsaid.

An old man crying on the floor has never appeared more dignified. I want to tell him that a nation cries with him, for his fallen friend. Or will as soon as the news goes public. We mourn with you.

But the thing is, that’s not exactly true. We aren’t mourning with the crying, living man. We knew the comedy. The icon. The art preserved on film. We loved the dead man, sure, but parasocially.

This 97-year-old man knew a fifteen-year-old boy, when he himself was sixteen. I see the sixteen-year-old, beneath the graying skin. And for that child, for his sorrow, for him, my heart breaks. It’s an honor to witness his raw, unique grief.

For a few more minutes, we will hold our silent vigil for a friendship that lasted over eighty years. Its body lies next to the physical corpse, and takes up nearly as much space.

And we’ll continue to let the legends be.

David Henson and his wife reside in Illinois. His work has been selected for *Wigleaf's Top 50 Very Short Fictions 2025*, nominated for Pushcart Prizes, Best Small Fictions, Best of the Net, and has appeared in various publications including *10 by 10, Best Microfictions 2025, Ghost Parachute, Moonpark Review, Maudlin House* and *Gone Lawn.* His website is http://writings217.wordpress.com. His X handle is @annalou8.

Migration

"I don't understand what you mean, Dad." Laura touches her father's forehead and glances at her watch. "How did you get where?"

"Here. How did I get here?"

Laura looks at the CNA then back at her father. "You remember, Dad. After Mom died last year, we all agreed this is the best place for you. Right?"

Her father goes to the window." Cherry blossoms," he says. "The hummers will be here soon." His breath fogs the glass. "Still a bit chilly. Hope they don't come too soon."

"When did this start?" Laura says, turning to the CNA.

"At breakfast this morning." The CNA lays her blood pressure monitor on the cart and pushes it to the door. "I've got vitals to check. If his confusion gets worse…"

The unfinished sentence hanging over her, Laura goes to her father. "Dad, I—"

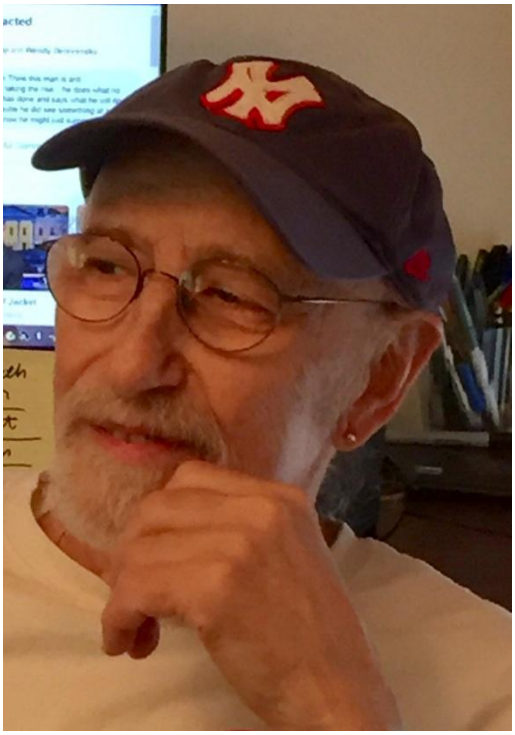
"They return from thousands of miles away." He wipes the glass with his hand.

"Dad, I don't…"

Her father strokes her arm. "Don't get me wrong. This isn't a bad place. Decent food. Bingo every day. I know it's the best place for me."

Laura exhales and smiles. "So you remember why you're here?"

Her father turns back toward the window. "Of course. But how?"



Robert Scotellaro is the author of 11 flash and micro collections, and 5 books of poetry. He has, with James Thomas, co-edited *New Micro: Exceptionally Short Fiction* (W.W. Norton). His work has appeared widely and is included in Norton's *Flash Fiction International* and *Flash Fiction America*. His work has been published in 7 Best Small Fictions and 3 Best Microfiction award anthologies. He is the winner of Zone 3's Rainmaker Prize in Poetry and the Blue Light Book Award. Visit him at: www.robertscotellaro.com

The Various Incarnations of a Mrs. Potato Head Ear

It was late in the season with low hanging clouds emptying the last bits of snow from their pockets. My daughter gathered up what she could and called her little snowwoman, Sarah. She gave it a face from her Mrs. Potato Head set (what was left of it): smiling red lips, a nose, one eye, and a single ear. I'd give anything to know what she was whispering into that one ear under her grandmother's church hat with the blue dahlia attached (my mother's favorite). Steadily the sun took Sarah down and our daughter begged us to put what was left of her head in the freezer (which was a bit sweet and a bit creepy). We tried to explain how some things were not meant to last. But this was her first encounter with the finality of loss and even though a kind of death had brushed by with a gentle touch, it made her cry. But then the cat rubbed against her leg, and with a child's swift tectonic plate shift, she determined it time to dress the cat up for high tea. She poured invisible tea into little cups, with her Barbies in attendance, and that retrieved ear, anew, was pushed into an apple now. Ready to hear all about god knew what.

Becky Parker is an award-winning writer and poet. She can often be found listening to a tall tale and glamping with her husband. She is the founder of *Briar Haus Writes.*

High School Vintage

Chemistry class reeked of claustrophobic hormones, experimenting with pheromones to create a stinky socks and *Sweet Desire* perfume aroma.

I preferred Botany class with its breathable sunshine and wild dandelions; growing my own roses to give myself at Valentine's Day.

Most of all I remember Mr. Johnson, a chain smoking saint, who taught both classes. Mr. J's voice reminded me of gravel on wet pavement. We savored his rare smile when we finally mastered the experiment of banana flavor instead of pine sol.

My ears still ring with his "Whoa there Sparky!" to the goofball, Ted who was always trying to blow up the lab, set fire to the petunias, or release the frogs in the Biology lab. All because he was trying to impress Candy, a cheerleader.

Twenty years later, Ted is still a goofball but somewhat reformed, wearing horn-rimmed glasses and crisp shirts while masquerading as a high school principal. It was a surprise to all, including me when I was invited to be on the faculty to teach Botany and Chemistry.

As part of my contract, Ted agrees to not bomb my labs with frogs or banana bombs! I met his son Bobby at the greenhouse, smelling suspiciously like pine sol.

Nina Rubinstein Alonso's work has appeared in *The New Yorker, Ploughshares, Broadkill Review, Bluepepper, Bagel Bards Anthology, Peacock Journal, Nixes Mate*, etc. Her publications include both poetry and fiction: *This Body* (Godine Press), *Riot Wake* (Cervena Barva), *Travels With Fernando* (Wilderness House Press), *Distractions En Route* (Ibbetson Street), *The Ones I Could Tell Anything* (Ibbetson Street). Her next publication *None Of Them Are You* is in the works.

To The Islands

Despite snow and ice dripping off Boston roofs, Myra didn't especially want to visit a tropical island, but couldn't refuse when her friend Angela won a trip to Curacao in a puzzle contest and the prize included tickets for two. The Sunday flight to Miami was smooth, Myra reading an Amelia Ellis mystery, the characters quirky, mustached Detective Lopez untangling murders pulling threads from a sticky ball of clues..

They're waiting in the departure lounge when a delay announcement appears on the screen, no prediction when they might take off. Hours pass, Myra searching her phone for news as attacks on drug-dealer boats in the Caribbean are happening lately, but can't find updates. She switches to a music station, relief to hear Gershwin, 'Somebody loves me, I wonder who.'

The boarding notice finally appears, no explanation for hours of delay, but the flight to Willemstad is smooth. They land, collect their luggage and taxi to Surfside Inn, then enjoy a spicy dinner at a nearby cafe hearing a mixture of Spanish and the island's version of English. Their room overlooks the ocean, and they consider walking to the beach, but it's getting dark, they're tired, decide to do it tomorrow. While Angela takes a shower Myra searches world news updates on her phone, finds nothing, flips on the tv, scrolls through ads for tourist attractions, local weather, old movies, other links possibly blocked as bad for island business.

Next morning they bring their coffee and croissants to the beach, a sandy palm-edged expanse with a scatter of vacationers. They swim and sunbathe then decide to leave as they're pale Northerners cautious about over-exposure. They explore shops offering Delft pottery, mini-windmills, seashells, painted clay iguanas, Gouda cheese, sunscreen and the pink flamingo pin Angela decides to buy.

"The beach is lovely, especially remembering the snow and ice back in Boston," Myra says but doesn't tell Angela she's getting bored, also anxious because she can't locate international news and suspects the island deliberately blocks contact with the messy outer world. Friday evening their plane is approaching Miami when news appears on Myra's phone about Trump's attacks on Iran."Nice distraction from the Epstein files," Angela says rubbing lotion on her sunburned neck. Myra's wishing Detective Lopez was here to analyze the situation, cut through thick layers of ugly political lies.

Zvi A. Sesling, Brookline, MA Poet Laureate (2017-2020), has published numerous poems and flash fiction. He edits *Muddy River Poetry Review* and *10 By 10 Flash Fiction Stories*. Sesling has won international and national poetry prizes He is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee. His most recent poetry chapbook is *Simple Game & Ghost of Fenway* (Alien Buddha Press). Sesling recently published *Wheels* (Alien Buddha Press), a flash fiction chapbook. His full volume flash fiction book, *Secret Behind The Gate* published by Cervena Barva Press. He lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.

No Need To Cry

"Drunk? I'm not drunk," I tell the cop who pulled me over.

"Please exit the car and walk a straight line to the end of your car and then back," he says with no emotion as if he had done hundreds of times, which he probably had.

He makes me walk on a cobblestone street and of course I wobble, trip and fall, so he calls a tow truck and arrests me for DUI.

I get my one phone call to my lawyer, Rick Shaw who tells me to meet him in court the next morning. When I see him I quickly tell him what happened, he laughs and says, "Well this won't take much time."

The judge calls my name and Rick says, "Rick Shaw representing the defendant your honor."

The judge looking bored peers over the top of his reading half glasses. "Very well counselor let's get on with it.

The judge looks at the prosecutor who looks like a Russian butcher. "Is the state prepared to present its case?"

"Yes, your honor," the butcher replies.

The state puts the cop on the stand who says, "The defendant was driving erratically so I pulled him over."

"And that was on Humbolt Avenue," the prosecutor who still looks like a butcher asks.

The cop responds as if on cue, "I asked the defendant to walk a straight line, but he was wobbly and fell over so I arrested him and had his car towed to the city lot. Then I proceeded to drive him to the jail on Woodward Street where he was placed in a holding cell."

After the prosecution rests Rick Shaw addresses the judge, "Your honor this police officer detained my client for driving erratically, yet how else can one drive on cobblestones that are more than a century old, let alone walk on them. In fact, where my client tried to walk

near the intersection of Claymore it is particularly hazardous. In fact, your honor, the city is scheduled to pave over Humbolt Avenue for all those reasons,

"The city has determined this particular road presents difficult driving and is very dangerous to pedestrians trying to cross. And, your honor, there are at least fifteen cases the city has settled this year with people who fell on the cobblestones. Some were bruised, a couple broke their ankles and others had broken bones or twisted knees. Your honor I ask this care be dismissed."

The judge peers over his half glasses again, "Yes, your arguments seem to follow the city's need to fix Humbolt Avenue. This case is dismissed. I would warn this officer and others to heed caution on Humbolt Avenue until it is repaved."

We all leave the courtroom. I really dislike that cop for trying to pin a DUI on me. So, a couple weeks later when I read he has been shot and killed by a druggie during an armed robbery at the local convenience store I do not shed any tears.